

TESTIMONY OF THE NORTHWEST ATLANTIC MARINE ALLIANCE

Before the

NEW ENGLAND FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

On

EXCESSIVE FLEET CONSOLIDATION AND
THE IMPACT TO THE MARINE ECOSYSTEM

Presented by

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Council Members:

On behalf of the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today as you examine possible actions and decide the best way to handle the important and difficult issues of fleet diversity and consolidation of the New England groundfish fleet. You are in a position to decide whether to take action to protect and refine the character of the region's fishing industry. We hope you will leave this Council meeting convinced that a problem exists, that New England has the opportunity to pro-actively build a long-term vision, and that action is needed **now** to select and implement the most effective measures addressing the problem.

The Problem:

We know that Catch Share programs around the world have mostly taken the road of unregulated economic channels, because policy makers failed to make proactive decisions, and this has led to the consolidation of fishing fleets into monolithic, industrial scale, non owner-operator fleets – the Mid Atlantic Surf Clam/Ocean Quahog being one. These consolidations often happen at the expense of communities, crews and shoreside jobs. New England's current plan under Amendment 16, like Mid-Atlantic Surf Clam/Ocean Quahog management plan, has no safeguards against consolidation at all. No other Catch Share plan in the country is so devoid of any attempt to constrain accumulation and protect fleet diversity.

We also know that the majority of Catch Share programs around the United States have retrospectively had to adopt at least some set of mechanisms to ensure that fishing privileges stay accessible and affordable to a diverse range of fishing operations. New England can lead us in this direction without having to repeat past mistakes.

Before the potential actions are examined, it must be acknowledged that there is a problem, and together we must commit to finding effective solutions. This is what we ask of the Council today.

In the groundfish fishery, we are already seeing signs of excessive consolidation and its dire ecological and economic consequences. The cost of leasing quota and buying permits is rising rapidly. Quota and permits are migrating more rapidly from small- and mid-scale to larger-scale and more industrial operations. This puts community infrastructure at risk of collapse. Is this the vision New England wants for its fisheries? We saw this happen in other fisheries. We also saw this happen with farms in our land based food system. We urge that you not let this happen with our New England fisheries and our marine based food system.

A Vision Forward:

We refer you to our accompanying paper that surveys a variety of options for measures to control consolidation and quota accumulation and thereby achieve fleet diversity, and we look at what makes some measures more successful than others. We have included an expanded bibliography that we believe you should explore.

During the April Interspecies Committee meeting, the June Council meeting and the September Groundfish Committee meeting, NAMA presented the outcomes the Fleet Vision Project, which was developed by New England's fishing community and supported by a wide spectrum of participants in fishing-related industries, community members, seafood consumers, and marine and social scientists. We refer you to the Fleet Vision Report we submitted in April. The conclusion may be summarized in a single generalized vision for the future of the New England fishing fleet: "A diverse, economically viable, and environmentally sustainable fleet that is managed through a participatory governance structure." We believe that Amendment 16 as is, with no safeguards, will undermine this vision and ultimately undermine conservation efforts that so many have worked hard to achieve.

It is still eminently possible to take corrective measures that would safeguard the fleet and the fish. Otherwise you risk sacrificing both to the financial gain of a few. The responsibility is on your shoulders and cannot be put off until future amendments or frameworks, or until sectors morph into some other form of management. By then the damage that will have been done cannot be reversed.

Consistent with the aim of motions that were passed at the last Council meeting in June and at the Groundfish Committee meeting, and in support of those fishermen and their communities who composed the Fleet Vision, NAMA recommends that the Council adopt mechanisms to:

- Ensure that diversity of the region's fishing fleet represents the ecological diversity of the region's marine ecosystem.
- Ensure the diversity of the fishing fleet by preventing excessive consolidation and accumulation of fishing power into the hands of a few entities.
- Prevent repeating mistakes of the past in both fisheries and agricultural food systems by ensuring that the NE groundfish fleet does not become consolidated, geographically concentrated, homogenized, vertically integrated, and commoditized.
- Recover fish and keep fishermen fishing through careful attention to who fishes where.

In addition to accumulation limits we suggest that leasing restrictions, quota set-aside programs, and owner-operator provisions be put in place. We believe these interlinked measures will be effective in shaping a sustainable fishery so that it supports rather than eliminates diversity of the fleet, fisheries, and fish.

In order to protect the marine ecosystem, fishing communities, and our food system

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it is essential that New England maintain a diverse and locally based groundfish fishery, which includes a variety of gear types, vessel sizes, geographic locations, and levels of participation. Evidence shows that in order to recover fish stocks and the health of the ecosystem, diversity and scale of the fisheries should be well matched to the diversity and functional scales of marine species and the fishery ecosystem. Loss of fleet diversity and excessive consolidation of fishing power threatens to undermine regional and national conservation goals and requirements, our access to healthful food from the ocean, and the economic underpinnings of the region's fishing communities. It is urgent that fleet diversity and 'who fishes' be a top priority for New England fishery managers and decision makers.

Science – why does fleet diversity matter to conservation efforts?

