

June 10, 2015

Mr. Michael Pentony
Assistant Regional Administrator
NOAA Fisheries
Sustainable Fisheries Division
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

Mr. David E. Pierce, Acting Director
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Marine Fisheries
251 Causeway Street, Suite 400
Boston, MA 02114

Re: Request for your Support

Dear Sirs:

We are writing to ask that you join with us in support of municipalities of Cape Cod & the Islands that are petitioning the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) & the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) to extend the near coastal protection zone that exists from Boston north to the Hague Line (Herring management area 1A-average 30 miles) to include the 12 mile territorial waters from Boston south along the outside of the Cape around Nantucket and south of Martha's Vineyard to the Western Massachusetts line as was logically and originally planned back in 1999.

This closure would be a Gear Based Restriction of no less than 6.5" mesh in any mobile gear. Bay scallop dredges and the historic state waters squid fishery would be exempt (April 23 -June 9). Throughout the year, this zone has historically been the *main* migratory route of whales, predator fish, birds, and spawning forage fish (squid and herring). This forage food is one of the main ingredients that contributes to the rich and *essential* fish habitat and marine ecosystem that exists along this route. As a result of the fast moving currents for which this area is known, the tides have the ability to flush forage fish from inside state waters (3 miles) out to and beyond the 12 mile territorial boundary in one tide cycle, which is where the vessels fishing small mesh gear have become accustomed to ambushing them as they either pass out of the protected areas to the north or flush out into the territorial waters from the near coastal zone l.

The vast majority of local stake holders believe this area should be protected from industrial size fishing boats and small mesh gear types that have the potential to cause irreversible damage and wreak havoc on this natural resource. Prior to the historic Magnuson Stevens Act of 1977, one of the main reasons to create the 12 mile territorial boundary along the coast was to protect our marine

habitat ecosystems and fisheries from the foreign fishing fleets who were trolling using indiscriminate harvesting gear types.

Today, the same *massive* indiscriminate killing and destruction of our natural resources is happening because so-called small mesh, mid-water pair trawlers and otter trawlers are towing in such close proximity to shore as well as illegally allowing the nets to reach lower in the water column often engaging the sea floor and causing even further damage.

The steady decline and collapse of our New England ground fisheries has already forced several local career fishermen to change occupations. This foreshadows the additional impending negative socio-economic impact that will increasingly affect every stakeholder: commercial and recreational small boat fishermen, whale watch and charter boats, recreational beach fishermen, tourism (tackle shops, restaurants, hotels, etc.

Unless legislation is immediately enacted to protect ecosystems and forage fish, irreversible marine ecosystem collapse is inevitable. At this point in time the biomasses of local fish stocks can no longer handle the amount of shifting pressure and indiscriminate harvesting that at one point in time seemed acceptable and sustainable. In our quest to become responsible stewards of the oceans and natural resources, the vast majority of stakeholders and regulators should no longer turn a blind eye.

The stakeholders believe this is logical, ethical, and fair request that must be enacted immediately to avoid allowing the looming near coastal ecological disaster that is staring us in the eye. Recognizing the shifting of fisheries management policies from a single species management to the EBFM (Eco Based Fisheries Management) method we hope will change the collision course which we are presently on. This change would ultimately create a futuristic sustainable near coastal marine ecosystem and fishery for future generations... before it is too late.

We thank you for your time and consideration and strongly urge you to support this Petition. We are available to answer any questions about our advocacy for extending the near coastal protection zone.

Sincerely,

Sheila R. Lyons,
Chairman

Mary Pat Flynn,
Vice Chairman

Leo G. Cakounes,
Commissioner