

**Senator John F. Kerry
Opening Statement**

“Massachusetts Fishery Management Plans”
U.S. Senate
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
October 3, 2011
Boston, MA

I'd like to welcome everyone to this important hearing to review how the Massachusetts fishing industry is faring after a year under the catch share fisheries management plan. I want this hearing to consider the social and economic impacts of federal regulations and to discuss how to make improvements not only in outcomes for fishermen but also in their relationship with the federal government. I want to thank NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco for taking the time out of her busy schedule to be here today. I would like to welcome the other witnesses appearing today and the Members of our Massachusetts Congressional delegation.

Finally, I would like to give a special welcome to Senator Mark Begich from Alaska who is the Chairman of the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries and Coast Guard. For decades, Massachusetts and Alaska have had a tradition of working together to help our fishermen. Eleven years ago, the late Senator Ted Stevens joined me at a hearing similar to this one. I look forward to working with Chairman Begich to continue this tradition in the future.

Fishing is a critical part of Massachusetts; it's central to our culture and our economy. Gloucester and New Bedford are two of the largest ports in the nation for landing fish – and the commercial fishing industry supports over 77,000 jobs in Massachusetts. Unfortunately, too many of our fishermen and local businesses are facing increasing difficulty just staying in business. Jim Keding is like any other commercial fisherman in Massachusetts. He understands the rules and tries to live by them. I think we can all agree that federal regulations should never get in the way of someone who is simply practicing his trade and providing for his family. Unfortunately, recent changes in federal regulations have hurt his fishing allocation and made it much more difficult for Mr. Keding to make a living doing what he loves. As a result, Jim has had to sell both his boat and his home. Now he is forced to rent another boat just to make ends meet. This is unacceptable. It must change.

It highlights the deep sense of disappointment and mistrust our fishermen feel toward how they are treated by federal regulators on the enforcement, science and research funding issues that determine their future.

That's why today I am announcing that I intend to introduce the Fishery Research and Conservation Investment Act to focus federal funding under the Kennedy-Saltonstall Act on identifying the critical research, conservation and management needs in each fishery region. My legislation would make sure that these federal funds go where they were originally intended -- to

address the critical problems facing Massachusetts fishermen. Under this legislation, each fishery region will develop a five-year fishery investment plan that specifically addresses their needs, with money from the Kennedy-Saltonstall fund being used to implement those plans. Because our fishermen will be involved in developing these plans, we will be able to better tailor solutions to solve the problems facing Massachusetts and New England.

In 2009, I worked with Senator Kennedy to confront the Department of Commerce and requested an investigation of potential abuses and intimidation of our fishermen. Dr. Lubchenco, even though you had just taken office and the vast majority of abuses took place in the past administration, you took our request seriously and initiated a Department of Commerce Inspector General report. I know that an easy thing to do in a new job but that report that has helped to stop the abuse, the intimidation and the Department of Commerce has returned more than \$600,000 in unnecessary fines to our fishermen.

There are examples of federal assistance that works. In 2008, I successfully obtained disaster funding for Massachusetts that has been used to help the Fishing Partnership Health Plan in Massachusetts that helped reduced the number of fishermen without health insurance from 43 percent to just 13 percent. I was pleased to include a provision in the new health care law to increase community outreach to further reduce the number of fishermen without health care.

However, a lot more needs to be done to make sure Massachusetts fishermen are treated fairly by federal regulators.

First, I strongly believe that the Department of Commerce should provide a disaster declaration for Massachusetts due to the financial effects of the catch share program on small boat fishermen in our state. I believe we have provided NOAA and the Department of Commerce with enough evidence for to make this determination.

Second, I am concerned for our small boat fishermen about an increased concentration of ground fish gross revenues among top earning vessels. In 2010, approximately 80 percent of the gross revenues resulted from landings from only 20 percent of active vessels. This clearly threatens the future of small boat fishing in Massachusetts, which has been a way of life for generations of our families. Well, I want you to know that their way of life will not end on my watch.

Third, I have previously requested that NOAA and the Council allow the appropriate fishing sectors to carry over more additional unused quota under Amendment 16. Adding a small increase in allocations of fishing stocks to this year's assigned quota would be an important step forward. There are a number of other issues affecting our fishermen we need to discuss today.

I hope this hearing will help make it clear how federal agencies are impacting our local economies – and what needs to be done to make sure our state's fishermen stay in business and prosper. It's been an uphill fight for way too many years, but I will continue to work to make sure our fishermen are treated fairly and we continue to build a sustainable fishery for future generations.

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