

Gloucester City Council and Fisheries Commission Meeting

January 16, 2015

Testimony by Jackie Odell, Executive Director, Northeast Seafood Coalition

Dear Members of the Council and Fisheries Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before all of you today.

My testimony will focus on the regulatory changes that are necessary to maintain small family owned and operated commercial groundfish businesses that operate from and within the port of Gloucester.

However, prior to outlining policy improvements that are necessary for the sustainability of the fishery and this port, I feel it is important to provide an overview of the mission, work and membership of the Northeast Seafood Coalition.

Organizational Description:

The Northeast Seafood Coalition (“NSC” or “Coalition”) was founded in 2002.

NSC is a 501(c)(6) membership organization that represents commercial groundfish businesses.

Since our founding, the work of NSC has been geared toward crafting policy solutions, based in the accordance with the law, to complex fishery issues. NSC strives to develop creative solutions that work to rebuild fish stocks while preserving family-owned fishing businesses, a diverse groundfish fleet, and fishing communities. NSC works within the public policy process which was established by federal law to design regulatory measures for federally managed stocks.

NSC members are small, independent, entrepreneurial businesses that fish for – and support fishing for – cod, haddock, flounders, and other groundfish species. NSC members fish from small and large ports along the Northeast coast. They fish from small, medium, and large vessels, and they deploy all groundfish gear types (predominantly trawl, longline, and gillnet). NSC represents over 250 commercial fishing entities—which hold over 500 limited access groundfish permits—on political and policy issues affecting their interests as participants in the commercial groundfish fishery.

NSC’s operations rely heavily upon dues collected from our small business members, most notably our fishing members.

Since 2010, within the port of Gloucester, NSC’s members’ fish out of the groundfish sectors referred to as Northeast Fishery (NEF) Sector II and Northeast Fishery Sector (NEF) III.

These sectors, like other Northeast Fishery Sectors developed by the Northeast Seafood Coalition, were structured in compliance with Magnuson 2006 reauthorization mandates and a New England Fishery Management Council (Council) groundfish action known as Amendment 16. The sectors have been in operation since May 1, 2010.

NSC developed the Northeast Fishery Sectors to support the diversity of the groundfish fleet – to be community-based and to have an internal self-governance system designed specifically to empower each sector (through its operations plans and associated contractual documents) to protect and preserve its unique demographic and economic integrity.

Groundfish Regulations:

Focusing now on groundfish policy improvements that are necessary:

NSC has witnessed for the past fourteen years of operations fluctuating scientific reports on the status of groundfish stocks - followed by large changes in allowable catches and shifting management measures and management “philosophies”. These continuous changes have led to instability and turmoil for the groundfish fishery.

In 2010, the groundfish fishery transitioned to what is referred to as a hard total allowable catch management program to comply with statutory mandates. This program was touted as the opportunity to rebuild fish stocks, end overfishing, increase fishing flexibility which would promote economic profitability – and sustainability.

As many know, although most GF stocks were on schedule to rebuild by 2014, and GOM cod was reportedly going to rebuild prior to its management deadline, a new suite of revised groundfish stock assessments held in 2011 and 2012 determined otherwise. Based on these assessment results, the groundfish fishery received a Disaster Declaration by the Secretary of Commerce on September 12, 2012.

Contrary to public perception, the catch reductions implemented in 2013 were not because catch limits, which are driven by the results of stock assessments, had been exceeded by the commercial fishing fleet. In fact, since rebuilding plans were implemented in 2004, commercial fishing businesses have remained within every prescribed catch limit directed by the science and accompanying rebuilding plan analyses.

Until the recent unscheduled assessment for GOM cod and Interim Measures implemented by NMFS, NSC had high hopes that the Disaster Declaration would force fundamental change for the fishery.

During the initial days of the Disaster Declaration, which again was not the result of fishermen exceeding catch limits that are based on the science and which contain layers of scientific and management precaution, NSC called for everyone in the groundfish community—the scientists, managers and policy-makers—to acknowledge and accept the reality that the current process was just not working.

NSC stated in our public comments and testimonies that it was time to “step out of the weeds” and examine the bigger picture: there are critical elements of science, management, and the

law that all need to be fixed. *The fishery cannot remain in the same box*, performing the same rituals and expect a different result. Fundamental change was necessary.

