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COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND COMMERCE

COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

May 10, 2010

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Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D.
Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Dr. Lubchenco:

I commend your leadership in innovating fishery management tools that support healthy fisheries and economies in coastal communities, including well designed catch share programs. Catch shares may prove to address some of the economic and environmental problems facing our Nation's fisheries and fishing families.

I believe catch share management is not a simple "silver bullet" solution. Catch shares can have many benefits, including bringing harvesting capacity into alignment with resource availability, helping fishers avoid bycatch of overfished species, and increasing the quality and value of their harvest. However, catch shares can also have drawbacks. If the catch share is designed improperly, it could result in fleet consolidation that makes it difficult for small boat owner-operators to enter or remain in the fishery, change fishing and landing patterns, and distribution of fishery revenues that disrupt the economies of fishing communities.

I firmly believe that in developing catch share programs, we must involve coastal communities and fishery stakeholders in the design, with the goal of preventing or mitigating these undesirable side effects, while capturing the potential benefits that catch shares may offer to a particular region.

Today, I am writing to request that NOAA Fisheries participate in and support a unique project that could contribute substantially to the economic and social health of fishing communities in my congressional district, and could provide a model for structuring catch share systems to directly benefit fishing communities.

As you know, my district is home to the Central Coast Groundfish Project (CCGP), an innovative partnership among fishers, community representatives, The Nature Conservancy and others. This partnership is working to maximize the local economic, social and environmental benefits of the soon-to-be implemented West Coast groundfish trawl Individual Quota (IQ) program. Their work has focused on improving the economic and environmental performance of the fishery through transitioning traditional trawl fishing to more selective gear types as well as beginning to develop a local Community Fishing Association (CFA). This CFA would act as a collective fishing arrangement that could hold and manage quota share for local fishers and ensure that the Central Coast communities do not lose their traditional fishing access to local groundfish resources as the result of consolidation or migration of quota under the new IFQ program.

The Pacific Fishing Management Council and the National Marine Fisheries Service are striving mightily to implement catch shares in the Pacific Coast groundfish fishery by January 1, 2011. Under the program rules, the Central Coast quota will be initially allocated to TNC, and will remain intact and non-transferable for the first two years of the program. After the two year moratorium on transfer expires, TNC would like to transfer the quota it receives to a Central Coast CFA, to maintain CCGP continuity. However, unless the program is modified to allow CFAs to hold quota in excess of the program's IFQ accumulation limits, the CFA may be limited to holding only up to the amount of quota intended to be the maximum for an individual, not a collective of fishers working together. This will impede a CFA's ability to anchor enough quota in a small scale fishing community to keep it economically viable. For TNC, the absence of a CFA term in the program will mean that it will be forced to divest of approximately two-thirds of the quota it receives, to be transferred to two or more unrelated parties, or it would be revoked and redistributed among the remainder of the shoreside trawl fleet. Either of those results would have a significant adverse impact on the Central Coast fishing communities and the model and lessons this project could provide for the Pacific Coast groundfish IQ program and other new catch share programs.

The Pacific Fishery Management Council has tentatively scheduled CFA scoping for September, 2010, as part of a trawl IQ program trailing amendment. However, to prevent the CCGP from being disrupted, a CFA alternative must be developed, adopted and fully implemented on an expedited basis, and in any event not later than January 1, 2013, the date on which the IQ program moratorium on quota transfer expires.

Given the demand placed on their staffs by IQ program implementation and the obligation to adopt Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) and Accountability Measures (AMs) for the fisheries under their jurisdiction, I believe that it will be difficult for the Pacific Council and NMFS Northwest Region to move forward expeditiously with CFA implementation unless they receive additional support from NOAA. That support should include additional staff to assist the Council and the NMFS Northwest Region developing and analyzing CFA alternatives, and additional staff to assist the NMFS Northwest Region and NOAA General Counsel with tasks such as drafting regulations. I encourage NOAA to make the Central Coast CFA project a priority, and ask that NOAA provide the Pacific Council with the support necessary to have a CFA alternative implemented as soon as possible.

As a separate but related matter, the CCGP and other interests in the industry are encouraging the use of electronic monitoring (video cameras) for hook and line and trap vessels ("fixed gear boats") immediately upon implementation of the program, to avoid significant community impacts that will occur as the smaller boat fleet reacts to the extremely high cost associated with 100% observer coverage. This type of monitoring has proven effective in other similar fisheries and its lower cost is essential for our new fishery model to be economically viable.

Very low quota availability for overfished species, the loss of large processing facilities on the Central Coast, changes in the seafood market, and our interest in improving the environmental performance of the fishery have generated strong fleet-wide interest in transitioning some portion of traditional bottom trawl fishing effort to hook and line and traps. These lower volume/overhead fishing operations allow fish to be harvested in a premium quality condition and fishers to obtain higher value markets. However, IFQ management will require full catch accountability and reporting. If these requirements are met solely through human observer coverage, the costs will be

extremely burdensome, if not prohibitive, for small fixed gear vessels. I am therefore requesting that NOAA make development and implementation of a cost effective electronic monitoring program for fixed gear vessels a top priority item.

Specifically, I request that NOAA initiate that program by providing the funding necessary to restart an experimental electronic monitoring program that the CCGP began two years ago, but had to drop due to cost considerations. Contractors experienced with conducting electronic monitoring experiments estimate that a full year of research including hardware leasing, data analysis and reporting would cost approximately \$200,000. This would be a wise upfront investment for the fishery, facilitating the development of a monitoring program that results in improved data collection and reduced costs for fishers and fishery managers. The development of electronic monitoring for fixed gear fishing can also help us test and prove the use of modern monitoring and reporting technologies into the rest of the fishery. Another exciting technological advancement in the CCGP is an online database, coined "eCatch", which is used to turn catch information—traditionally captured on paper forms—into spatial depictions. Fishers in the project have formed a type of "information-collective," sharing all their catch data so it can be mapped and accessed by all fishers participants by simply logging into their eCatch online account. The collection and spatial assessment of this large stream of information is allowing fishers to work together to avoid overfished species while also more effectively fish for target species. CCGP project managers are now working on the next phase of eCatch – remote entry of catch data directly from the boat to improve data quality, shorten the time it takes to make information accessible, and reduce data management costs. I look forward to updating you on the progress made on eCatch.

The West Coast groundfish trawl fleet's transition to catch shares will provide us with invaluable lessons and models as we work toward our common goal of restoring our marine ecosystems. I look forward to collaborating with you and your staff on this exciting endeavour. In that spirit, I request that you provide me with a written response that identifies the actions NOAA will take to address my requests related to CFA and electronic monitoring program implementation.

Thank you in advance for your prompt response.

Sincerely,



LOIS CAPPS
Member of Congress

cc: Mr. Eric Schwaab, NOAA Assistant Administrator for Fisheries
Mr. Galen Tromble, Chief, Domestic Fisheries Division, NMFS
Mr. David Ortmann, Chair, Pacific Fishery Management Council
Mr. Barry Thom, Acting Regional Administrator, Northwest Region, NMFS