

March 17, 2009

President Barak Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

During your first hundred days you are focusing on moving the country in a positive direction in the face of crisis. As your programs take hold, you will be able to turn your attention to other long-standing problems, such as those that face our coastal fishing communities. As you do this, we urge your administration to proceed with caution, and to carefully consider the consequences of broad-brush decisions governing a diverse activity in diverse ecosystems.

As a community organizer, you know the value of community and the role community members can play in solving problems and planning for their future. We represent a collaboration spearheaded by leaders of small-scale coastal fishing communities and aided by academics and conservation NGOs in New England working toward solutions that can prevent the mistakes of the past and pave the way for a new paradigm that ends overfishing while ensuring the economic health of our communities. We are connected to one another through common resources and values; and we are intimately interconnected with the biology of coastal waters whose health is our health. For decades the life of our coastal waters has been declining and, along with it, our lives and livelihoods.

The problem began with a centuries-long history of overfishing – by foreign and domestic fishing fleets and by local fishermen throwing caution to the wind in order to compete. In recent years the decline has continued due to a mismanagement system that traps fishermen into targeting single species while throwing away other portions of their catch. Further exacerbating the problem has been inattention to the appropriate scales of fisheries and management, which has allowed broad scale fisheries models to dominate ecosystems and community fisheries that function on finer scales. At the same time the impacts of overall environmental degradation, such as climate change and toxic pollution, have not been addressed.

We are seeking leadership from your administration that supports local small-scale fishermen who want to turn the decline of fisheries around. Community-based fishermen in New England propose a strong stewardship ethic; a focus on high-quality and low-volume local markets; and, an ecologically sound area-based management strategy. Such an approach has been described in *Sharing the Ocean: Stories of Science, Politics, and Ownership from America's Oldest Industry* (Michael Crocker, 2008, co-published by Tilbury House Publishers and the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance – copy attached)

Fisheries management based on whole ecosystem health and community vitality is prescribed by the Magnuson-Stevens Act – the main federal law governing marine fisheries. If such requirements continue to be minimized or ignored in favor of single-species management approaches by the National Marine Fisheries Service and the regional management councils, fisheries will not recover nor will our coastal communities. The alternative we propose is fisheries management that:

- Is a local governance subunit nested within the regional council system;
- Is developed and implemented with participation of the local community-based fishermen informed by sound science and their intimate daily knowledge of the marine ecosystems in which they fish;
- Is adaptive to real time changes in the biological system;
- Is designed to manage fisheries on space and time scales that match critical biological processes and habitat requirements;
- Addresses non-fishing issues such as climate change and persistent pollutants that build up in the marine food chain;
- Is sensitive to habitat quality, life cycle stages, and natural food webs;
- Integrates terrestrial and marine environmental conservation;
- Is dedicated to eliminating the senseless waste of living resources that is a consequence of current practices; and
- Focuses on local markets and integrates with local farmers.

We are asking you to lead your administration to break the old fisheries management habits that have only led to consolidation of fishing effort without reducing the amount of fish caught or improving the health of the region's ecosystem. One good place to start would be to direct your administration to implement all eleven national standards in the Magnuson-Stevens Act at regional levels.

We can make the shift in New England by establishing a pilot *Green-Collar Fishing Sector* in the Gulf of Maine based on an ecologically defined area fished and managed by local, small-scale fishermen who pledge to be stewards of the ecosystem. And to ensure their efforts succeed, we ask you to direct NOAA and other responsible agency officials to devote resources to the restoration of habitats upon which fish and fisheries depend.

We believe you have made good appointments to lead NOAA and science in your administration. Given the deep west coast experience of your appointments to Commerce, we urge you to seriously consider balancing that with a director of the Fisheries Service who has strong experience in other coastal regions as well as an appreciation for the issues that link all US fisheries. We hope you and your Secretary of Commerce will give the NOAA leaders what they need to implement ecologically based decision-making at a time that the ecosystems of the planet need a strong helping hand. We trust that, under your leadership, the Commerce Department will for once make the connections among community, environmental protection, and economic viability.

We feel confident you understand the critical issues, and we look forward to working with your administration to restore marine ecosystems and set community based fisheries on the path to a healthy long-term recovery.

Sincerely,

We the undersigned

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