



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

Deval L. Patrick
GOVERNOR

Timothy P. Murray
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Ian A. Bowles
SECRETARY

Tel: (617) 626-1000
Fax: (617) 626-1181
<http://www.mass.gov/envir>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 4, 2008

Contact:
Robert Keough
(617) 626-1109
Lisa Capone
(617) 626-1119

Patrick-Murray Administration Launches Groundfish Initiative

*State Will Distribute Aid to Suffering Fleet and Communities, Develop Plan
for Improved Regulatory System to Protect Industry and Fish Stocks*

BOSTON – Secretary Ian Bowles today announced that the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) and the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) will work to develop alternatives to the federal regulatory system that better protect both the groundfish industry and fish stocks than the current “Days At Sea” system. While working with the fishing industry and scientists to develop long-term regulatory fixes when the National Marine Fisheries Service amends regulations in 2009, DFG and its Division of Marine Fisheries will also collaborate with legislators, the Congressional delegation, and fishing communities to push for more immediate and urgent changes in the next round of federal New England Fishery Management Council meetings this spring.

In addition, the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) is developing the federal application needed to expedite distributing \$13.4 million in emergency federal aid to the Massachusetts groundfish fishing fleet and coastal communities dependent on the industry, Secretary Bowles said. DMF is currently discussing with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration the terms of the aid, but will confer with stakeholder advisors and others through a public meeting process. A wide-ranging program to address lost groundfish income will likely include support for fishing crew health insurance, vessel safety improvements, investments to support the long-term health of our fishing industry, and other forms of assistance.

“The Massachusetts groundfishing fleet, and the communities that depend on the fleet for their economic vitality, have suffered unduly from federal fishing restrictions that have also failed to achieve the goal of reviving fish stocks,” said Secretary Bowles. “Working with Governor Patrick and our state legislators, our congressional delegation passed budget amendments to provide some financial relief in the short term. But the federal regulatory system needs to be fixed for the long term. The time is ripe to develop a regulatory regime and infrastructure that

protects the fishing economy along with the natural resource in collaboration with our federal partners.”

In February 2007, Governor Deval Patrick wrote to U.S. Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez asking him to declare a “fishery resource disaster” in the Massachusetts groundfish industry due to federal regulatory restrictions. In April, Governor Patrick submitted documentation from the Division of Marine Fisheries in support of that request, citing regional economic losses of \$22 million due to recent changes in federal commercial fishing regulations.

A series of regulations imposed under the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan since 1994 have reduced the area and the number of days Massachusetts vessels are allowed to fish. The fishery management plan’s most recent revision, Framework 42, which went into effect November 22, 2006, further reduced the fishing days available to the inshore groundfishing fleet by 50 percent.

In October 2007, Secretary Gutierrez denied the Governor’s request for a disaster declaration, but in December, Senators Edward Kennedy and John Kerry and the rest of the Massachusetts congressional delegation succeeded in obtaining a federal appropriation of \$13.4 million to aid the struggling Massachusetts groundfishing industry.

“I welcome this stepped-up involvement in fishery issues on the part of state government,” said U.S. Representative Barney Frank. “In particular, the Governor’s efforts in support of a fishery disaster declaration were very important, and helped pave the way for Congressional approval of the federal emergency financial assistance now being provided to the state. As efforts to improve the management of our fisheries move forward, we must make it clear that appropriately flexible policies can keep fisheries sustainable without inflicting undue economic harm on fishing communities. Fishermen are among the strongest advocates of sustainable fisheries, because they don’t plan on going out of business. It is essential that they be fully involved in these state discussions and any future deliberations on reforming fishery management in New England.”

In each of his letters, Governor Patrick also stressed the need to work with federal regulators “toward our shared goals of conserving our natural resources and preserving our fishing communities.” Toward that end, EEA and DFG are launching an initiative to coordinate the Commonwealth’s representation at fisheries councils and facilitate development of innovative alternatives to the Days At Sea method of fishing regulation that would better support commercial fishing and better manage groundfish stocks. Stakeholder involvement, collaboration with state and Congressional legislators, collaboration with other states, and engagement of scientists will allow the Commonwealth to speak in a more coherent and focused voice at the New England Fisheries Management Council.

