

Response to Written Questions Submitted by the Hon. Kelly Ayotte to the Hon. Penny Pritzker

*Question 1.* As you know, the New England Groundfish Fishery has faced significant hardship in recent years. Fishing is a historic and honorable trade that has been in many New Hampshire families for generations and sustains the livelihood of fishing communities across New England. The fishery in my home state of New Hampshire has been forced to near extinction.

Recently, I have heard concerns from fishermen regarding NOAA's At-Sea-Monitoring Program. NOAA officials have told fishermen in New Hampshire that due to budget constraints, in this fishing year, fishermen will be forced to pay for part or all of the monitoring costs. Has NOAA budgeted the correct amount of funding to cover the required observer under its At-Sea-Monitoring Program?

Answer. Amendment 16 for New England Groundfish that established the sector program envisioned that the industry would pay for at-sea monitors after an initial transition period. In the interim, the Administration requested and Congress appropriated observer funds including at-sea monitors in four specific budget lines and the Department has been funding this program. However, in response to a ruling of the U.S. Court of Appeals, NMFS has worked with the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils to adopt and approve a revised Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology Omnibus Amendment, which will greatly limit our discretion in funding the at sea monitoring program.

Our proposed rule implementing this Amendment would require observer funds from these specific budget lines to be used first to meet the requirements of the Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology for the purposes of monitoring bycatch before allocating such resources for additional observer needs including at-sea monitors in the New England ground fishery.

Because we anticipate that appropriated observer funds will be insufficient to meet the requirements of the Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology, we do not anticipate having sufficient funds to continue to cover all of the at-sea costs associated with the At-Sea Monitoring Program for the entire 2015 fishing year. Therefore, the fishing industry would be required to pay for at-sea monitoring coverage beginning partway through the 2015 fishing year, which begins on May 1, 2015, and ends on April 30, 2016.