NSC viewed the Groundfish Disaster Aid later appropriated by Congress as an essential bridge until the necessary long-term solutions could be sought. At that time, NSC also participated in numerous efforts put forth to maintain, recover and revitalize small businesses and communities that were facing hardships due to the reductions in the allowable catches.

Not only has no measureable reforms been initiated but the unscheduled GOM cod stock assessment has further compounded the problems for small businesses and the Gloucester community is taking the direct hit. Any bridges that were attempting to be resurrected during the initial Disaster Declaration have essentially been blown-up.

Under the current Interim Rule measures implemented by NMFS, fishermen and ports along the Gulf of Maine, most notably Gloucester, are crippled by the inability to harvest other groundfish stocks located in the Gulf of Maine which they have received an allocation and have yet to harvest this current fishing year.

Again, any effort put forth following the Groundfish Disaster Declaration would largely appear to be all for not because the GOM cod “crisis” has shown the fundamental issues plaguing the fishery are alive – well - and will only continue to create instability and crises in fishing businesses and fishing communities until they are genuinely fixed.

NSC’s request from the City of Gloucester and our elected officials:

The City of Gloucester has numerous fishing industry-based organizations that possess specific expertise, skillsets and knowledge. The City should continue to solicit input from these organizations as it strives to work toward maintaining a future for the commercial fishing fleet in Gloucester.

Although there are many organizations such as the Massachusetts Fishermen’s Partnership and Gloucester Fishermen’s Wives Association that NSC has and continue to work with for various services for the fishing industry - to identify a few other organizations located in Gloucester today that are working diligently under the groundfish management and regulatory system in place today are:

- Northeast Fishery Sector II, Northeast Fishery Sector III and the sector support services provided by the Northeast Sector Service Network (NESSN): These Sectors currently serve as the organizations operating under the catch share management system that is

protecting small family owned businesses in the port of Gloucester. They are protecting fleet diversity (small, medium and large vessels as well as gear types) - which is imperative for a consistency of landings and increased stability in the market place.

- Gloucester Fishing Community Preservation Fund (GFCPF): Without the Fund, fishing regulations over the years, which have taken a direct hit in Gloucester's fishing community in many instances, would have forced many fishing businesses to sell out of Gloucester and thus would have resulted in less landings and economic development for the port.
- Lastly, the Northeast Seafood Coalition: NSC works diligently with our fishing members in Gloucester to seek viable solutions to complex management problems. NSC is actively working to improve groundfish stock assessment and promote management stability and reliability. NSC is also actively engaged in Magnuson reauthorization – and efforts to revise guidelines established under National Standard 1. NSC currently provides updates as necessary to the Gloucester Fisheries Commission and we look forward to the continued partnership with the City and the Commission in the days ahead.

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Not only has no measureable reforms been initiated but the unscheduled GOM cod stock assessment has further compounded the problems for small businesses and the Gloucester community is taking the direct hit. Any bridges that were attempting to be resurrected during the initial Disaster Declaration have essentially been blown-up.

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The City of Gloucester has numerous fishing industry-based organizations that possess specific expertise, skillsets and knowledge. The City should continue to solicit input from these organizations as it strives to work toward maintaining a future for the commercial fishing fleet in Gloucester.

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January 16, 2015

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However, prior to outlining policy improvements that are necessary for the sustainability of the fishery and this port, I feel it is important to provide an overview of the mission, work and membership of the Northeast Seafood Coalition.

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Groundfish Regulations:

Focusing now on groundfish policy improvements that are necessary:

NSC has witnessed for the past fourteen years of operations fluctuating scientific reports on the status of groundfish stocks - followed by large changes in allowable catches and shifting management measures and management “philosophies”. These continuous changes have led to instability and turmoil for the groundfish fishery.

In 2010, the groundfish fishery transitioned to what is referred to as a hard total allowable catch management program to comply with statutory mandates. This program was touted as the opportunity to rebuild fish stocks, end overfishing, increase fishing flexibility which would promote economic profitability – and sustainability.

