

# GloucesterTimes.com, Gloucester, MA

May 8, 2010

## Fed fishing rules seen as quick 'failure'

By Richard Gaines

**Staff Writer**

In less than a week, what little hope there had been in the federal government's experiment in using catch shares to strengthen New England's mixed stock groundfishery has vanished.

Rolled out just a week ago today, the new system was vilified Friday in a pair of emergency meetings — one in Gloucester, the other in New Bedford, co-capitals of the New England fishing industry.

Angry fishermen and shoreside business operators described a chaotic introduction to the Obama administration's new regulatory scheme, with dysfunctional communications technology leaving boats uncertain whether they could leave port or unload, other boats held back from fishing to avoid exceeding allocations of specific species, jobs lost and fractional landings endangering supply systems.

A fisherman who lives across the street from Mayor Carolyn Kirk was laid off, she said.

David Marciano, a veteran boat owner and groundfisherman, said he had to sell his permit because he could not afford the debt that would have accrued from buying. And more of the same was predicted, underscoring government predictions of intended reductions in the size of the fleet.

Gloucester and New Bedford fishermen avoided fishing for the most part during the first week of "catch share" management. The port cities' lead auctions reported minimal landings.

"We're heading for catastrophic failure on every level," said state Rep. Ann-Margaret Ferrante, D-Gloucester, who co-sponsored the debriefing and strategic brainstorming of mostly Gloucester fishermen at City Hall with Kirk and state Sen. Bruce E. Tarr, R-Gloucester.

During the three years of government planning and development to create the catch share system — catching rights with hard limits and deterrent policies against excesses — most of the industry anticipated a debacle. But there were some who, without embracing the concept as promoted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Environmental Defense Fund, saw catch shares as inevitable and worth a try.

Any hints of interest or hope in the system were gone Friday.

"These are evil, evil, evil people," said Richard Burgess, who owns four boats and leads the gillnet sector, a guild-like business cooperative for the 40 boats that fish with fixed gear out of Gloucester.

Richie Canastra, co-owner of the New Bedford-based Whaling City Seafood Display Auction, said he heard not a peep of support for the government system in the two-hour emergency meeting called Friday afternoon by New Bedford Mayor Scott Lang.

"Gloucester and New Bedford are walking side by side on this one," said Canastra.

Angela Sanfilippo, president of the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association who helped the mayor organize the Gloucester meeting, recalled the bitter irony confronting fishermen; they put up with fierce cutbacks to help the stocks recover only to find themselves facing the radical redistribution of equity in the fishery that typically arrives with the commodification of catch shares.

"Now that it is rebuilt, our fishery is not for sale," she said.

Listening and taking notes were representatives of U.S. Sens. John Kerry and Scott Brown and Congressman John Tierney. But what the industry and its allies in Congress might be able to do to relieve the hardships was uncertain.

Jackie Odell, executive director of the Northeast Seafood Coalition, said it was essential that Congress modify the Magnuson-Stevens Act to make explicit the option for administrators to lengthen rebuilding schedules rather than debilitate the fishing industry with the kind of crushing limits that kept the bulk of the boats inactive last week.

The Gloucester and New Bedford meetings were organized as the congressional delegation pondered the approach to a meeting next Thursday in Washington, D.C., with Commerce Secretary Gary Locke.

He granted the meeting in response to a letter from a bipartisan group of 23 federal lawmakers — including Kerry and Brown — seeking relief from economic losses expected from the inauguration of catch shares, the fishing approach favored by NOAA administrator Jane Lubchenco and EDF, where she had been board vice chairwoman.

Sanfilippo advised the lawmakers' representatives to "tell the Secretary of Commerce the fishery is not for sale."

Patricia Kurkul, Lubchenco's regional administrator of NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, wrote to Saving Seafood, the industry Web news digest, after reading the announcement of the Gloucester meeting.

"Your readers should know that NOAA ... has been in constant communication with fishermen ... over the past year to develop these management measures," Kurkul wrote. "Our field staff are on the docks all this week, not only in Gloucester but all along the coast, speaking with fishermen to hear firsthand what they are experiencing on the water."

Maggie Mooney-Seus, Kurkul's spokeswoman, told the Times that NMFS stayed away from the one-week review meeting in Gloucester because it wasn't invited to City Hall.

Canastra said only about six boats out of 200 New Bedford groundfishing boats were fishing in the first week of the new system. Larry Ciulla, president of the Gloucester Seafood Display Auction, described a similar pattern in Gloucester.

Ciulla said that seafood buyers will not wait long to find alternative sources of supply.

"When there's no certainty of supply, the market place begins to disappear," he said, noting alternative "supplies are available from Iceland, Canada, Norway, and especially China lately."

Richard Gaines can be reached at 978-283-7000 x3464, or [rgaines@gloucestertimes.com](mailto:rgaines@gloucestertimes.com)