

JOINT STATEMENT OF MEMBERS OF THE MASSACHUSETTS
CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION REGARDING
RECENT NEW ENGLAND FISHERIES CLOSURES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MARCH 9, 1979

As members of the Massachusetts delegation, we are deeply concerned about the adverse impact on the New England fishing industry resulting from recent closures of fisheries in the North Atlantic. Acting in accordance with the groundfish management plan adopted by the New England Fisheries Management Council, the National Marine Fisheries Service ordered closures for cod and haddock in the Gulf of Maine and for yellowtail flounder west of 69° longitude effective last February 4. Since that time, fishing vessels have not been able to harvest these stocks.

The New England Council last month requested that NMFS reopen these fisheries to allow at least some level of fishing on these stocks at this time. Recent stock assessments indicate that -- despite increased landings over the past several years -- both the cod and haddock stocks have improved. In light of this information, it appears likely that the New England Council will soon submit amendments to their groundfish management plan which would increase the maximum allowable catch for these species. We hope that these increases will allow for continued fishing of cod and haddock at a reasonable level for the balance of the year.

Furthermore, we believe that it makes no sense to prolong a ban on yellowtail flounder in the area west of 69° at this time of year, when severe winter weather prevents fishermen from traveling further east to areas where yellowtail flounder can still be harvested. Even if it is necessary to ban fishing in locations west of 69°, it would be preferable to close them during the summer months when fishermen can more safely travel long distances to the east, and when other species are more available.

Therefore, we believe that an early opening of these cod, haddock and yellowtail flounder fisheries is both reasonable and necessary. We urge the National Marine Fisheries Service to act immediately on this request in order to restore some measure of faith and trust in the fisheries management process. Further, we believe that NMFS should implement all Council requests as soon as possible unless there is clearly a valid reason to do otherwise.

Although we understand the level of frustration felt by fishermen during this closure, we must again urge fishermen to abide by the Management regulations as long as they remain in effect. We are extremely pleased that, while many fishermen have been vocal in airing their complaints, most have nonetheless continued to act in a responsible manner. We urge, in the strongest possible terms, that the National Marine Fisheries Service recognize this fact and implement the Council's request within the next few days.

Edward M. Kennedy
United States Senator

Paul E. Tsongas
United States Senator

Gerry E. Studds
Member of Congress

Nicholas Mavroules
Member of Congress