



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910
THE DIRECTOR

Brian J. Rothschild, Ph.D.
President and Chief Executive Officer
Center for Sustainable Fisheries
115 Orchard Street
New Bedford, MA 02740

MAR 26 2014

Dear Dr. Rothschild:

Thank you for your letter to Secretary Penny Pritzker regarding disaster relief for the Northeast multispecies fishery and requesting emergency action to permit an experimental Georges Bank yellowtail flounder fishery.

I am acutely aware of the difficult situation New England fishermen and associated businesses are facing this year as several key stocks, including Georges Bank yellowtail flounder, remain at low abundance levels with low associated catch limits. These catch limits remain necessary to rebuild this iconic fishery. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 (H.R. 3547) included \$75 million for Fisheries Disasters that were declared by the Secretary in calendar years 2012 and 2013. Six fisheries, including the Northeast multispecies fishery, were eligible for the funding and the allocation determination was released in February 2014. NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is working diligently with the impacted states and tribes that received allocations to assist them with the funding grant process. I understand the importance of these funds to the affected states and communities and we will move as quickly as possible to help distribute the allocated funds.

Although I share your concern that the information used to develop management advice for Georges Bank yellowtail flounder needs further analysis, we cannot grant your request for rulemaking for the type of experimental yellowtail flounder fishery you requested. I believe that an experimental fishery that would operate outside the established catch limits would result in overfishing and further strain this vulnerable stock. However, we are currently working on an alternative approach that should help to address the concerns you outlined in your letter. NMFS has been developing, with our Canadian management and research partners, an empirical approach to Georges Bank yellowtail flounder management advice. The empirical approach will closely examine all existing sources of information on the stock and do so with the participation of both U.S. and Canadian scientists and fishery managers, academia, industry, and others. I encourage your participation in the empirical assessment process. This approach will consider, among other things, survey indices, comparison of catch by various gear types, cooperative research results, and short- and long-term tagging studies, including information from various studies conducted by the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth School of Marine and Science Technology. The goal is that this extensive, all-inclusive critical examination of all available information will provide the best advice on stock abundance. If the abundance is, as you suggest, higher than previously believed, that information will be available for use in management decision-making.

THE ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR
FOR FISHERIES

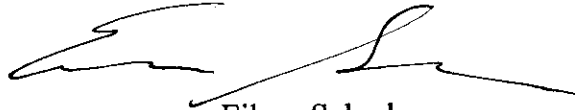


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I appreciate your continued interest in Northeast fisheries issues. For more information on the empirical assessment process, including how you and your organization can be involved, please contact Paul Rago, NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center, at (508) 495-2000.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eileen Sobeck', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Eileen Sobeck
Assistant Administrator
for Fisheries

cc: Dr. Bill Karp, Director, Northeast Fisheries Science Center
Thomas Nies, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council