



U.S. SENATOR MARIA CANTWELL WASHINGTON

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Cantwell Secures Commitment from Obama Administration to Make Groundfish Program ‘a Top Priority’ in Budget

Fisheries administrator tells Cantwell: ‘We will do everything within our power’ to protect crucial program for Washington fishing industry

VIDEO AVAILABLE

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) secured a commitment from the Obama Administration to make the Pacific Coast groundfish trawl catch share program “a top priority” in budgetary decisions. The program is crucial to limiting overfishing, improving safety, and increasing economic stability for Washington state’s West Coast groundfish fishery, part of the state’s \$3.7 billion fishing industry which accounts for more than 70,000 jobs.

At a Senate Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard Subcommittee hearing Tuesday morning, Cantwell pressed National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) administrator Eric Schwaab to ensure that the catch share program has the funding to be implemented. Schwaab committed to making the program ‘a top priority’ of the NMFS. [Watch a video](#) of their discussion.

“I want to ask you, specifically on the record: Can you commit that the West Coast groundfish catch share funding will be a top priority for your agency?” Cantwell asked.

“Senator Cantwell, yes, we can,” Schwaab replied. **“We certainly appreciate the intensive effort in developing that program put forth by the council, put forth by the fishermen of the region. We recognize how important it is to them going forward. It is a top priority for us and we will do everything within our power to see that we meet the commitments that have been made there from the agency.”**

Schwaab also told the Oceans subcommittee that the NMFS had requested the necessary funding for implementation of the Pacific Coast groundfish catch share program in the 2011 and 2012 budgets.

Tens of thousands of Washington jobs depend on the health of the ocean's resources, but overfishing could threaten long-term sustainability and the health of the fishing economy. Fisheries along Washington's coast produced roughly \$3.7 billion in sales impacts and supported 72,000 jobs in 2008, according to the National Marine Fisheries Service.

The West coast groundfish fishery has been working for years to end the race for fish by implementing a catch share system. Implementation of the Pacific Coast groundfish trawl catch share program began in 2011, but Washington state fishermen are worried that promised program support from the NMFS might fall victim to federal government cuts.

The *Seattle Times* praised the catch share program in a December 2010 [editorial](#), saying it would "reduce economic and environmental waste."

"If the new system works, it should remove the economic waste of the 'race for fish,' improve fisheries management and provide fish lovers with a supply of delicious whiting, turbot, sole, Pacific cod and black cod," the *Times* editorial board wrote on December 27.

Cantwell, a member and former chair of the Senate Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard, has long been a lead Senate advocate of programs that protect the health of the ocean's resources and coastal economies. In Washington state, the coastal region supports 162,000 jobs and generates \$9.5 billion in economic activity. Nationwide, the coastal economy supports 3.6 million jobs.

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