



April 12, 2010

Ms. Patricia Kurkul, Regional Administrator
NMFS - Northeast Regional Office
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

RE: Science and the success of sectors in New England

Dear Ms. Kurkul:

On the eve of the transition of most of the ground-fishery to sectors in New England, I am writing about a matter that is not new but one which takes on renewed urgency for the successful transition to a promising new system of management. Reducing the time between fisheries data collection and the use of data must be given a very high priority. This is essential for adhering to catch limits. It is also critical for programs that will help to reduce bycatch and discarding, as well as for high-quality assessments of current stock status. As those who have embraced sectors face a new way of doing business and the associated costs and risks, every effort must be made to use the most current data available. This is not a simple matter but it is a very important one as I am sure you realize.

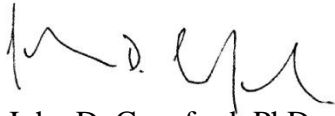
Due to the multi-species nature of the ground-fisheries, newly-formed sectors will find themselves limited by the degree of selectivity of their gear and the estimated status of the weakest stocks they encounter. As we work to improve the data on stock status, we must also work to ensure that the most current data are integrated into management as quickly as they can be. In cases where the condition of a weak stock is improving, this will improve access to multiple stocks based on the most current stock status for the limiting stock. In cases where stocks are showing downward trends, it will allow appropriate precautionary actions.

In the US Eastern Bering Sea Pollock Fishery (*Theragra chalcogramma*), we note that data only months old are used to adjust assessments and management.¹ This is a standard that should be emulated here in New England for all our stocks. The status of our own Pollock (*Pollachius virens*) stands to severely limit sectors since it has been weak. However, over the past year stock scientists have been hard at work assembling new data and running improved assessment models. The results of this most recent assessment should be used to inform management this year (2010) instead of delaying until next year, if possible. If the best available science supports it, the catch limits for sectors should be adjusted to relieve the already substantial challenges faced by sectors during this first year of their operation.

¹ Morell V (2009) Can science keep Alaska's Bering Sea Pollock fishery healthy? *Science* **326**: 1340-41

As challenging as the transition to sector management is, with its commitment to Annual Catch Limits and better catch monitoring, it holds great promise for New England. We acknowledge the tremendous effort NMFS has put into this transition so far, and support further efforts to improve data acquisition and to speed the integration of new science into management.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John D. Crawford". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "C".

John D. Crawford, PhD
Science and Policy Manager

cc: Paul Howard, Executive Director, New England Fisheries Management Council
Dr. Nancy B. Thompson, Science Director, Northeast Fisheries Science Center
Eric C. Schwaab, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries