Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 11, 2012

Mr. Eric Schwaab
Acting Assistant Secretary for Conservation and Management
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW Washington, DC 20230

Dear Acting Assistant Secretary Schwaab:

We write to seek your assistance with a matter of critical importance to the New England groundfish industry regarding the ongoing and difficult situation with Gulf of Maine cod.

As you know, the historic cod fishery has experienced unprecedented challenges after an unanticipated change in stock status following a revised assessment of the stock in 2011. The New England Fishery Management Council (Council) has expressed serious concern about the economic fallout from the anticipated low annual catch limit (ACL) of Gulf of Maine cod for the 2013 fishing year, and at its June meeting the Council passed a unanimous motion (14-0-1) that requests that NOAA Fisheries determine the feasibility of authorizing the carryover of "up to 50% of the fishing year 2012 Gulf of Maine Cod ACL to fishing year 2013".

In a letter to Acting Regional Administrator Dan Morris, the Council's Executive Director Paul Howard described as "disastrous" the situation the industry will find itself in with an ACL for Gulf of Maine cod that is expected to fall below 2000 metric tons under the next assessment. A 2000 metric ton ACL would be untenable for the fishery and all efforts consistent with the law should be pursued to provide flexibility for these fishermen. Mr. Howard's letter also details the potential biological and economic benefits that could be attained by allowing the industry to voluntarily reduce fishing mortality in 2012 in order to sustain some level of fishing opportunities in 2013.

We appreciate the considerable attention that your Agency has already paid to this difficult situation and hope that you will continue your efforts to provide relief to the groundfish industry under this extraordinary situation as we work to manage these unexpected developments as effectively as possible.

We ask that you fully consider the Council's position and expedite any analysis necessary to fulfill its request. Time is of the essence, and New England's groundfish industry is awaiting the results of your decision. We hope to hear the outcome of your decision as soon as possible.

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Sincerely,

John Kerry
U.S. Senator

Olympia J. Snowe
U.S. Senator

Susan M. Collins
U.S. Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
U.S. Senator

Scott Brown
U.S. Senator

Kelly Ayotte
U.S. Senator

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

Michael H. Michaud
Member of Congress

Barney Frank
Member of Congress

Frank Guinta
Member of Congress

William Keating
Member of Congress

John Tierney
Member of Congress

cc: Samuel D. Rauch III, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs