



August 7, 2015

David Pierce, Ph.D.
Acting Director
Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries
251 Causeway Street, Suite 400
Boston, MA 02114

Dear Dr. Pierce,

On behalf of the Northeast Seafood Coalition's (NSC) Board of Directors, I am writing to offer the following recommendation on MA DMF's draft spend plan for the Bin 3 groundfish disaster aid.

The recommendation offered by the NSC is based on the following rationale and set of circumstances:

1. The underlying consensus among state directors and GARFO in May 2014 was Bin 3 was to support a longer term plan for the groundfish fishery. Thus, unlike programs designed under Bin 1 and Bin 2, Bin 3 was uniquely situated to make an active fisherman that chooses to remain in the groundfish fishery viable. Even though the state directors and NOAA have recently agreed not to utilize the entirety of the Bin 3 aid to offset fees associated with an industry buyback program, continuing to support active commercial groundfish fishermen ("limited access multispecies permit holders") and a longer-term plan for the fishery remains a priority.
2. You may recall, the Northeast Seafood Coalition Board of Directors had advised NSC leadership to speak with you and Paul Diodati last winter to stress the NSC Board's position that "if" a buyback was not pursued – then Bin 3 aid should be utilized as a second round of direct assistance to federal limited access multispecies permit holders under Bin 1. NSC leadership was informed during our discussions as well as during the subsequent meeting with GARFO that there was no support for transferring the aid to Bin 1, and it was explicitly noted by state directors that a critical reason they did not support Bin 1 or a Bin 1 type of distribution was because they asserted that the 5,000 lbs. landing criteria was too low and did not reflect a dependence on the groundfish fishery. It was further noted that Bin 1 and 2 had already allotted up to \$32,500 to vessels that met the 5,000 lbs. requirement.
3. The Bin 1 qualification criteria was developed and supported by NSC, along with many industry advocates, with the intention to keep it simple - and inclusive - for the aid to be distributed quickly to those in need. This qualification was not based on prioritizing active commercial fishermen, whose landings were used as justification for the groundfish disaster declaration in 2012, nor did it take into account operational expenses associated with being active in the commercial groundfish fishery today, which now includes At Sea Monitoring expenses for groundfish sector fishermen.

Recognizing now that commercial fishing businesses with minimal landings and dependence on the groundfish fishery have received aid through either or both Bin 1 and Bin 2 (in many cases more aid than the vessel's gross, annual per groundfish revenues) and taking into account Bin 3 is intended to

support a longer term plan for the fishery, NSC offers the following recommendation:

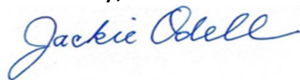
- Bin 3 funds should be directed toward federal limited access multispecies permit holders who are trying to remain active in the fishery today. Directing the aid toward the permit holder will allow each fisherman to make his / her own decision on how best to utilize the money - to make their business be more viable. Fuel, insurance, dockage, repairs, compliance with safety requirements or any other operational fee or expense, including At Sea Monitoring charges could be offset with these funds.
- These funds should not be intercepted for the purpose of funding the current inefficient At Sea Monitoring program. If individual fisherman receive these funds directly - and the industry is forced to pay for monitoring – the individual fisherman will have these funds to cover their Sectors' share.
- In light of the fact that the Bin 1 program has already distributed \$32,500 to vessels that grossed less than \$32,500 in the groundfish fishery in their best of four years 2010-2013 and Bin 2 allotted between \$16,000 for vessels that landed less than 5,000 lbs. and \$32,500 for those landing at least 5,000 lbs. in 2009, it would be prudent to determine dependence and activity in the commercial groundfish fishery by seeking a filter that does not distribute these limited funds to vessels that have already received more assistance than their annual revenue in their best of 5 recent years. To accomplish this the NSC recommends that MA DMF utilize the following criteria to qualify federal limited access multispecies permit holders:

Minimum **GROUNDFISH** landing threshold of **20,000 lbs. in ANY ONE** of the following fishing years – **2012**, 2013 or 2014.

The NSC recommends that 2012 be included because the groundfish disaster declaration was made on September 13, 2012 by the Secretary of Commerce based upon the most recent assessment reports, the “Assessment or Data Updates of 13 Northeast Groundfish Stocks” in March 2012 and the Gulf of Maine cod benchmark assessment (SAW 53 - February 2012). The 2012 fishing year represents the last full fishing year before steep catch reductions took place on a host of critical groundfish stocks. The steep reductions for GOM cod and flatfish ACLs alone, which were implemented in fishing year 2013, caused widespread business paralysis most notably to the active - inshore groundfish fleet.

On behalf of the NSC Board of Directors, thank you for the opportunity to provide written comment on this extremely important matter for our Massachusetts-based commercial groundfish members.

Sincerely,



Jackie Odell, Executive Director

Cc: Melanie Griffin, Fisheries Management Specialist, MA DMF