



State seeks \$21 million in relief for fishing losses

By **Doug Fraser**

dfraser@capecodonline.com

November 16, 2011 2:00 AM

BOSTON — Gov. Deval Patrick has asked U.S. Department of Commerce Secretary John Bryson for \$21 million in disaster assistance for Massachusetts fishermen who suffered losses in 2010 because of strict new regulations.

In his request, Patrick cited three reports, including two released Tuesday, which show that total revenues were down by \$11 million for 12 of the 17 fishing "sectors."

Sector management, also known as catch shares, went into effect in New England in May 2010. It apportions the annual quota of cod, haddock, flounders and other bottom-feeding groundfish among fishermen according to how much they landed over an 11-year period. Fishermen are required to join cooperatives known as sectors, which then draw up fishery management plans that ensure they fish responsibly and catch no more than their combined quota. Fishermen are also allowed to trade, lease or even sell the quota assigned to them.

Patrick expressed concern that the fishery was becoming sharply divided among those who had the capital to buy up quota and go fishing and those who didn't. He pointed to a NOAA report released in October that showed that nearly 60 percent of groundfish revenues were concentrated in less than 10 percent of the vessels.

A similar request for federal assistance last November was rejected, but state officials have been working with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on resubmitting an appeal that includes new economic data.

The new disaster assistance request also included an analysis of one particular cooperative, known as Sector 10, which has 27 fishermen as members in Scituate, Marshfield, Plymouth and Provincetown. That analysis showed that these small-boat fishermen lost \$1.5 million in groundfish revenues in the first year of sector management.

Still, Sector 10 does not include major groundfish ports and two of the largest in the state, Boston and New Bedford, saw increased revenue in the first year of catch shares, and the third largest, Gloucester, broke just about even with the previous year. Total groundfish revenues throughout New England were down just over \$2 million to \$83.3 million in the first year according to the NOAA report released last month.

While some have railed against sector management, others rallied in support of the new system. On Tuesday, approximately one-fifth of those participating in sectors, 107 fishermen representing 153 vessels from Rhode Island to Maine, signed a letter sent to Bryson, other federal fisheries officials and all five New England governors asking them to stay the course. The letter was critical of politicians who were responding to constituents suffering hardship but put many others who were invested in the new system in jeopardy.

"A few voices calling for the overturn of the entire sector system have been amplified in the media," the letter read. "Unfortunately, this has led to a series of increasingly dangerous proposals that truly put the future of our businesses and fisheries at risk."

"Give it time. It will work, and it is working and it is a good system. A lot of fishermen have made substantial investments. To change now would be a disaster," said John Tuttle, a Chatham fisherman with 34 years experience. "I've had six fishing vessels and there is no perfect solution, but this system is working because the other one was a disaster."

State Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Richard Sullivan voiced cautious support for sector management in a telephone interview Tuesday. He saw positive developments in a more open dialogue with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which oversees fishing in federal waters through the New

England Fishery Management Council. He was optimistic that the newly minted commerce secretary would be more responsive to the needs of Massachusetts fishermen.

"We think the catch share system can work," Sullivan said. But he felt everyone needed assurances from NOAA that they would improve their science and be more flexible with fishermen when changes were required.

Copyright © Cape Cod Media Group, a division of Ottaway Newspapers, Inc. All Rights Reserved.