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

Dear Secretary Bryson:

Last November, Governor Paul LePage sent a letter requesting that you declare the Northeast multispecies fishery a failure under Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. To date, there has been no response to that request. I appreciated that development of 2012 Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) for Gulf of Maine cod were a priority this year, and thank you and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for taking interim action to grant a year's reprieve to many of the New England fishermen who depend on Gulf of Maine cod for their livelihoods.

Regrettably, the regulatory pressures on our historic groundfishery continue to multiply, threatening its ability to survive. As you know, the New England Fishery Management Council met this week in Mystic, Connecticut. During the Groundfish Committee report, at the request of industry leaders, the Council considered several motions to address a dramatic decrease in the ACL for Georges Bank yellowtail flounder that will have profound implications for the offshore fleet. In addition, consequence closures for harbor porpoise and the recent listing of Atlantic sturgeon will further restrict the already struggling inshore fleet. Finally, stock assessment updates will further ratchet down catch in Fishing Year 2013, not only for Gulf of Maine cod but also for other key target species such as Georges Bank cod, Gulf of Maine haddock and Cape Cod/Gulf of Maine yellowtail flounder.

New England's hardworking fishermen can't wait any longer. A formal declaration of fishery failure will provide Congress with the strong base needed to pursue further measures that can give a much-needed relief valve to this struggling industry. I urge you to respond to this request as soon as possible, and remain committed to working with you to ensure the long-term survival and viability of New England's groundfishery.

Sincerely,

OLYMPIA J. SNOWE
United States Senator

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