



THE GENERAL COURT OF MASSACHUSETTS
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053

May 6, 2022

The Honorable Charles Baker, Governor
State House – Room 280
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Scallop Fishery Leasing Proposals

Dear Governor Baker:

We are writing to you as a group of New Bedford area state legislators regarding the vibrant and successful scallop fishery based in the Port of New Bedford.

As you know, the federal New England Fishery Management Council is currently engaged in a preliminary 'listening tour' on whether to advance a regulatory proposal called "leasing" which has the potential to dramatically change the future of the Massachusetts scallop industry in ways we think are detrimental to the fishery and the SouthCoast. As described briefly below, we urge you to use caution through the participation of the Commonwealth's designated member of the federal fishery council (a designee participates from the Division of Marine Fisheries). While the listening tour is occurring right now with upcoming public sessions in New Bedford, there will likely be a full Fishery Management Council vote this fall as to whether to advance the idea of permit leasing to the full blown 'amendment process'.

Permit leasing is a potential practice where scallop boats, rather than go out to sea to fish, would lease out their fishing days to another vessel for use at sea. The businesses known to push this idea tend to be vertically integrated (often with ownership outside of Massachusetts) within the fishing industry; these business groups tend to own the vessels, the shoreside docking facilities and also own the processing businesses who then market seafood for sale. Those businesses are quite different from that portion of the New Bedford based scallop fleet

which consists of local family businesses, whether engaged directly in fishing or support areas like supplying gear, welding, repairs, provisions, etc.

We do not think that pushing the leasing proposal to the 'amendment process' is in the state's or the fishery's best interest while other critical issues important to the scallop industry are in need of Management Council attention. The Management Council is already in need of using its limited time and staff resources on the questions of protecting small scallops, promoting scallop recruitment in the mid-Atlantic, and reducing flatfish bycatch. Licensing would only, in our view, be a distraction from the needed work of the Council on these direct ocean-based issues affecting the size of the harvest and the health of the Atlantic Scallop biomass.

In addition, the Council should be focusing on the reopening of the prime fishing area known as the Northern Edge; this is a must in our view as it will open prime areas for commercial access to scalloping and bring certain economic benefit to our port in the tens of millions of dollars. These fishery issues (as opposed to leasing) will benefit ALL those who participate in the scallop fishery, while 'leasing' is of limited benefit to some, and a threat to the future of the smaller independent fleet which also involves a way of life and supports hundreds of families on the SouthCoast.

Specifically, 'leasing' proposals, which have come up for consideration and been rejected over many years by the Management Council, would change the way the fishery functions, and likely concentrate ownership in a few corporate and investor entities by allowing the grouping of individual fishing permits so that one vessel could fish in the name of many permits. In the end, we believe the result of this dramatic change in the shore-side fishery, will leave our port less diverse, with fewer participants; that would mean fewer participants not only in the boats and crews themselves, but in the many support businesses of maintenance, supply and repair which are the hallmark of the Port of New Bedford. Our port attracts vessels and their business activities to Massachusetts from Maine all the way south to North Carolina because there are so many independent support businesses available in the harbor.

Make no mistake, this is the kind of change in practice akin to the so-called 'sector management' plans adopted in New England a decade ago. It is now generally acknowledged that sector management reduced the groundfish fleet in our port to a few owners who regrettably used their essential control over the fishery to manipulate prices and reduce that fleet to a fraction of what it had been. Because such changes cannot be reversed once ownership and businesses change, this is not the kind of issue which can be 'tried out' to see how it works. Failure here, would mean a permanent change in our port, which as you know, has remained the Number One fishing port in the country for many years.

Our successful scallop fishery in New Bedford is no accident. Careful management has resulted in a healthy fishery and biomass supporting thousands and bringing several hundred million dollars to the local and state economy every year. A risky change in practice, on behalf of only some in the fleet, is not in the broader interest which we look to you for support.

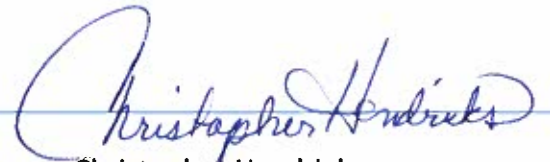
Thank you for your consideration.



William M. Straus
State Representative
Mattapoisett -10th Bristol



Paul Schmid
State Representative
Westport - 8th Bristol



Christopher Hendricks
State Representative
New Bedford - 11th Bristol



Antonio F. Cabral
State Representative
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Christopher Markey
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