There is widespread agreement among fishermen, environmental organizations, and other stakeholders that the current federal regulatory scheme has been unsuccessful in protecting fishing communities or fish stocks. Days At Sea has been an inflexible system that focuses on time fishing vessels can be on the water, not the resource that is ultimately being regulated: the amount of fish caught.

Already, the fishing industry is working to develop alternative methods of managing fishing effort to limit catch, reduce bycatch (accidental catch of non-target species, often leading to mortality of regulated species), and maintain economic viability. Under a “sector” approach,

fishing industry representatives are working to create a system that provides more flexibility. Sector-based approaches set quotas based on scientific monitoring and allow fishing vessels to trade fish catches as long as the sector stays within the overall quota. In addition, several other jurisdictions (states and other countries) have experimented with innovative forms of management that deserve exploration.

“As a commercial groundfish industry group that is engaged in the federal fisheries process, we are encouraged by the interest and concern genuinely expressed by Governor Patrick and his Administration,” said Jackie Odell, executive director of the Northeast Seafood Coalition. “We look forward to working closely with the Commonwealth in developing the infrastructure necessary to facilitate the implementation of harvest cooperatives and other catch-based systems that have been developed and supported by the industry.”

“This Administration’s willingness to smooth the transitional waters from failing Days at Sea to community-based harvesting groups called sectors will restore fish populations, business profits, and community prosperity throughout the Commonwealth,” said John Pappalardo, policy analyst for the Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen’s Association. “In celebration, I also urge caution. Sectors will only succeed where Days at Sea have failed with bold fiscal investment into innovative monitoring systems that measure catch and bycatch in a timely manner. Without such data we will be piloting blind through the fog once again.”

“We applaud the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for moving forward with a process to fundamentally transform the groundfish fishery in a way that will work for both fishermen and fish,” said Sally McGee, policy director for Environmental Defense’s New England Oceans Program and member of the New England Fishery Management Council. “Momentum for positive change has never been stronger, with fishing communities now advocating for innovative, market-based approaches to management. The time to act is now to give fishing communities the support they need to begin a safer, more prosperous fishing future.”

Several weeks ago, Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray, representatives of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, Department of Fish and Game Commissioner Mary Griffin, Division of Marine Fisheries Director Paul Diodati, area legislators, and other officials attended a public listening session in New Bedford to hear from a range of different voices in the fishing industry.

“Our fishing fleet is working hard to find new ways to protect the fish stocks they rely on and maintain the industry their communities depend on,” said Commissioner Griffin. “We want to work with them to develop and implement innovations that we can present to our federal partners.”

“It is critical that our groundfishermen have a say in the federal regulations that dictate their livelihood,” said Senate President Therese Murray. “This initiative will ensure that they have a voice and provide innovative solutions that will aid the federal government in putting in place systems that work for everyone involved.”

“We will make sure this relief money makes it into the hands of those who need it most – our fishing communities and the many families facing economic duress,” said Senator Mark Montigny. “Once again, we are facing off with a federal administration that has established

regulations which are neither fiscally nor scientifically sound. This is only the first step of many towards stabilizing the industry and securing the long term viability of the fisheries.”

“I am pleased that Governor Patrick and Secretary Bowles are seeking a wide range of input in crafting the Commonwealth’s fisheries management policy,” said Senator Robert O’Leary. “Our smaller fishing fleets have too often been overlooked when large policy changes are discussed, and it is promising that these important interests will be considered as we move forward.”

“Our commercial fishing industry can’t survive the impact of current federal regulations,” said Sen. Bruce Tarr. “We all need to work together to take on the challenge of proposing changes in the federal rules that are forcing fishing families out of business, and I’m pleased the administration is initiating this new effort.”

“I applaud the Patrick-Murray Administration for their efforts thus far and their substantial commitment of both time and resources to help create long-term sustainability in the fishing industry,” said Representative John Quinn. “This endeavor will be complex but hopefully will be fruitful for all stakeholders in the future.”

“I am hopeful that this long overdue initiative will assist in stabilizing the fishing industry, including fishing families and related shoreside businesses,” said Representative Frank Hynes.

“Ground fisheries are an important economic contributor to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and it’s essential to do everything in our power to stimulate this industry,” said Representative Anthony Verga.

###