

[U.S. Senate KOs bid to stop catch shares](#)

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By Richard Gaines Staff Writer

U.S. Senate members of a conference committee have blocked an extension of the Jones amendment through the rest of fiscal 2012, setting aside a measure that would have barred the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration from converting more fisheries into commodities markets, multiple sources said Wednesday.

Supported by 100 votes on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives last February, the amendment by Congressman Walter Jones, a North Carolina Republican, was not added to an appropriations bill for Commerce, Justice and Science.

The spending bill was approved initially by the Senate without the Jones amendment. Jones' measure would have blocked any NOAA funding for expanding its catch share management policies, which have drawn fire and are blamed by many fishermen and Massachusetts lawmakers for forcing fishing industry consolidation and job losses.

Catch shares, a policy initiative of the Obama administration, was introduced without notice to or the approval of Congress by NOAA administrator Jane Lubchenco. Although an ardent believer in catch shares, she did not mention her intentions at her confirmation hearing before the Senate Commerce Committee.

Working on the so-called "mini-bus" spending bill since early November, the conference committee sealed the fate of the growing opposition to catch shares by closing the appropriations bill to floor amendments.

The Jones amendment was supported by Speaker John Boehner, according to Jim Donofrio, executive director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance, who was in Washington, D.C., to lobby for the amendment.

"It's a shame (the Jones amendment) was done in by the House of Lords," said Donofrio.

He said Boehner began blogging about fishing as a "jobs issue" in recent weeks.

Among Jones' House allies across the aisle are Massachusetts Democrats John Tierney and Barney Frank.

But NOAA officials Wednesday stood by blocking the Jones amendment as a means of giving fishermen in different fisheries a choice of trying to make catch shares succeed.

"America's fishermen today need more opportunities to succeed, not fewer," said Lubchenco's spokesman, Justin Kenney. "Catch share programs are simply one tool in the toolbox of fisheries management, and when designed properly have proven to be effective."

The conference committee report emerged late Monday, a day before Gov. Deval Patrick introduced two new socio-economic studies of the New England groundfishery, noted that they demonstrated that "catch shares have had a devastating impact on the groundfishery" and asked for a federal disaster declaration and \$21 million in federal assistance.

Citing a state study and one done in conjunction with federal scientists, the governor wrote to Commerce Secretary John E. Bryson that "federal regulations and management policies have caused a significant consolidation of the groundfish fleet, lost of jobs and reduced revenues," producing a "fisheries resource disaster."

On Wednesday, the consumer group Food & Water Watch reported similar effects from the catch share regimen covering the Gulf of Mexico red snapper fishery since 2007.

Red snapper was the first Gulf fishery to be managed as a commodities market.

Under catch shares, Food & Water Watch reported, the red snapper fishery has shrunk by 44 percent.

Food & Water Watch has been a global watchdog and critic of managing fisheries by catch share principles — limiting access and allocating the wild resources to ensure harvests, reduce the race to fish and encourage consolidation and commodity market trading.

Although a small number of U.S. fisheries — including the New England groundfishery — are using catch share systems, the idea of expanding the approach rapidly was promoted aggressively by Environmental Defense Fund, which favors market-based policies and also gave birth to the so-called "cap-and-trade" policy on air pollution.

EDF and its proxies hired at least four Washington, D.C., lobbying firms and spent at least \$250,000 fighting against the Jones amendment, according to the OpenSecrets.org, the website of the Center for Responsive Politics.

"The funding prohibition on new catch share programs would save fishing jobs and taxpayers' money," Jones wrote Wednesday in an email to the Times.

"While I am extremely disappointed that this language was not included in the conference report, I will continue to work with my coastal colleagues to prevent NOAA from jamming new job-destroying catch shares programs down the throats of fishermen who do not want them."

Jones remains hardly alone.

"The negative economic impact of the current catch share program on our fishing community is clear," Congressman John Tierney said. "I join my colleagues in expressing immense frustration and disappointment that Congressman Jones's amendment was not included in this bill."

Another opponent of catch shares is Sen. Scott Brown. His press secretary John Donnolly said that "Sen. Brown is disappointed this provision was not included in the conference report, and will continue working to ease burdensome catch-share regulations on Massachusetts fishermen."

One amendment that was added to the Commerce, Science And Justice spending bill for fiscal 2012 requires NOAA to report to the Senate Appropriations Committee within two years on the feasibility of moving the Northeast Regional Office, which was rebuilt in Gloucester three years ago at a cost of \$15 million, to Baltimore.

Eric Schwaab, appointed by Lubchenco to head NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, had been a career bureaucrat in Maryland. The amendment was filed by Sen. Barbara Mikulski of Maryland, one of the 11 Democrats among 18 senators on the conference committee.

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