As many know, although most GF stocks were on schedule to rebuild by 2014, and GOM cod was reportedly going to rebuild prior to its management deadline, a new suite of revised groundfish stock assessments held in 2011 and 2012 determined otherwise. Based on these assessment results, the groundfish fishery received a Disaster Declaration by the Secretary of Commerce on September 12, 2012.

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NSC viewed the Groundfish Disaster Aid later appropriated by Congress as an essential bridge until the necessary long-term solutions could be sought. At that time, NSC also participated in numerous efforts put forth to maintain, recover and revitalize small businesses and communities that were facing hardships due to the reductions in the allowable catches.

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The City of Gloucester has numerous fishing industry-based organizations that possess specific expertise, skillsets and knowledge. The City should continue to solicit input from these organizations as it strives to work toward maintaining a future for the commercial fishing fleet in Gloucester.

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Focusing now on groundfish policy improvements that are necessary:

NSC has witnessed for the past fourteen years of operations fluctuating scientific reports on the status of groundfish stocks - followed by large changes in allowable catches and shifting management measures and management “philosophies”. These continuous changes have led to instability and turmoil for the groundfish fishery.

In 2010, the groundfish fishery transitioned to what is referred to as a hard total allowable catch management program to comply with statutory mandates. This program was touted as the opportunity to rebuild fish stocks, end overfishing, increase fishing flexibility which would promote economic profitability – and sustainability.

As many know, although most GF stocks were on schedule to rebuild by 2014, and GOM cod was reportedly going to rebuild prior to its management deadline, a new suite of revised groundfish stock assessments held in 2011 and 2012 determined otherwise. Based on these assessment results, the groundfish fishery received a Disaster Declaration by the Secretary of Commerce on September 12, 2012.

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Not only has no measureable reforms been initiated but the unscheduled GOM cod stock assessment has further compounded the problems for small businesses and the Gloucester community is taking the direct hit. Any bridges that were attempting to be resurrected during the initial Disaster Declaration have essentially been blown-up.

Under the current Interim Rule measures implemented by NMFS, fishermen and ports along the Gulf of Maine, most notably Gloucester, are crippled by the inability to harvest other groundfish stocks located in the Gulf of Maine which they have received an allocation and have yet to harvest this current fishing year.

Again, any effort put forth following the Groundfish Disaster Declaration would largely appear to be all for not because the GOM cod “crisis” has shown the fundamental issues plaguing the fishery are alive – well - and will only continue to create instability and crises in fishing businesses and fishing communities until they are genuinely fixed.

NSC’s request from the City of Gloucester and our elected officials:

The City of Gloucester has numerous fishing industry-based organizations that possess specific expertise, skillsets and knowledge. The City should continue to solicit input from these organizations as it strives to work toward maintaining a future for the commercial fishing fleet in Gloucester.

Although there are many organizations such as the Massachusetts Fishermen’s Partnership and Gloucester Fishermen’s Wives Association that NSC has and continue to work with for various services for the fishing industry - to identify a few other organizations located in Gloucester today that are working diligently under the groundfish management and regulatory system in place today are:

- Northeast Fishery Sector II, Northeast Fishery Sector III and the sector support services provided by the Northeast Sector Service Network (NESSN): These Sectors currently serve as the organizations operating under the catch share management system that is

protecting small family owned businesses in the port of Gloucester. They are protecting fleet diversity (small, medium and large vessels as well as gear types) - which is imperative for a consistency of landings and increased stability in the market place.

- Gloucester Fishing Community Preservation Fund (GFCPF): Without the Fund, fishing regulations over the years, which have taken a direct hit in Gloucester's fishing community in many instances, would have forced many fishing businesses to sell out of Gloucester and thus would have resulted in less landings and economic development for the port.
- Lastly, the Northeast Seafood Coalition: NSC works diligently with our fishing members in Gloucester to seek viable solutions to complex management problems. NSC is actively working to improve groundfish stock assessment and promote management stability and reliability. NSC is also actively engaged in Magnuson reauthorization – and efforts to revise guidelines established under National Standard 1. NSC currently provides updates as necessary to the Gloucester Fisheries Commission and we look forward to the continued partnership with the City and the Commission in the days ahead.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today.

