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## **EDITORIAL: Cut NOAA talks, funds until there's true commitment to change**

There actually seemed to be some hope in and around the fishing industry last week going into a meeting between U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke and a caucus of more than a dozen congressional lawmakers.

There was hope that, in agreeing to the meeting, Locke might have seen the urgency the lawmakers raised in seeking emergency relief from the absurdly low New England catch limits put in place by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and its National Marine Fisheries Service.

There was a sense this Cabinet secretary might raise the limits which, combined with the NOAA chief Jane Lubchenco's tunnel-visioned rush into a new management system, seems certain to doom scores of small fishing boat businesses and waterfront jobs in Gloucester, New Bedford and elsewhere.

But it shouldn't have taken Sens. John Kerry and Scott Brown, Congressmen John Tierney, Barney Frank and others long to realize they'd been had. That Lubchenco was even part of the talks spelled doom for "keeping hope alive" for any change to aid this industry, or the communities it serves.

Indeed, it sadly seems Locke is willing to let Lubchenco carry on the NOAA mantra voiced by the agency's law enforcement thugs invading the Gloucester Seafood Display Auction four years ago — when they declared they were "accountable to no one."

The fact that a Secretary of Commerce cannot see the needless threat to commerce posed by NOAA's and NMFS' policies — and would let the limits stand in the face of mounting documentation showing they're not

needed — makes a cruel joke of the entire Obama administration's alleged commitment to "jobs, jobs, jobs."

In retrospect, the bipartisan group of lawmakers — from Maine's Sen. Olympia Snowe to North Carolina Congressman Walter Jones — probably could have skipped the meeting or walked out once Lubchenco was part of the deal. They have, after all, met with her ad nauseam. And they were well aware of her open contempt for Congress — evidenced through her failure to make more sweeping reforms within the scandalized NOAA law enforcement and her Nixonian stonewalling on any reconsideration of catch limits or catch shares.

Indeed, Lubchenco's presence at the meeting suggests she still believes that, somehow, holding "summit" meetings and merely talking with lawmakers, fishermen and community leaders — perhaps while holding hands, singing a few verses of "Give Peace A Chance" and vowing to work together and move forward — will somehow fix all this.

No dice, Dr. Jane.

Not when you and your trusty sidekick, NMFS' chief Eric Schwab, allow jack-booted enforcement agents to continue harassing fishermen with tactics that have been decried by Commerce's own Inspector General. Not when you stand by tightening catch allocations despite the "inconvenient truth" that NOAA's own figures show more and more fish stocks have been rebuilt.

If Locke and Lubchenco want to carry out any more of these charades — time-wasting summits that are true insults to the likes of Kerry, Brown, Tierney, Frank and others — here's what must happen to even attempt to approach a patch of common ground:

Raise the catch allocations for pollock and other species, effective immediately, as the lawmakers, in good faith, asked last week.

Cleanse, from top to bottom, the human dumpster known as NOAA law enforcement. Criminal conduct — from document shredding to after-hours breaks into businesses and intimidating court witnesses — cannot be part of any administrative law playbook.

Outline specifically how NOAA will provide financial reparations for fishermen assessed excessive fines and wrongly prosecuted in the past. Yes, that costs money. But start with NOAA law enforcement's \$8.4 million

Asset Forfeiture Fund, and the \$54 million Lubchenco's looking to set aside for catch share management.

Maybe then, there can be more talk. Maybe then, there can be a move to "go forward." But until then, congressional lawmakers should follow Frank's lead and make two things clear to the White House:

Any other "agenda" items are on hold until the president stops this renegade agency in its tracks.

Any taxpayers' money budgeted for this agency is on hold until there is very real "change" at NOAA — the only thing that bring a renewed glimmer of "hope."