



**For Immediate Release  
November 15, 2012**

### **NEW ENGLAND FISHERY MANAGERS TAKE HISTORIC STEP Votes in favor to protect fish and fleet diversity**

**Newport, Rhode Island** – Today the New England Fishery Management Council took the historic step to preserve the unique character and diversity of the New England commercial fishery by prioritizing Amendment 18 to the groundfish fishery management plan.

The vote signals the council's commitment to both ensure that opportunities exist for future generations of fishermen to target cod, haddock, hake and flounders, and to prevent the concentration of fishery access into fewer hands.

This vote comes on the heels of a recent NOAA announcement declaring the New England groundfishery a federal disaster. The disaster will result in dramatic cuts in the allowable catch which likely will lead to fleet consolidation. According to a Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries report, "We do see evidence of a fisheries disaster caused by the transition to catch shares, with a disproportionate impact on small boat (30-50') owners, which have been hampered by their limited range and limited access to quota. \*

Since New England began its Catch Share management program in 2010 nearly 200 crew jobs have been lost, fishing pressure of larger offshore boats has increased in near shore waters and fewer entities are controlling more of the quota.

The Amendment 18 seeks to improve the sector system by limiting quota ownership and establishing fleet diversity protections. Similar measures have been successfully implemented in other fisheries. In Alaska, for example, the halibut/ sablefish fishery strictly limits individual ownership to ½ to 1 percent of the total stocks in an effort to ensure that owner-operator fishermen can continue to flourish in the fishery, rather than allow the fishery to consolidate into only a select few, very large fishing operations, as has happened in many other fisheries around the world.

Billy Chaprales, hook fisherman from Sandwich, MA said that Amendment 18 will "make sure that the next generation of young fishermen just might have the opportunity that I had in this fishery – making a living fishing sustainably with hooks as the stocks rebuild."

In developing Amendment 18, the New England Fishery Management Council convened 10 scoping hearings from Ellsworth, Maine to Cape May, New Jersey to solicit comments from fishermen. The meetings were very well attended, with fishermen overwhelmingly supporting the development of strong, meaningful limits to ensure fleet diversity.

“The management strategy of attack and exploit the resource and then buy out the struggling day-boat, is quickly paving the road to a big boat only fishery,” said fisherman Mike Pratt at a hearing in Plymouth, MA.

Council members have expressed an interest in using Amendment 18 also to develop place-based protections on inshore fishing grounds of critical importance to the health of both the fish stocks and the fishermen. Options may include an inshore/offshore line designating a gear restricted area to complement the existing catch limits. Taken together, the suite of measures aim to recover chronically overfished stocks and ensure a profitable future for the economically significant coastal New England fishing industry.

National Marine Fisheries Service Regional Administrator John Bullard told the Council that the issues behind Amendment 18 were one of the most frequently raised issues during his listening sessions around New England. “It is an issue that is on people’s minds and it deserves to be a priority and I’m glad it is on the there”, said Bullard. He also added, “We might also ask ourselves whether we should be thinking about the issues underneath Amendment 18 that exist in other fisheries.”

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**Citation:**

\* MA Division of Marine Fisheries report, Comparative Economic Survey and Analysis of Northeast Fishery Sector 10, November 2011.