Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association

PRESS RELEASE: JANUARY 22, 2009 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CAPE COD FISHERMEN REACT TO FINDINGS OF NOAA ENFORCEMENT PROBLEMS

Report released Thursday by Commerce Department's Inspector General highlights problems with NOAA's enforcement of fishing rules- particularly in Northeast Region

NORTH CHATHAM, MA: The Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association expressed disappointment today with the findings of the recently published Inspector General's report on the practices of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Fisheries Law Enforcement. The federal inquiry, which was undertaken after continuous complaints on the part of the fishing industry, found that the enforcement of complicated fisheries regulations was too often arbitrary and that fundamental reform is needed, especially in the Northeast.

"No one in the fishery is surprised by this at all- we've all known it, lived it for years," said Harwich commercial fisherman Bob Keese. "The fishermen have always been treated like they're guilty until proven innocent. It's just not right."

Sue Nickerson, Executive Director of the Hook Association, made the following statement:

"We all agree that compliance to fisheries regulations is critical to strong and healthy fisheries. But unless enforcement becomes more even-handed and transparent, there will only be continued mistrust within our industry. This report is an important first step in this process, and I think NOAA should get credit for that. But it's just a first step. Whether NOAA follows through and makes the recommended changes is the real question. We're committed to seeing that it happens."

In the short term, the Inspector General will continue to investigate dozens of individual complaints of excessive fines, unfair treatment and abuses of authority by NOAA enforcement officers. More importantly, NOAA must also implement immediate and far-reaching changes to existing enforcement policies. The Hook Association looks forward to continuing to work with NOAA and to advocate for these much-needed changes on behalf of local fishermen.

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