

Poll shows public support of fisheries plan

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A public opinion survey of voters in Massachusetts and Maine found that 66 percent of those polled support a new fisheries management plan.

"What we believed and what the poll showed is that there are people who don't live near the water or go commercial fishing that have an interest in the health of fisheries," said Peter Baker, manager of Pew Environment Group's End Overfishing in New England campaign.

The environmental advocacy group sponsored the poll, which examined the public's attitude toward overfishing and Amendment 16, a proposed groundfish management plan that would establish sectors. Under sectors, groups of fishermen would be given a share of the total allowable catch set for each stock and could design their own rules for how to catch that quota.

New England fishery managers will take a final vote on Amendment 16 when they meet in Portland, Maine, from June 22-25.

Pew Environment hired Cambridge-based research and consulting firm City Square Associates Inc. to conduct the poll. The 28-question telephone survey included interviews with 750 members of the public — 375 in each state — who had voted in the 2008 national election.

More than 75 percent of those polled said they were aware of the overfishing problem in New England. Nine out of 10 of those aware of the problem thought it was important to solve it, according to an executive summary of the poll results.

The poll found 66 percent of voters supported Amendment 16 while 20 percent were opposed and 13 percent undecided. Those supporting Amendment 16 were driven most by the desire for future generations to have access to wild fish. Others wanted to see the preservation of New England's seafaring history or reconciliation between conservationists and fishermen.

Forty-four percent of opposed and undecided voters said learning how much fish is thrown overboard due to current management rules made them more supportive of a new fisheries management approach.

A large number of voters from both states said they trusted the government most when it came to accurate information about fisheries management.

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