

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

March 17, 2017

Via E-Mail

Mr. John Bullard
Regional Administrator
Greater Atlantic Region Fisheries Office
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

Dear Mr. Bullard:

Thank you for the time you and New England Fishery Management Council staff have recently taken to address concerns about overfishing of Atlantic sea scallops in the Northern Gulf of Maine (NGOM) management area; we appreciate your attention to our constituents who engage in the fishery.

Over the phone on March 14th we were pleased to hear of—and strongly support—the Council's intentions to address the shortcomings of the NGOM management plan with respect to accounting for the activity of boats with limited access (L.A.) permits in the area for the 2018 season and beyond. We remain concerned, however, about the sustainability of the resource and the prospects of those future seasons in the NGOM if too many scallops are harvested this year. Therefore, we are writing to request that you and your staff elaborate on some of the key points that came up during our recent conversation.

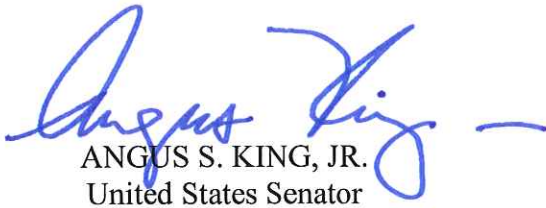
1. What threshold of NGOM landings would constitute overfishing or pose a threat to future economic opportunity in the fishery and what are those numbers based on? The NGOM plan development team recently indicated that 500,000 pounds was the high end of what can sustainably be harvested annually from the entire NGOM area, is that accurate? Would a different number be used to qualify overfishing and if so, what is it?
2. If such a threshold were to be met well before NGOM permit holders hit the 75,000 pound TAC, why, specifically, would it not meet the standards for an emergency action? During the phone call you mentioned that the legal authority did not exist; as you know, some of the concerned parties believe that it does.

3. Why might an emergency action take four to five weeks to facilitate—especially when, as you pointed out, the length of the NGOM season is often closed out within a comparable timeframe?

We are concerned that an emergency action seems to be completely off the table before the consideration of potential justifications. To be sure, we are not attempting to affect a decision that might favor one type of permit over another—the existing diversity in types of permits can and should continue to work but that there needs to be an improvement in accountability so that fishermen pursuing the species in the same area are not unfairly and unproductively pitted against each other, over fears of overfishing, by the way their fishery is managed.

Again, thank you for your ongoing attention to this valuable fishery; we look forward to your responses to the above questions and any other updates that are available.

Sincerely,



ANGUS S. KING, JR.
United States Senator



CHELLIE PINGREE
Member of Congress