



Statement of

Jon Mitchell

Mayor of New Bedford

Chairman, New Bedford Port Authority

Submitted to

New England Fishery Management Council

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Mystic, Connecticut

Thank you Chairman Quinn and Members of the Council for this opportunity to communicate about a matter of ongoing concern to the Port of New Bedford, namely the impact that the closure of Sector 9 of the Northeast Fishery is having on groundfishing operations in the Port.

The NOAA decision has had--and continues to have--troubling economic consequence for the Port of New Bedford and our local economy. It has triggered significant business losses among local companies that provide support services to the commercial fishing fleet, and has meant the loss of livelihood for dozens of local fishing families.

It is important for all parties to keep in mind the numerous New Bedford businesses and families who have played no direct role in the operation of Sector 9, but who now find themselves in severe financial distress as a result of the Sector's closure.

While the significant human cost of the closure cannot be adequately measured, Professor Dan Georgiana of the School of Marine Science and Technology at the University of Massachusetts (SMAST) has used a standard

NOAA economic impact model to estimate the economic damage being done to the Port of New Bedford. His analysis found that the Port suffered roughly \$12 million in economic losses in just the first twenty-five days after the closure went into effect on November 20th of last year.

This week marks the fifth full month of the Sector 9 closure, and the losses continue to mount. If one extrapolates from Professor Georgiana's original analysis, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the Port of New Bedford may now have cumulatively suffered tens of millions of dollars in losses in the last five months.

This figure includes the impacts on harvesting, processing, wholesale and retail market activity, but does not include the cost to the public of unemployment compensation or the impact on businesses that supply vessels or process groundfish.

None of this is to suggest that the one person at the center of the controversy should not be punished severely. Carlos Rafael should be held fully accountable for his actions. I emphasize rather that the Fisheries Service should undertake its rulemaking, as it is statutorily required, with the interests of the Port and its businesses in mind. At a minimum, this means that it should complete the rulemaking "expeditiously"--as NOAA's notice of withdrawal said it would--so that the effected fishermen and businesses can get back to work without further delay.

The Service also noted it had to calculate the amount of "overage" to certain groundfish stocks caused by Rafael's fraud before it completed its rulemaking. Yet the Service has had, for some time now, all the reasonably available information to complete this loss calculation. Again, I urge the Service to complete these calculations and its rule-making with all deliberate speed.

The clock is ticking against New Bedford fishermen and shore-side businesses. A resolution of this matter therefore cannot come soon enough for the Port of New Bedford. Thank you for your consideration.