



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

April 26, 2011

Contact: Monica Allen  
202-379-6693 (cell)

## **Statement on Management and Science Reports from Eric Schwaab, Assistant NOAA Administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service**

Today, we are releasing phase one of an independent assessment of the fishery management system in New England that I requested last year. This review was initiated last fall following a recommendation by John Pappalardo, the chairman of the New England Fishery Management Council. We welcomed the proposal as a timely opportunity to improve important aspects of the fishery management process in the region.

The review conducted by Touchstone Consulting Group and under the leadership of Preston Pate, included interviews with 179 fishermen, other industry participants, local government officials, academic institution partners, members of fishery management councils, and NOAA regional and science center staff. The phase one report offers findings and recommendations based on those interviews.

While noting strengths that include dedicated staff at the Fishery Management Council, NOAA's Northeast Regional Office, and NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center, strong scientific efforts and valuable opportunities on which to build, the report identified numerous challenges impeding further progress. Those challenges formed the basis for a series of phase one recommendations.

We are making progress ending overfishing and rebuilding stocks around the nation. And we are turning a corner in New England as we see important fish stocks rebounding, catch limits being raised for the new fishing year and fishermen taking greater control over their businesses. This management report will help us make improvements to better assist fishermen across the region during this time of economic challenge and transition.

I am announcing actions today that we will take in the short term in response to the report and another report that we're also releasing today. This second report, also requested by NOAA, is a national review of NOAA Fisheries science. It was conducted by the respected senior fisheries scientists, Dr. Michael Sissenwine and Dr. Brian Rothschild.

***Improve collaboration with partners on science, cooperative research with industry and reviews of science programs***

The review was very specific regarding the opportunity to improve science collaboration. While we along with many partner institutions and fishermen across the region continue to do great science work, we can do better. Especially in this budget climate, it is critical that the science conducted by our Northeast Fisheries Science Center and partner research institutions is done in a more collaborative manner and in ways that maximize involvement of fishermen in the findings. We will work and plan together with research and academic institutions and fishermen to make the best use of limited research funding to answer some of the critical questions facing New England fisheries. We will immediately initiate an expedited mid-term review of the 2009 strategic plan for cooperative research in a way that involves all regional cooperating agencies and academic institutions. The results will be incorporated into FY12 research funding prioritization decisions.

***Next, we will work to improve our communications efforts in very specific and immediate ways.***

Several of the report recommendations relate to how we communicate with and provide customer service to the industry and the general public. We are committed to continuing our efforts to improve our communications. Specifically, in the Northeast we will consolidate our communications staff under one program and coordinate them under one communications plan. We will build on recent efforts like the Navigator now found in Commercial Fisheries News to simplify the way we explain the actions we are taking and how they impact industry. We will also build on our efforts to communicate directly with industry through programs like the pilot Fisheries Information Centers, bi-weekly calls with the sector managers, and our new compliance liaison here in New England.

***Clarify roles and responsibilities***

A third consistent concern noted in the review was that the roles of our regional office, science center and council need to be expressed clearly, performed consistently, and coordinated well. This has both short-term and long-term implications. We will immediately update the regional office and science center operating agreement in light of the report recommendations. In addition, through the Northeast Region Coordinating Council (made up of the region's fisheries executives from the New England and Mid-Atlantic councils, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, NOAA's Northeast regional administrator and Northeast fisheries science center director) we will renew our efforts to clarify NOAA and council functions and specific staff roles through new operating agreements. More importantly, subject to additional feedback from the fishery management council and other interested participants, we envision this to be a particular area of focus for phase II of the review.

### ***Improve data management systems***

The management review finds that our data management systems are not integrated appear redundant, and stakeholders are unsure of where to turn for data. Over the years, data collection programs and data management systems have been developed in our Northeast Regional Office and science center as needed. To address this, we will integrate and consolidate our fishery dependent reporting/collection systems and the underlying data management systems in the region. To improve the timeliness and accuracy of fisherman reported data and simplify industry reporting requirements, our regional office and science center have been working with the industry to transition from paper to electronic logbooks. This will speed processing of data, reduce errors in the data and relieve the industry of having to obtain, carry and fill-out paper logbooks. The program will be available initially on a voluntary basis to vessels in multispecies sectors. We are targeting June 2011 availability. While these are immediate steps we will take, some of the recommendations in the reports will require much more thought and analysis. The council will also need time to review the findings and consider next steps. We also want to hear from stakeholders and so we are beginning a 30-day comment period on the management report.

The challenges we face in New England, home of the nation's oldest fishing communities, did not happen overnight. Lasting solutions will take some time. This report notes that progress is being made in a number of areas. It is critical that NOAA partner with the New England Fishery Management Council as we move forward to rebuild fisheries that support fishermen and seafood businesses in diverse, economically vibrant coastal communities.

**For more information on the New England Fishery Management Review (Phase I) and the Science Enterprise report, go to:**

[http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/publicreview/new\\_england\\_phase1/index.htm](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/publicreview/new_england_phase1/index.htm).