

PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Secretary Mineta
<Address>

Dear Secretary Mineta:

The Pacific Fishery Management Council, by unanimous vote, is sending you the enclosed Groundfish Fishery Strategic Plan.

This plan is not a requirement of Congress or the Administration. Rather, it is the Pacific Council's response to the groundfish fishery crisis accelerating along the entire Pacific coast.

The Pacific Council developed the plan in response to fishery declines, which are significant from both biological and economic perspectives. A transition to a sustainable fishery will only be accomplished over an extended period of time while stocks recover. The economic impacts of crisis and decline have already begun and will only grow in the foreseeable future.

The plan proposes a range of very serious, even radical, actions, within current Council authority, to begin to change the fisheries. This is needed because it is apparent *status quo* management will not solve the problems at hand. In addition, a failure to promote dramatic change, the Council believes, would actually result in a harsher and more chaotic future than is necessary.

While the Council is committed to begin immediate implementation of the plan, help from the Administration and Congress will be essential to long-term success of the West Coast fishing industry. In addition to administrative support from NMFS, there is an urgent need for new financial resources, both to the Pacific Council for implementation processes and the industry for transitional purposes.

Reducing the fishing fleet's overcapacity is the central action relating to solving all other issues. As a matter of public policy, the Pacific Council appropriately favors use of market mechanisms to rein in capacity. However, the Council also recognizes that market tools such as "Individual Transferable Quotas" are presently not available based on Congress's moratorium. This needs to be corrected promptly. Another dimension of the same problem is that while market tools may be preferred, we are doubtful they alone can accomplish the job. Rather, a

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Congressionally funded "buyback" program appears essential to reduce "latent" capacity in particular, and to create the momentum market tools could carry on.

A future sustainable fishery will only exist if the scientific information needed to manage it wisely is in hand. This means both more frequent resource surveys, biological analysis and a meaningful observer program. The costs of such programs must be seen as investments in the future not burdens. For too long we essentially over-exploited and under-invested in the resource. Without an adequate longer term commitment the 1996 goals Congress established in the Magnuson-Stevens Sustainable Fisheries Act will remain out of reach.

<Paragraph on observer program needs?>

Another critical aspect of managing the fishery transition is addressing the social, assistance needs of those displaced and the overcapacity in the processing sector. Clearly, there are predictable and negative consequences in these areas; however, the Council's management authority does not cover these areas. Accordingly, all we can do is earnestly encourage you and Congress to give them your serious attention.

We stand ready to meet with you at your convenience to discuss implementation necessities. Please feel free to contact me or the Executive Director, Dr. Donald McIsaac, at the Pacific Council office.

Sincerely,

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Jim Lone
Chair

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