

GloucesterTimes.com, Gloucester, MA

February 13, 2011

Sen. Brown touts FISH Act in harbor visit

By *Steven Fletcher*
Staff Writer

The U.S. Senator who's filed legislation to reform federal fishing policy and hold federal regulators accountable got a firsthand look Saturday at the impact those regulations are having on Gloucester and other communities.

Sen. Scott Brown spoke to some 30 Gloucester-based fishermen and waterfront business operators about his proposed Fishery Impact Statement Honesty (FISH) Act during a Saturday visit to the Gloucester Seafood Display Auction.

The legislation aims to amend the Magnuson-Stevens Act and places federal fishing policy under independent annual analysis from the Government Accountability Office.

Brown said he wants someone independent of federal fishing regulators serving as a watchdog over policy-making organizations like the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and its National Marine Fisheries Service.

"They (fisheries policy groups) have to justify it (their actions)," said Brown.

Brown's visit to the auction — a flashpoint in an Inspector General's report that has outlined widespread excessive policing tactics the part of NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement — came as part of a day-long tour of Massachusetts' primary fishing ports, which began at 8 a.m. in New Bedford.

In Gloucester, he visited Cape Pond Ice before boarding the fishing vessel Padre Pio, captained by Joe Orlando, and crossing the Inner Harbor to the auction on Harbor Loop.

Brown, joined by state Sen. Bruce Tarr, state Rep. Ann-Margaret Ferrante and Mayor Carolyn Kirk, talked of the struggles facing the fishing industry and fielded questions from the audience of boat captains and fishing advocates.

"You don't need to be preyed upon by the federal government," Tarr also told the fishing business operators.

Brown noted that there is now a bicameral, bipartisan group of government officials that are fighting the government on behalf of the fishing industry.

"It's not just fishing jobs, it's ice, it's people — the auction, welders, they're all related," he said.

Brown's federal FISH bill aims to creating jobs in an area where many feel that the government is trying to eliminate them. And without fixing fishing, he noted, officials don't fix the other waterfront industries that form a big part of the economies in cities like Gloucester and New Bedford.

He described his FISH act as a job-building bill, and said that he came by the auction to remind the Gloucester fishing community that continues to work for them.

His audience asked questions about the congressional oversight of the fishery, and one resident asked if fishing could move back into the Department of Agriculture.

Others, like Angela Sanfilippo, president of the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association, asked the senator to consider what she described as the threat of off-shore development to the fishing industry as well, through ocean zoning and other proposals that aim to set aside wide swaths of fertile fishing grounds for the advancement of wind farms and other projects.

"Regulations are good," said Larry Ciulla, owner of the Seafood Auction, "but they need to be fair regulations.

"We are the environmentalists in the ocean," he added. "We don't want to see overfishing, and we don't overfish."

Steven Fletcher can be reached at 978-283-7000, x3447, or at gt_reporter@gloucestertimes.com.