

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 3, 2020

VIA E-MAIL:

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
U.S. Secretary of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230 Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Ross:

We write with respect to the Department of Commerce's efforts to implement the Assistance to Fishery Participants section in PL 16-136, the CARES Act. Like nearly every other sector of our nation's economy, the seafood industry is reeling from the shocks to supply, demand, and labor that the coronavirus pandemic has dealt to our collective prosperity and way of life. Perhaps to a higher degree than other businesses, those who make their livelihoods harvesting the bounty of our oceans, engaging in aquaculture, and enabling the supply chains that process and move fresh product from remote islands in Maine to far corners of the globe have incredibly complex and unique business models. As such, we are enthusiastic about this section of the relief legislation that targets both the iconic and bedrock elements of our state's economy and the value-added enterprises that link them to consumers.

We are grateful for this opportunity to offer some advice on how we believe the \$300 million of fishery-related assistance can most productively and expeditiously reach those who need it to get through this period of upheaval and soon return to and prosper in their respective enterprises. Because the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is well-versed in the evaluation of fisheries disasters under the Magnuson Stevens Act and the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act, and as the agency has competency in allocating and distributing related relief funds, we encourage—to the greatest extent possible—the use of existing data, analytics, and procedures to get this relief out the door. Due to the unprecedented nature of the current situation, we have some specific requests and advice; they are as follows:


1. We encourage NMFS to work with regional fisheries management commissions to distribute the funds to the various coastal states with eligible stakeholders—including fishery-related businesses that have not typically been evaluated in past fisheries disaster relief measures.
2. While there must be meaningful bounds on the use of these taxpayer dollars, we believe it is critical for each state to have reasonable latitude to distribute money in the ways that will do the most good for the unique challenges present in their jurisdiction.
3. With respect to how the total amount will be allocated between states, we urge NMFS to use comparative methods and averages that span multiple years—as is common with other fisheries disaster calculations. For example, relying upon comparative ex-vessel revenue losses for the

early part of this year would not appropriately reflect seasonal fishery, supply chain, or aquaculture business losses.

4. Because the onset of this catastrophe was so sudden and the need is immediate, we ask the NMFS continue to move quickly to get money out to the states, and that accountability be achieved with a requirement that each state submit a spend plan back to the agency for approval prior to distribution to businesses and harvesters.

Thank you for your attention to our input on this component of the relief effort to stabilize and recover the American economy. Please provide our staff with regular updates on NMFS's plans and timeline for implementation as well as any problems that may be encountered.

Sincerely,



ANGUS S. KING, JR.
United States Senator



CHELLIE PINGREE
Member of Congress



JARED GOLDEN
Member of Congress

CC: Chris Oliver, NOAA Fisheries