



## Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **HOOK ASSOCIATION PETITIONS U.S. SECRETARY OF COMMERCE FOR EMERGENCY ACTION**

*Time has run out on bogged-down effort to implement new monitoring requirements  
for midwater herring trawlers in groundfish closed areas*

**NORTH CHATHAM, MA:** The Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association petitioned U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke on Thursday to issue an Emergency Rule requiring stricter monitoring requirements for industrial trawlers targeting Atlantic herring in a Georges Bank area closed to groundfishing. Though the National Marine Fishery Service (NMFS) published a proposed rule on the matter today, there is not enough time for the rule to be implemented before the so-called midwater trawl herring fleet is likely to start fishing in the closed area.

Herring trawlers, the region's most efficient and potentially destructive fishing fleet, are ships that drag a large net between two boats, often within feet of the seafloor. Without strict controls, this type of trawling threatens healthy oceans by locally depleting sea herring and unintentionally catching other species such as river herring, cod, striped bass, whiting, dogfish, seals, whales and porpoises.

"The National Marine Fisheries Service's action on Friday was simply too late," said Tom Rudolph, manager of the Hook Association's Herring Campaign. "These herring trawlers have already been fishing on Georges Bank where groundfish bycatch occurs, and without Emergency Action by Secretary Locke, we will not have the requirements requested by the New England Fishery Management Council last April in time to assure that their trips to Closed Area I receive the extra monitoring everyone agrees is needed.

"We're asking Secretary Locke to do what should have been done months ago, and issue an Emergency Rule to get this extra monitoring in place now or else we won't get any new information until fall 2010."

In April, the Council requested that NMFS require these herring trawlers to have 100% of fishing effort monitored and to prohibit the dumping of unsampled catch. That decision came after the National Marine Fisheries Service found that in October 2008, at least two herring vessels were documented in the closed area with haddock bycatch greater than one percent, violating a groundfish bycatch limit set for the closed area.

More than a dozen Cape Cod fishermen signed the petition to Secretary Locke. Local fishermen have a huge stake in the outcome - the 2008 incident saw thousands of pounds of commercially valuable groundfish sold as lobster bait at a time when local fishermen are struggling to keep their businesses afloat. And, local fishermen were only allowed to fish for groundfish in the closed area using special gear after meeting rigorous standards, including sailing nearly 150 experimental trips with 100 percent observer coverage totaling over \$500,000 in expenses. The herring fleet will not be responsible for paying for the increased observer coverage requested by NEFMC.

"Absent emergency action on this, these herring boats are going to get a pass this year in Closed Area I, in the form of yet another year of unpredictable and inconsistent observer coverage and the freedom to just dump the dirtiest haddock tows even when there is an observer aboard," said Peter Taylor, a Chatham groundfisherman.

Greg Walinski, a Harwich longliner, also had serious concerns:

"These big boats make big mistakes, and we can't afford even a little mistake in these closed areas," he said. "My own anecdotal experience is that I've seen them negatively affect other fisheries multiple times- we need better information."

"Additionally, many groundfishermen have sacrificed for years so cod and other groundfish populations could rebuild, including giving up access to these closed areas. In fact, NMFS has dragged its feet on this issue for so long that groundfishermen from Maine have sued over it and the whole question of whether these herring boats should be in those areas at all is before a Federal judge right now."

**Sources:**

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**Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association**

The Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association is a nationally recognized, non-profit organization that aligns protection of the oceans with the economic interests of our historic fishing community. We support stewardship of coastal ecosystems through education, research, and policy programs. Started in 1991 by the local fishing fleet, the Hook Association is now the leading community fisheries organization in the region. We are taking action now to make sure there are fish for future generations.

~ Protecting a Resource, a Tradition, and a Way of Life ~

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