Gloucester City Council and Fisheries Commission Meeting

January 16, 2015

Testimony by Jackie Odell, Executive Director, Northeast Seafood Coalition

Dear Members of the Council and Fisheries Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before all of you today.

My testimony will focus on the regulatory changes that are necessary to maintain small family owned and operated commercial groundfish businesses that operate from and within the port of Gloucester.

However, prior to outlining policy improvements that are necessary for the sustainability of the fishery and this port, I feel it is important to provide an overview of the mission, work and membership of the Northeast Seafood Coalition.

Organizational Description:

The Northeast Seafood Coalition (“NSC” or “Coalition”) was founded in 2002.

NSC is a 501(c)(6) membership organization that represents commercial groundfish businesses.

Since our founding, the work of NSC has been geared toward crafting policy solutions, based in the accordance with the law, to complex fishery issues. NSC strives to develop creative solutions that work to rebuild fish stocks while preserving family-owned fishing businesses, a diverse groundfish fleet, and fishing communities. NSC works within the public policy process which was established by federal law to design regulatory measures for federally managed stocks.

NSC members are small, independent, entrepreneurial businesses that fish for – and support fishing for – cod, haddock, flounders, and other groundfish species. NSC members fish from small and large ports along the Northeast coast. They fish from small, medium, and large vessels, and they deploy all groundfish gear types (predominantly trawl, longline, and gillnet). NSC represents over 250 commercial fishing entities—which hold over 500 limited access groundfish permits—on political and policy issues affecting their interests as participants in the commercial groundfish fishery.

NSC’s operations rely heavily upon dues collected from our small business members, most notably our fishing members.

Since 2010, within the port of Gloucester, NSC’s members’ fish out of the groundfish sectors referred to as Northeast Fishery (NEF) Sector II and Northeast Fishery Sector (NEF) III.

These sectors, like other Northeast Fishery Sectors developed by the Northeast Seafood Coalition, were structured in compliance with Magnuson 2006 reauthorization mandates and a New England Fishery Management Council (Council) groundfish action known as Amendment 16. The sectors have been in operation since May 1, 2010.

NSC developed the Northeast Fishery Sectors to support the diversity of the groundfish fleet – to be community-based and to have an internal self-governance system designed specifically to empower each sector (through its operations plans and associated contractual documents) to protect and preserve its unique demographic and economic integrity.

Groundfish Regulations:

Focusing now on groundfish policy improvements that are necessary:

NSC has witnessed for the past fourteen years of operations fluctuating scientific reports on the status of groundfish stocks - followed by large changes in allowable catches and shifting management measures and management “philosophies”. These continuous changes have led to instability and turmoil for the groundfish fishery.

In 2010, the groundfish fishery transitioned to what is referred to as a hard total allowable catch management program to comply with statutory mandates. This program was touted as the opportunity to rebuild fish stocks, end overfishing, increase fishing flexibility which would promote economic profitability – and sustainability.

As many know, although most GF stocks were on schedule to rebuild by 2014, and GOM cod was reportedly going to rebuild prior to its management deadline, a new suite of revised groundfish stock assessments held in 2011 and 2012 determined otherwise. Based on these assessment results, the groundfish fishery received a Disaster Declaration by the Secretary of Commerce on September 12, 2012.

Contrary to public perception, the catch reductions implemented in 2013 were not because catch limits, which are driven by the results of stock assessments, had been exceeded by the commercial fishing fleet. In fact, since rebuilding plans were implemented in 2004, commercial fishing businesses have remained within every prescribed catch limit directed by the science and accompanying rebuilding plan analyses.

Until the recent unscheduled assessment for GOM cod and Interim Measures implemented by NMFS, NSC had high hopes that the Disaster Declaration would force fundamental change for the fishery.

During the initial days of the Disaster Declaration, which again was not the result of fishermen exceeding catch limits that are based on the science and which contain layers of scientific and management precaution, NSC called for everyone in the groundfish community—the scientists, managers and policy-makers—to acknowledge and accept the reality that the current process was just not working.

NSC stated in our public comments and testimonies that it was time to “step out of the weeds” and examine the bigger picture: there are critical elements of science, management, and the

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