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NORTHEAST SEAFOOD COALITION POLICY DIRECTOR TESTIFIES AT MSA REAUTHORIZATION LISTENING SESSION: NE GROUND FISH IS IN MIDST OF CRISIS THAT NEEDS IMMEDIATE ATTENTION

November 5, 2013—Gloucester, Mass. Northeast Seafood Coalition (NSC) Policy Director Vito Giacalone testified on Monday at the Massachusetts State House for a Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) Reauthorization Listening Session hosted by United States Senators Elizabeth Warren and Mark Begich, Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard. Senator Markey, Congressmen Tierney and Keating, several Massachusetts legislators and Mayor Mitchell of New Bedford attended.

Giacalone testified about the immediate reality affecting small groundfish fishing businesses in the Northeast region. He said long-term policy improvements will not matter if there are no fishermen left when policies are implemented. “We are in the midst of a crisis that needs immediate attention,” Giacalone said emphatically.

Fundamentally, he said, the management strategy set forth in MSA places demands on groundfish science that far exceed its capacity. Dramatic instability within the Northeast groundfish fishery, which is caused by scientific unpredictability and significant swings in perceived stock abundance, have confounded fishery management and every aspect of our fishing industry and community. As a result, the strategy has simply failed.

To comply with the law, Northeast groundfish fishermen have paid an unprecedented price because science and management have tried to know the unknowable and control the uncontrollable. This has resulted in unrealistically low Annual Catch Limits that have caused extraordinary social and economic costs without a commensurate biological benefit.

Giacalone spoke of the critical need for flexibility within the law to provide regional Councils with authority to implement alternative rebuilding strategies that focus on the rate of fishing mortality instead of on the rate of rebuilding to highly speculative targets within arbitrary time-frames. Additionally, Giacalone recommended smoothing management responses to often fluctuating stock assessments by allowing multi-year evaluations of overfishing and overfished status determinations.

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NSC is grateful to Sens. Warren and Begich for the opportunity to provide input to improve national fisheries legislation that is mindful of the realities of the Northeast groundfish fishery. Additionally, NSC is thankful to Sen. Markey, Congressmen Tierney and Keating, members of the Mass. legislature, and Mayor Mitchell for attending. We're appreciative for their continued support to provide critically needed disaster assistance to help mitigate the hardships for those directly impacted by the devastatingly low allowable catch for key groundfish stocks that were implemented on May 1, 2013.

About the Northeast Seafood Coalition:

The Northeast Seafood Coalition is a non-profit organization representing over 361 commercial fishing entities, which hold over 500 limited access groundfish permits, in the northeast United States on political and policy issues affecting their interests as participants in the groundfish fishery and the Sector program in the Northeast multispecies groundfish fishery. NSC members are small, independent, entrepreneurial businesses that fish for—and support fishing for—cod, haddock, flounders, and other groundfish species along the northeast coast. NSC's fishing business members fish from small and large ports all along the northeast coast. They fish small, medium, and large vessels, and they employ all groundfish gear types.

NSC works for rules that embody real solutions to complex fishery problems.