



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

State House, Room 224
Providence, Rhode Island 02903
401-222-2080

Lincoln D. Chafee
Governor

August 24, 2012

The Honorable Rebecca Blank, Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Acting Secretary Blank:

On behalf of the hard-working men and women associated with Rhode Island's commercial fishing industry, I respectfully request that you issue a disaster declaration for the New England groundfish fishery, pursuant to Section 312 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

As you know, the New England groundfish fishery has been subject to major constraints over the past several years, as the New England Fishery Management Council has sought to curb overfishing and rebuild the depleted fish stocks. The constraints – in the form of restrictive quotas – have taken a toll financially on many commercial fishing businesses that rely upon groundfish as a source of income. Now, at a time when many hoped that the sacrifices endured during the rebuilding period would pay off in the form of stabilized catch limits, we find that several of the most important stocks are in surprisingly bad shape, prompting the need for draconian cuts in 2013. Given the magnitude of the cuts – up to 73 percent – it is evident that the impacts on the industry are going to be profound.

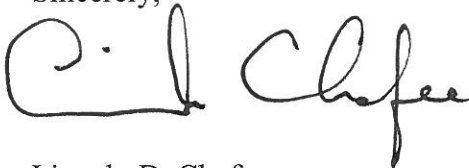
The fishermen participating in the fishery have been complying with the regulations, and there is every reason to believe that they will continue doing so. But such compliance is increasingly resulting in significant financial hardships, which many are unable to bear. It therefore stands to reason that those destined to suffer the most under the looming cuts should be afforded some measure of financial relief.

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The Rhode Island commercial fishery is diverse, and less dependent on groundfish than other New England states. But groundfish are certainly a significant component of our fishery. There are 108 RI-based vessels holding federal groundfish permits, fifty-one of which are enrolled in one of six approved groundfish sectors. In 2011, Rhode Island fishermen landed 1.3 million pounds of groundfish, with a dockside value approaching \$2 million, in Rhode Island. Those landings are far less than amounts landed in prior years. The projected cuts for 2013 will not only directly impact the many Rhode Island fishermen who target groundfish, but also indirectly impact those participating in other fisheries, which are likely to come under increased pressure as groundfishermen shift their effort to other species.

I am concerned that the economic fallout may push a number of businesses past the brink. We cannot withstand such losses. I therefore call upon you to exercise your authority to declare a disaster, prompting Congress to provide emergency financial relief for those fishermen hardest hit by the drastic cuts to groundfish quotas slated for 2013.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. D. Chafee". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "L" and "D".

Lincoln D. Chafee
Governor