Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

November 28, 2011

The Honorable John Bryson, Secretary
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Bryson:

On November 21, 2011, Maine's Governor Paul LePage formally requested that you declare a fisheries failure for the Northeast multispecies groundfishery in the state of Maine under section 312(a)(1)(B) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick sent a similar letter to you on November 15, 2011. We write to express our support for Governor LePage's request for a fishery failure declaration and to confirm our continued commitment to achieving long-term ecological and economic stability for this fishery.

As you are aware, the 2007 reauthorization of Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act required the implementation of Annual Catch Limits and Accountability Measures. These measures, combined with the rebuilding timelines mandated by the Act, have exponentially increased the complexity of managing a multi-stock complex such as the New England multispecies groundfish fishery. Catch limits in 2010 required New England groundfishermen to maximize the value of every pound landed, and their ability to do so successfully hinged on how quickly they were able to adjust their harvest strategy to be compatible with the new sector management system. Certainly, the learning curve has been steep as fishermen learned to target plentiful stocks while avoiding the so-called "choke species."

The challenges of operating efficiently within this new management system are not unique to any one state. They are felt in harbors across the region, including those in Maine, from the small boat fleet Downeast to the historic groundfish hub of Portland. From 2009 to 2010, there was a 33 percent reduction in the number of vessels home-ported in Maine that received revenue from at least one groundfish trip. Many Maine fishermen see potential in the sector management system, though acknowledge that it comes with additional administrative costs. In the near future, the industry will also have to absorb the cost of catch monitoring. While revenues appear to have increased, the costs of operating under sector management have also risen dramatically, far exceeding any increased revenues at the dock and resulting in a net loss for many fishermen.

Maine's fishermen are committed to rebuilding the state's iconic groundfish fishery, and continue to work tirelessly to implement the sector management system for the benefit of the resource as well as our coastal economy. Their commitment to finding durable, long-term solutions to the management challenges of this fishery should not exclude them from any efforts made by the Department of Commerce or Congress to mitigate the burden of this transition. We

stand ready to work with you to respond to this request for the benefit and economic viability of all New England groundfish fishermen.

Sincerely,

Olympia J. Snowe

Susan M. Collins

Michael H. Michaud

Chellie Pingree