

Testimony of  
Terry A. Alexander, President  
Sustainable Harvest Sector  
Cundy's Harbor, ME

Submitted to  
Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife  
House of Representatives

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Chairwoman Bordallo and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding catch share management of commercial fisheries.

I have been a commercial fisherman vested in the New England groundfish fishery for over 30 years. I am currently the President of the Board of Directors of the Sustainable Harvest Sector. We are over 100 groundfish permit holders from Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, and New York who have joined to fish under catch share management in New England groundfish beginning on May 1, 2010.

The management of New England groundfish, which includes nineteen different fish stocks, has produced extraordinary biological results over the past 20 years. Many of the stocks within the complex are at the highest levels since the 1980s. The status of others continues to perplex scientists, managers, and the industry. For example, during the last five years, commercial fishermen in New England have under-harvested the scientifically based catch limits for some stocks by millions of pounds, only to be informed that "retrospective patterns" have reversed the positive projections of earlier stock assessments.

These biological gains were achieved at the cost of hundreds of New England groundfish businesses and jobs.

For example, from 2001 to 2007 the number of active vessels in the New England groundfish fishery has shrunk from nearly 1100 to 574, and in Massachusetts, from which the largest percentage of vessels has historically hailed, the number of active vessels has declined from 629 to 300. In Maine, less than 75 boats remain in the fishery and groundfish landings have plummeted from 30 million pounds annually to 6 million pounds.

The loss of these businesses and jobs came well before the implementation of catch shares - and make no mistake about it, - with or without catch shares, more businesses and jobs will be sacrificed in the New England groundfish industry.

The cause of continued job loss cannot be attributed to any particular management scheme, but instead can be directly attributed to the stringent rebuilding requirements of the Magnuson Stevens Act. Many members of Congress have said that the intent of the

Magnuson Stevens Act is to protect fishing communities as well as fish populations, but that is not the outcome we have experienced in New England.

Let me be perfectly clear - the Sustainable Harvest Sector is not embracing catch share management. We have been long-time vocal opponents of catch shares - but we have now come to the conclusion that, under the current mandates of the law, and facing the alternative of only 24 allowable days to fish, catch shares management of New England groundfish is the lesser of two evils.

The catch share program for New England groundfish was developed over a three-year process with considerable input from stakeholders. We are not satisfied with all the design details. In particular, we oppose the plan to shift monitoring costs to an industry that cannot afford those costs.

Congress must provide funding for the costs of catch share monitoring. Projected costs for at-sea monitoring alone for New England groundfish sectors is close to \$5 million dollars annually. NOAA should prioritize funding for monitoring of existing catch share programs before advocating for new or expanded catch share programs

A buyout is crucial to lessening the negative impacts of the impending restrictions on the New England groundfish industry. We have known for decades that there is an overcapacity problem in New England groundfish. A buyout could remove that excess capacity, give those who wish to leave the industry a dignified way to exit, and allow those who remain to increase allocations at minimal cost.

Congress must provide the funding necessary for a buyout, or advance an industry-funded buyout proposal.

If catch share management of New England groundfish is to succeed, we need a much greater investment in stock assessment science. It is clear that NOAA's budget request places priority on a catch share agenda over the goal of improving stock assessments. We would like to see improved science as the number one priority of NOAA.

Fisheries science, at its best, is guesswork – stock assessment models are based on “assumptions” and the outputs are called “projections”. Yet, the Magnuson Stevens Act continues to hold fishery managers and the industry to arbitrary timeframes and unrealistic goals.

The most important message I have to convey today is this: Congress must amend the Magnuson-Stevens Act in a way that clearly articulates the flexibility necessary for fisheries managers to restore fisheries resources while preserving fishing communities.