An Open Letter from Jeff Pike on Protecting Small Boats
On Behalf of the Scallopers Campaign
August 24, 2022

Word on the dock is that the Scallopers Campaign proposal to allow leasing in the limited access (LA) scallop fleet is a veiled attempt by the big guys to encroach on the Gen Cat or Northern Gulf of Maine scallop fisheries. As spokesman for the Campaign, I can tell you nothing is further from the truth.

I grew up commercial fishing on small boats on Cape Cod. After crewing for many owners, I purchased and operated the F/V Miss Molly, a 42-ft. Bruno & Stillman longliner and gillnetter out of Chatham, MA. My entire fishing career was spent on small boats, living in the places where small-boat fishing was an integral part of the everyday fabric of the community. I worked for Congressman Gerry Studds as his fisheries advisor for 16 years, and in that job my appreciation and understanding of the natural conflicts between big and small operators only grew. I also learned that mutually acceptable solutions can always be found when everyone works together in good faith.

Understanding and appreciating the importance of small boat fisheries to coastal communities was a driving force on why I insisted, from the very beginning, that the Scallopers Campaign adopt key principles such as “no harm to other fisheries or sectors” and “conservation neutrality” for any leasing program. The Scallopers Campaign, supported by a strong majority of the LA fleet, seeks only to provide flexibility to the LA fleet within its current allocation and under the current 5% ownership caps.

It makes no sense for an LA vessel to spend 80% of the year tied to the dock because of limited catch allocations. With allocations expected to decline further over the next several years, LA vessel owners simply seek the flexibility to better manage their vessels within their existing allocations. Our Campaign is committed to protecting the small boat scallop fisheries, whether in the Northern Gulf of Maine or the General Category scallop fisheries. This is why, since its inception, the Scallopers Campaign has reached out to both of these sectors to seek their ideas and concerns.

The recently concluded scoping meetings conducted by the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) provided significant opportunity for all stakeholders to share their views on leasing. From Gloucester, MA to New Bern, NC, there was broad support for the NEFMC to proceed with designing a leasing program. The Scallopers Campaign attended every meeting, and we were encouraged by the
number of solid ideas on how to best protect other fisheries from negative impacts from a LA leasing program.

We are hopeful that the NEFMC will vote at its September meeting to proceed with the development of an LA leasing program. The Scallop Advisory Panel (AP) would then be tasked with the lion’s share of the work. The members of the AP represent all scallop sectors, big boats and small. Having worked with most of the fishery management councils over my career, I can tell you that the NEFMC Scallop AP is one of the nation’s most hard working, thoughtful and productive advisory panels.

With our clear pledge to protect small boat fisheries and isolate them from impacts of a LA leasing program, we ask for your support. We can do this!

Jeff