

Greetings,

This article below indicates Commerce Secretary Locke is “interested in exploring” a buyback program for fishing boats grappling with NOAA’s stated policy of forcing out “a significant fraction” of the current independent fleet. The comment speaks volumes about the fish management process.

For example, our once robust shrimping fleet in Key West totaled over 500 boats during the height of the shrimping years before China and Vietnam took over 90% of the US market and NOAA took over the management of fisheries. Last month, the fleet in Key West was down to FOUR and then one of the owner/captain committed suicide because he ran out of hope. Our Key West shrimp fleet had three boats working out of Stock Island on July 4, 2010 as the downtown packing facilities disappeared years ago.

How many more domestic fishing boats will be squeezed out of existence by its own government? The Administration talks a good game about jobs, but allows the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and NOAA to destroy jobs on a regular basis as they push for no fishing zones.

Thousands of fishermen throughout the country have been forced out of business by NOAA’s relentless pursuit to enact the United Nation’s Convention on Biological Diversity as outlined in the publication “*Earth summit AGENDA 21, The United Nations Programme of Action From Rio*” published in 1992 (ISBN-92-1-100509-4)

The Commerce Department should concentrate on creating commerce (jobs) for Americans and less for foreign nations.

Bob Jones
July 26, 2010

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Feds would 'explore' boat buyouts

By Richard Gaines Staff Writer

Federal Commerce Secretary Gary Locke has said he is "interested in exploring" the creation of a buyback program for fishing boats grappling with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration policies and catch limits designed to force out "a significant fraction" of the current independent fleet.

But for now, Locke said in a letter to Gov. Deval Patrick, there is no funding — from government, industry or any other source — for such a program.

The New England Fishery Management Council has formally recognized the need for a buyback program, which has long been a top agenda item on the wish list of the Gloucester-based Northeast Seafood Coalition, the region's leading industry group.

Locke discussed options for a buyback program in a July 20 letter, responding to two letters from Patrick in May.

A third Patrick letter sent on July 16 crossed paths with the Locke letter, creating some federal-state confusion.

Locke's comments about a buyback program were included in a lengthy letter that made multiple claims of support for the fishing industry, and rehashed recent actions — including the six-fold increase in the size of the pollock allocation in response to a new survey, The new NOAA numbers and the 600-percent hike in the catch limit validated fishermen's insistence that the original allocation was made based on flawed data.

While advocates for the industry in government lauded the correction, many fishermen saw the radical adjustment as a "told you so" moment, when once again, the industry's empirical sense of what's in the sea proved more valid than the trawl surveying done by the science arm of NOAA.

A spokesman for Patrick described the Locke letter as generally unsatisfactory.

A bipartisan, bi-cameral coalition of elected officials met in June with Locke, and — getting no satisfaction — decided the next and last stop on the power pyramid was the Oval Office of President Obama, with whom Patrick has a long friendship.

Patrick came to Gloucester two weeks ago at the urging of the Northeast Seafood Coalition to strategize next moves.

After thinking out loud about calling his friend the president, Patrick elected instead to send a third letter to Locke.

In it, the governor asked Locke to loosen catch limits across the range of the mixed groundfish complex, provide an undetermined amount of economic aid to the industry, fund a \$3.2 million request for a cooperative research survey of fish stocks and innovative gear technology and release previously allocated funds of at least \$500,000 to help underwrite the system of sectors or fishing cooperatives.

Most Gloucester and New England groundfishermen have opted to join a sector to gain access to allocated fishermen's catch shares rather than continue to fish under the old controls that were largely based on limiting fishermen's effort — with wide areas periodically off limits a times, and tight limits placed on fishermen's days at sea.

Even at extremely low levels, the allocated catch shares are considered a better lifeline than the highly constricted days-at-sea system that is being phased out.

Jackie Odell, executive director of the seafood coalition, said she found Obama administration fisheries policies out of sync. NOAA chief Jane Lubchenco has acknowledged that the agency's policy of regulating the fishing industry through its catch share format will reduce the small-business fleet by "a significant fraction."

"What do you think about the 'jobs, jobs, jobs' and the small business support — that is the platform — for an administration who is also in charge of an agency (NOAA) that's cutting jobs, supporting catch shares with very low catch limits, and then supporting a buyback?" Odell asked. "That's why we need the leadership of the White House."

The coalition in 2008 unsuccessfully pushed for a \$156 million earmark that included a \$100 million buyback program. But that program never got off the ground, and was left out of one of the early federal stimulus bills.

"Typically," Locke wrote to the governor in his most recent letter, "buyback programs have been implemented under specific congressional authorizing legislation and can be funded through specific appropriations, industry fee systems and public, private or nonprofit sources.

"Industry could request an industry-funded buyback program under existing regulations," he continued. "NOAA is ready to assist in designing a buyback program to help address the economic impacts of ending overfishing in this fishery."

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