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### Patrick Cites Urgency In New Appeal For Federal \$\$\$ For Mass. Fishermen

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By Michael Norton  
 STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, AUG. 14, 2012.....Calling the need for a disaster declaration "more critical than ever" and saying he feared for the state's fishing industry, Gov. Deval Patrick appealed to the federal government Monday to facilitate direct economic relief to Massachusetts fishermen.

In a [letter](#)  1MB to Acting U.S. Commerce Secretary Rebecca Blank, Patrick cited recently released National Marine Fisheries Service data suggesting potential groundfish catch limit cuts next year of between 43 percent and 73 percent across multiple stocks, reductions that the governor said would put "the very viability of the historic and economically vital New England fishing fleet at risk."

"We must take immediate action to prevent a massive consolidation of the fleet and to protect the thousands of fishermen and their families who depend on this industry for their livelihood," Patrick wrote in his letter, asking Blank to use authority she holds under the Magnuson-Stevenson Act.

Noting Massachusetts had renewed its disaster declaration request in November 2011, Patrick asked Blank to act before cuts in fish catch limits are implemented next year. "Without this advance and proactive action, I fear for the viability of our fleet, and the communities and shore-side businesses that depend on the industry," Patrick wrote.

In November 2010, Patrick asked the federal government to provide \$21 million in relief to the groundfish fleet in Massachusetts "for the impact caused by the implementation of and transition to catch shares." In January 2011, that request was denied but federal officials asked for more research.

In an interview, Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Rick Sullivan said the state had supplied requested documents to back up its request for disaster relief and suggested the federal government has a moral obligation to respond. "We're at a point where I think now is the time to absolutely make this declaration and act," he said.

Asked about the status of fish stocks, Sullivan said it depends on which fishery is being examined. He described cod and yellowfin tuna as "stressed and in that disaster phase" while adding that scallop supplies appear "quite healthy."

Asked what kind of economic aid fishermen might see if there is a disaster declaration, Sullivan said there were plans to announce some revolving loan funds of about \$1 million to assist certain owner-operated fishing fleets. Other aid, he said, would depend on the size of the relief fund, with the potential for additional low or no-interest loans.

"It's possible that it could be outright assistance," Sullivan said, akin to aid provided to struggling U.S. farmers.

Asked about examples of fishermen struggling, Sullivan said, "We're certainly seeing some consolidation. We're seeing the financial impacts of a disaster."

Sullivan said the challenges facing farmers coping with droughts are more visible than the problems facing fishermen. "This one may not be as readily apparent to be able to see," he said.

With numerous parties questioning the accuracy of groundfish estimates, Patrick also called on Blank to improve fisheries science. The state has committed \$1.3 million for sonar studies to improve the science behind fish counts, Sullivan said.

John Bullard, Northeast region director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, was in meetings late Tuesday and was not available to discuss Gov. Patrick's letter, according to an aide.



"We have received it and we are certainly considering it," NOAA spokeswoman Marjorie Mooney-Seus said, referring to Patrick's letter.

Appointed this summer, Bullard is the immediate past president of the Sea Education Association (SEA) and is working out of Gloucester. According to the agency's website, he is overseeing the region's fisheries conservation and management.

Bullard has deep local ties. The New Bedford native was mayor of that city from 1986 until 1992. Before joining SEA, he worked on the senior staff of UMass-Dartmouth Chancellor Jean MacCormack. From 1993 to 1998, during the Clinton administration, Bullard led NOAA's first federal Office of Sustainable Development and Intergovernmental Affairs.

[Governor Patrick Letter for Federal Relief for Massachusetts Fishermen](#)  1MB

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