

June 9, 2009

Dear Council Chairs and Executive Directors:

Thank you for all the work you do in managing our fisheries resources. As you know, the new Administration has set as one of its goals to improve the management of fisheries by better aligning the interests of the Agency with fishermen. Three weeks ago at the Council Coordinating Committee (CCC) meeting in Boston, NOAA Administrator Dr. Jane Lubchenco announced the creation of a Catch Shares Task Force. The Task Force will help NOAA to facilitate the consideration and adoption of catch shares where appropriate as a management strategy in Regional Council and Secretarial fisheries management plans. Dr. Lubchenco has asked me to lead this Task Force, and submit findings and recommendations to her no later than August 1, 2009. Five charges for the Task Force are spelled out below.

Dr. Lubchenco and I understand that there are no one size fits all solutions, and we are committed to making sure we pursue this priority in the right way. We need you as partners to ensure we have the proper ingredients for success. I am writing to request your support in the following four areas:

1. Agenda time at upcoming Council meetings

Each of your Councils will be meeting over the coming weeks. The Task Force has a short window of time to complete its task. It is important to initiate quickly a discussion with each Council on what impediments are in the way of the Councils to fuller consideration or implementation of catch shares (i.e., funding, policy, legal, infrastructure issues - need specifics), and what the Councils and NOAA should do about it. For Councils with catch shares experience, we also want to identify the major lessons you learned, and to identify best practices to craft a national catch shares policy. Efforts are already underway to schedule a short amount of time for one of our Task Force members to discuss these issues at your upcoming Council meeting. I appreciate your support for our request and forbearance for the short notice.

2. Council representation on the Task Force

The Task Force will look at the issues surrounding the implementation of catch shares and provide the NOAA Administrator with recommendations addressing them in federally managed fisheries. Based on feedback and suggestions at the CCC meeting, the Task Force will be comprised of a geographically balanced mix of senior NOAA and Council leaders (members or Executive Directors). We want to announce the Task Force members as soon as possible.

I would like your help in determining the members of the Task Force. Please provide to me by Monday, June 15th a nominee from each Council, from which Dr. Lubchenco will choose three. The nominees from within NMFS are also currently being vetted. A final selection of participants will be made from among all the suggestions to obtain an optimal mix of catch shares expertise, experience and geographic representation.

3. Catch Share Working Group

As a third element of moving forward, NOAA proposes reconstitution of the Council/NOAA Limited Access Privilege Program Steering Committee. That 2006 group successfully steered the creation of the NOAA Technical Memorandum “Design and use of Limited Access Privilege Programs.” The reconstituted group would be a source of expert advice to support the Task Force in the short term, and to help move catch shares programs forward – much like a consulting team – in the long term. There are a great many NOAA and Council staff who are catch shares experts that we can draw upon, and I am requesting each NMFS Office and Council to identify one of them to serve on the Working Group. The Group would assist the Task Force and various Councils as they work through consideration of these programs and respond to specific questions identified by Councils or NOAA. A Terms of Reference for this in-house consultation group will be one of their first orders of business. Please provide your Council staff nominee by Monday, June 22nd.

4. CCC Catch Shares Subcommittee

Since the Task Force is by design only a short-term proposition (reporting its findings and recommendations by August 1st), NOAA is also requesting the CCC to consider establishing a standing *Catch Shares Subcommittee* that NOAA would work with on an ongoing basis. This would serve as our venue to ensure continuity of communication, planning and performance monitoring/follow up action by NOAA and Councils. We hope that you could establish this subcommittee by Monday, June 29th.

This effort to implement catch shares will require a great deal of work within NMFS as well as in the Councils. I am pleased that Dr. Mark Holliday, Director of Policy for NOAA’s Fisheries Service, will serve as the Executive Director of the Catch Shares Task Force and the Catch Shares Working Group. If you have any questions, suggestions or concerns please feel free to contact me but please also copy him. In response to my above requests, please submit to Mark the nominations to serve on the Task Force, as well as the names of individual Council catch share experts who are willing and able to serve on the Catch Shares Working Group.

I look forward to working with all of you and believe this is a great opportunity to help advance our shared stewardship responsibilities. Thanks very much in advance for your support and assistance with this effort. I hope that together we will put many of our struggling fisheries on the path to sustainability and profitability

Very truly yours,

Monica Medina
Senior Advisor to the Administrator

Catch Shares Task Force Objectives

1. To develop a new NOAA policy on catch shares that ensures that catch shares are fully considered when Councils take up fishery management plan amendments.
2. To make sure that Councils who want to move forward with catch shares have the technical and administrative support to move quickly to design a catch share system while empowering local fishermen to be part of the process.
3. To make sure that catch share designs achieve the best possible environmental and economic performance supporting healthy ecosystems, meeting annual catch limits, reducing bycatch and habitat damage and enhancing economic performance.
4. To consider whether any organizational changes are needed within NOAA to provide the best possible communication and support.
5. To provide advice to the Under Secretary on how to allocate resources to the Councils to support this work, and how to create milestones so that we can evaluate our progress.