



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

1315 East-West Highway

Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

Agenda Item J.1.c

THE DIRECTOR

Supplemental NMFS Letter

September 2014

**AUG 21 2014**

The Honorable Peter DeFazio  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative DeFazio:

Thank you for your cosigned letter regarding the West Coast Groundfish Trawl Catch Share Program. As you indicated, the program has provided benefits to the groundfish industry and the fisheries resources. We also acknowledge the significant efforts of the Pacific Fishery Management Council and the industry in making this program successful.

In your letter you ask NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to expedite the implementation of trailing amendments within the West Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The Council currently identifies six trawl trailing amendments that have yet to be implemented: 1) rules for chafing gear, 2) observer/catch monitoring rule, 3) quota share/quota pounds—safe harbors for risk pools, 4) allowance for fixed gear and trawl joint registration, 5) at-sea processing of fixed gear sablefish, and 6) moving the opening date of the whiting season. Progress has been made on all of these rules, and we expect that all but one (the safe harbor rule) will be complete prior to the May 15, 2015, whiting season start date. The Council decided in 2013 that implementation of the safe harbor for risk pools trailing action could wait until the five-year catch share program review is conducted (anticipated to start in 2016). In addition, NMFS is working on other rulemaking actions that are important to the industry, including harvest regulations for the 2015–2016 groundfish seasons. NMFS continues to devote significant time and resources to these major efforts in support of the groundfish fishery.

Although neither anticipated nor required in Amendment 20 to the Groundfish FMP, NMFS has been devoting regional resources to provide for the reimbursement of daily observer costs to the trawl fleet since the inception of the Catch Share Program in 2011. NMFS notified the Council in 2010 that this reimbursement would proportionally phase out over a three-year period, with the industry expected to pay observer providers for the at sea and shoreside observing costs beginning in 2014. NMFS was able to extend the reimbursement, at a reduced amount, in 2014. At the end of 2014, NMFS will evaluate whether any reimbursement funds remain and, if so, these could be available to industry next year. However, without additional appropriations, it is likely that any potential reimbursement funds in 2015 will provide a much smaller subsidy, likely less than 25 percent of the daily cost of an observer. NMFS will continue to pay for the training, equipping, debriefing, and data analysis associated with the observer program.

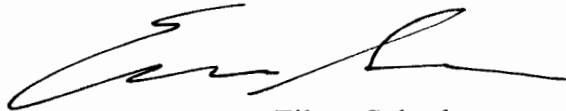
The Council approved the NMFS Cost Recovery Program in September 2011, and NMFS published a final rule implementing it in December 2013. NMFS is committed to running a transparent program and, as part of our commitment, this year we published our first annual



report on the program in March (available online at [http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/publications/fishery\\_management/rawl\\_program/analytical%20docs/cost\\_recovery\\_annual\\_report\\_01.pdf](http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/publications/fishery_management/rawl_program/analytical%20docs/cost_recovery_annual_report_01.pdf)). This annual report included information on how the fee percentage was calculated, program costs, ex-vessel value by sector, and total cost recovery fees collected by NMFS. The report was provided to the Council at its March 2014 meeting. Considering our commitment to transparency, we are open to comments and suggestions for improving the West Coast Groundfish Trawl cost recovery report in future years.

I appreciate your interest in the West Coast Groundfish Trawl Catch Share Program. If you have any questions, please contact Amanda Hallberg Greenwell, Director of NOAA's Office of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, at (202) 482-4981.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eileen Sobeck', written in a cursive style.

Eileen Sobeck  
Assistant Administrator  
for Fisheries