



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

June 30th, 2025

The Honorable Howard Lutnick
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Lutnick,

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) and its 15-member state fishery management agencies stand ready to play a critical role in this administration's goal of restoring American seafood competitiveness. The recent Executive Order (E.O. 14276) acknowledges that inaccurate and outdated fisheries data, as well as the delayed adoption of modern technology, impose burdens on fishers through costly and inefficient regulations. Due to data limitations and associated uncertainties, fishery managers are sometimes legally obligated to enact non-optimal regulations that lead to negative economic consequences for fishing communities. Stakeholders and managers alike want to avoid this outcome. The East Coast states and the Commission are uniquely positioned to work with the administration to improve data through cooperative fishery research programs in partnership with commercial fishers and recreational fishery data collection program improvements. Witnesses at a recent House Natural Resources Committee hearing titled *Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness* individually identified these as areas for improvement, and the Commission agrees.

The Commission was formed in 1942 by the 15 Atlantic Coastal states to promote cooperative management of fisheries of the Atlantic Coast. The Commission serves as the deliberative body of the states, coordinating the conservation and management of 27 of the coast's most economically and culturally significant fisheries, nine of which are cooperatively managed with our federal partners at the Fishery Management Councils. Supporting our fisheries management process are programs focused on fisheries science, habitat conservation, and law enforcement. Through these programs, the states and our federal partners collectively ensure the sound conservation and management of our shared coastal fishery resources and the resulting benefits to the fishing and non-fishing public. The Commission is funded through federal grants and state dues, with most of our budget dedicated to working with the states on cooperative fisheries management.

We have a long history of conducting highly successful and cost-effective cooperative research programs between commercial and recreational fishery participants, and state agencies to collect and share data that advance science and improve fishery management. The NorthEast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP) has been conducted by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science from Cape Hatteras, NC, to Cape Cod, MA, twice a year since 2006, and is complemented by the Maine-New Hampshire inshore trawl survey which has operated since 2000. These industry-based surveys fill in gaps in the federal survey, collecting abundance, biomass, hydrographic, atmospheric, and other data where NMFS cannot due to NOAA vessel maneuverability or depth limitations. The NorthEast Fishery Science Center pays \$2.6 million per year to completely cover the boat, staff, and

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data processing costs of these surveys. The SouthEast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP) is run on state-owned research vessels from Cape Hatteras, NC, to Cape Canaveral, FL, filling in similar gaps in federal surveys. NOAA spends approximately \$1 million per year on vessels alone to conduct half of the SouthEast Reef Fish Survey, while the states spend less than \$400,000 on vessels for the same coverage.

States often have positive relationships with the local fishing industry because of their history and accessibility. The involvement of industry in research improves and amplifies stakeholder trust in fisheries management decisions. Due to the cost effectiveness, data quality and qualitative benefits, this administration should continue to develop state-based and industry-based survey capacity to achieve the goals of the E.O. The Industry-Based Trawl Survey Pilot Program is a plan developed by the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel with the full support of both the New England and Mid Atlantic Fisheries Management Councils and the Commission to help expand that capacity on the East Coast.

Recreational effort and catch are estimated by NOAA Fisheries' Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), composed of three primary surveys: Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS), Fishing Effort Survey (FES), and For-Hire Survey (FHS). On the Atlantic Coast, APAIS has been conducted by the state agencies through the Commission since 2016. In 2019, the states switched from using paper logbooks to tablets and electronic forms. The electronic forms standardized the question order of the survey, streamlined the input choices for respondents, and allowed staff to receive data immediately. This innovation by the states produced higher-quality data at substantial cost savings. These electronic forms have been shared with the Gulf Coast states and Hawaii at no cost, increasing the value of the investment in state data collection. This serves as just one example of how partnership with the states can improve fisheries management nationwide. As the federal government looks to empower state-run recreational fisheries data collection programs, data must have standards and be comparable between states and across regions. Incomparable data would further contribute to uncertainty in fisheries.

We would be remiss if we did not mention our concern about the proposed cuts in the President's FY26 Budget. Cuts to National Marine Fisheries Service staffing and programs, such as the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act Grants and Species Recovery Grants, jeopardize data quality and state-run management programs. Reduced uncertainty in the data can lead to more consistent regulations and greater economic opportunities. For the public, reduced uncertainty can mean increased investment in commercial and recreational fisheries, more planned fishing trips, the purchase of new vessels and gear, or a host of other ways the public commits to these fisheries. Our states and the Commission are well-positioned to support increased cooperative research and recreational data collection activities if federal funding is sustained. Bolstering these programs would increase the amount of seafood caught in the U.S., reduce the seafood trade deficit, and help unleash American seafood competitiveness. My staff and I look forward to working with you to achieve these goals.

Respectfully,



Robert E. Beal

CC:
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