The tight linkages among management, fleet characteristics, and ecosystem vitality (including recovery of fish stocks) are all too often underappreciated. Ecology and emerging fisheries science tells us it will be a mistake with dire consequences to ignore these interdependencies. The fishing fleet is an integral part of the living ecosystem, regardless of external markets, and management of fisheries is irresponsible if it does not factor this in. For more details and a comprehensive bibliography, we refer you to the comments that were submitted by a number of scientists commenting on the proposed Amendment 16 before it was approved. These scientific comments are based on the following principles that should be fundamental to the management of marine fisheries:

- Fish species often live as discrete substocks distributed unevenly in a given region or ecosystem (such as the Gulf of Maine).
- A fishing fleet is an integral part of the fishery ecosystem, so in order to perpetuate a healthy biological community and fished populations the fleet must operate on scales consistent with the scales on which the ecosystem operates.
- Management that takes into account spatial distributions of stocks and ecosystem characteristics (i.e. ecology) will be most successful over the long-term.
- The fleet therefore needs to be distributed in a way that accommodates the matching of scales—i.e the most basic separation is between inshore and offshore fleets based on capacity and ability to travel distances.
- Finer subdivisions within each of these fleets—by area, gear types, seasons, etc.—would make management more effective.
- Fishing methods that conform and respond to non-uniform and fluctuating distributions will be most effective in ensuring viability of various fish stocks.
- Diversity of fishing vessel size, gear, location and target species will support diversity in the living marine system by avoiding pulse fishing which disrupts the natural distribution of individual stocks and critical interactions among species.

- Science based solely on broad generalizations that average stock conditions over large regions will not be effective in determining ecologically sound quotas.

The inevitable result of uncontrolled consolidation is a lack of diversity in the fishing fleet – i.e. a few large, efficient and homogeneous fishing operations working out of only a few ports – that will negatively affect the character, diversity and scales of the fishery ecosystem and the community diversity ashore.

Experience – learning from others:

If we care about the health of our oceans, fishing communities, and our food system, then who fishes matters. As the New England groundfish fishery transitions into a new ‘Catch Share’ management system, with its promises to improve ecological stewardship of our oceans, it is important to keep in mind that uncontrolled ‘Catch Share’ programs around the world have consolidated into monolithic, industrial scale, non owner-operator fishing fleets. This direction undermines communities, ecosystems, and our food system.

Fisheries are tied to the larger human food system, most importantly by providing an essential high-quality source of protein for many people. It is essential that we recognize and learn from the fact that a monolithic, industrial-scale, non-owner-operator food production system (i.e. modern agriculture dominated by agribusiness) has seriously failed to accomplish its ecological, social and economic objectives on land. We can and should learn lessons from consolidation that led to severe ecological and socio-economic problems in our terrestrial food system and not repeat the same mistakes with the food we get from the ocean.

It’s important to note that nearly 30 years after the farming industry was forced into consolidation and industrialization, the Department of Justice is currently holding hearings to determine the consequences of those actions. It took 30 years to truly see the ecological, economic and social consequences.

We urge the Council to take a very different road – one that leads to a diverse fleet in the hands of community-based, family fisher-men and women.

The need for careful analysis and decision- making:

We are encouraged that the Council took the first step toward addressing fleet diversity and consolidation in June when it passed a motion setting goals of maintaining inshore and offshore fleets, maintaining fleet diversity, and prohibiting excessive control of the fish by a small group of participants. And this month the Groundfish Committee committed to establishing individual accumulation limits in the next appropriate action. We believe these limits need to be established in

Framework 45, as the more time lapses, the more difficult it will be to undue the damage that is sure to be done.

You should know that you are not alone in your thinking. Nearly 200 people have already signed a letter in support of fleet diversity (<http://www.change.org/nama>).

We were also encouraged by the Council staff's white paper: *Fleet Diversity, Allocation, and Excessive Shares in the Northeast Multispecies Fishery*. We commend the paper for highlighting the important areas and trust that more analytical work will be done to assess the potential value of the different possibilities for New England and how experiences and lessons from other regions in the U.S. and the world will be helpful. We suggest that including the original data with the diversity analysis in the paper might provide a more complete and complex picture than the averaged data reveals. Without the data, it is difficult to interpret the diversity graphs, which appear inexplicably static over time.

We agree strongly with the paper's suggestion that the purpose of proposed measures should be clearly defined, so that it will be possible to anticipate the effectiveness and possible secondary consequences. We are eager to help in further analysis of the options.

Conclusion:

It is essential to ensure that mistakes that have happened in other Catch Share systems and in the rest of our food system are not repeated here in New England. The future of our fisheries and the food systems into which they contribute depend on the decisions you make today.

It is critical to adopt a long-term vision for the fleet that acknowledges our rich marine ecosystem and fishing heritage. Let it be one that provides for a stable, diverse and viable long-term future for our fishermen without undermining our communities, ecosystems and fisheries for decades to come.

As it stands in Amendment 16 and the current management plan for the groundfish fishery, there are no protections to ensure fleet diversity or to prevent excessive consolidation. Protections are needed to ensure that the fleet remains diverse and under the control of active fishing communities to achieve the ecological objectives established by the Magnuson Stevens Act.

We know this. And we now challenge the Council to acknowledge that there is a serious problem and to commit to finding effective solutions and to take action in the context of Framework 45. We look forward to working with you and the Council staff as this process moves forward.