



Olympia J. Snowe

U.S. Senator, Maine

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 11, 2011

Contact: Ken Lundberg, Communications Director  
202-224-8667

Katie Bruns, Press Secretary  
202-224-1304

## **Snowe Urges Thorough Consideration of Fishing Gear Regulations on Maine's Fishermen**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – U.S. Senator Olympia J. Snowe (R-Maine) is urging the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to thoroughly consider the operational and economic impacts of any new regulations to protect whales from becoming entangled in fishing gear. Senator Snowe, the Ranking Member of the Commerce subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard, says NMFS must account for practical problems associated with gear regulations in Maine's fisheries to ensure any new rules provide for the greatest protection of marine life without unnecessarily burdening Maine's fishermen with costly or ineffective requirements.

Senator Snowe said:

“Regulatory efforts must focus on positive outcomes without placing unnecessary restrictions on Maine's \$300 million lobster fishery. Those whose livelihoods depend on the fishery are most connected to effective management techniques. I welcome NMFS to Maine this week to hear first-hand from our fishermen their concerns and innovative solutions to this difficult problem. I urge the agency to fully analyze the range of options, and avoid a one-size-fits-all regulatory approach. NMFS should instead utilize its co-occurrence model in order to most effectively and safely reduce incidents of gear entanglement off our northeastern coastlines with the least possible impact to the fishing industry.”

**BACKGROUND:** As the former Chair and now Ranking member on the Senate's Commerce Committee subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries and Coast Guard, Senator Snowe has been a longtime champion of commonsense regulations that do not impose unnecessary or needlessly onerous restrictions on Maine's fishermen. The Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP) was implemented in 1997 to reduce incidents of fishing gear entanglement of large whales. From 2005 to 2007, NMFS developed a rule to reduce risk of whale entanglement in groundlines, including a requirement for the use of sinking groundlines in the lobster fishery.

In 2006, Senator Snowe requested a study by the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office (GAO) on those proposed strategies to mitigate entanglement. At a field hearing in Brewer in February 2008, Senator Snowe examined GAO's final report, which concluded that NMFS could not estimate the extent to which entanglement risks would be reduced by the proposed

That is why it is critical that the fishing industry is engaged early to help identify options that will be feasible and safe under working conditions at sea. I expect that the agency will to seek to work more collaboratively with fishermen during this rulemaking to identify feasible options. Focusing the discussion, as the agency has, on *risk* reduction, rather than a specific target percentage reduction in vertical line, gives fishermen the opportunity to proactively guide the development of options and tell National Marine Fisheries Service what works for *them*.

As a long-time supporter of finer-scale approaches to the issue of whale entanglement, I am very encouraged by NOAA's use of the co-occurrence model to guide the development of this rule. Broad-brush regulations will fail both the fishermen and the whales. We must focus our efforts where they can produce positive results for conservation of marine mammals, as well as the least harm to Maine's lobster fishery, which landed 93 million pounds in 2010 at a value of 310 million dollars. Conservative estimates of the economic impact of fisheries on the state's economy doubles the landings value, and the ex-vessel price being paid for Maine lobster has been strong this year. Clearly, there is a great deal at stake, especially in a difficult economy, in the development of any regulations that may adversely affect the lobster industry.

Maine's active industry associations, research foundations, and Department of Marine Resources have been laying the groundwork for a state proposal, doing research and working with the industry over multi-day workshops, at zone council meetings and kitchen tables to identify targeted, pragmatic ways to reduce the risk of entanglement. I applaud their efforts, and will continue to support them in every step of this process until we reach a plan that provides for the recovery of endangered species without putting our state's historic fishery at risk. I continue to believe we *can* achieve both of those outcomes, and will work tirelessly toward that objective.

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