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Commonwealth of Massachusetts

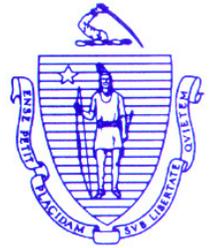
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July 14, 2015

Public Meetings Scheduled: Bin 3 Groundfish Disaster Aid

The Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) seeks public comment on a draft spending plan to distribute the final of three bins of federal disaster aid funds to the Commonwealth's groundfishery. Four public meetings will be held throughout Massachusetts during the last week of July (written comment accepted until 5PM on Friday, August 7, 2015):

North Shore

Monday, July 27, 2015 - 6:00 PM
MA DMF Annisquam River Station
30 Emerson Ave.
Gloucester, MA

South Shore

Tuesday, July 28, 2015 – 6:00 PM
Radisson - Plymouth Harbor
(Mayflower Room)
180 Water St.
Plymouth, MA

New Bedford

Wednesday, July 29, 2015 – 6:30 PM
(Note later start time)
Waypoint Event Center
Marriott Fairfield Inn & Suites
185 MacArthur Dr.

Cape Cod

Thursday, July 30, 2015 – 6:00 PM
Chatham Community Center
702 Main St.
Chatham, MA

Federal disaster aid stems from a September 13, 2012 disaster declaration in the Northeast multispecies (groundfish) fishery by the Acting Secretary of Commerce. Previous Bin 1 and Bin 2 spending strategies have provided direct aid to federal and state commercial groundfishermen, for-hire groundfishermen, and groundfish crew impacted during the disaster period between Fishing Years (FY) 2009-2013. Additional aid is also being directed to shoreside businesses supporting the commercial groundfishery and to sectors for administrative costs.

Originally the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and State Directors from Maine to New York had agreed to set aside roughly \$11-million for potential development of an industry funded buyback or buyout. Without sufficient progress after a year of discussions, NMFS re-programmed the funds to be allocated amongst the six disaster states to provide further assistance to their fishing communities and prevent a similar fishery failure in the future.

NMFS has allocated \$6.9-million from Bin 3 funds to the Commonwealth. DMF has developed the following draft spending plan with assistance from a Bin 3 industry-based Groundfish Disaster Aid Working Group:

1. **Continued Development of an Industry-funded Buyback:** NMFS specified \$200,000 for DMF to partner with industry in developing a viable permit buyback program. DMF proposes to form an Industry Steering Committee that will work with a hired contractor to develop a buyback proposal for a referendum vote. Funds will go towards the contract hire and other administrative costs.
2. **Aid to Commercial Groundfishery:** DMF proposes to utilize the remaining \$6.7-million to support the continued viability of the commercial groundfish fishery in Massachusetts. A number of strategies may be employed to ensure the most sustainable future possible, including:

A. Commercial Groundfish Permit Holders ~ \$6,000,000

- i. **Direct aid to federal limited access multispecies permit holders** who met similar, but more restrictive, criteria as in Bin 1 (i.e., a higher poundage filter). After discussion with the Bin 3 Disaster Aid Working Group, DMF proposes the following qualifying criteria:
 - landed at least 20,000-lbs. of groundfish during qualifying period;
 - qualifying period equal to Fishing Years (FY) 2013-2014; and
 - may need to meet criteria in all years, not just one year during period.
- ii. **At-Sea Monitoring (ASM) costs:** the Working Group did not recommend disaster-aid funding for ASM although there was some support for that use due to the impending crisis of industry having to pay for its own AMS this FY2015 starting as early as August. DMF seeks public comment on this possible funding strategy.
- iii. **Increased Fishing Opportunities:** fishermen have asked DMF to assist their efforts to acquire federal experimental fishing permits (EFPs) as part of their attempts to use small-mesh nets in some areas or better define where spawning fish are found (or not found). EFPs require at-sea sampling/monitoring. Some funds could be reserved for this purpose potentially providing fishermen with well-justified, additional fishing opportunities.

B. Industry Based Survey (IBS) ~ \$450,000.

Given the poor stock status of Gulf of Maine (GOM) cod, low catch limits and many fishermen's claims that the status is better than currently assessed, DMF is proposing a new GOM cod IBS. Relying on fishermen's guidance with additional input from NMFS and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC), DMF proposes a three-year study in the southwestern portion of the GOM where remnants of the GOM cod stock currently reside. The IBS will:

- i. provide another source of resource data and information for use in assessments;
- ii. test fishermen's hypothesis about GOM cod redistributing offshore in response to warming waters;
- iii. demonstrate relevance and importance of a GOM cod IBS for improving our understanding of the distribution of cod at times and in areas when the NEFSC surveys are not performed;
- iv. acquire additional info/data on other groundfish stocks in the survey area; and
- v. determine the IBS's potential for providing indices of abundance.

C. Legal Aid ~ \$50,000

DMF proposes funding for subsidized or no-cost legal assistance to fishermen, crew members and the Commonwealth's primary groundfishing communities of New Bedford and Gloucester. Business planning could help fishing operations navigate regulatory complexity to diversify and innovate fishing practices. Legal aid also can assist communities engage in fisheries sustainability planning, help address questions of fishery access in those communities and ultimately help boost the lost resiliency of many Massachusetts fishing communities.