



May 8, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

RE: U.S. Commercial Fishing Needs

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy,

We write today on behalf of our 18 member organizations and thousands of fishermen from Alaska to Maine. We are proud stewards and harvesters of America's seafood, our nation's strategic protein reserve and a critical component of our country's food security, especially during this time. As our nation reels in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we respectfully urge you to consider the following requests to ensure that the commercial fishing industry is able to continue providing a steady supply of fresh, sustainable seafood to our fellow Americans and support our coastal communities.

We are extremely grateful for the fisheries assistance included in the third COVID-19 stimulus package. As Congress turns its attention to crafting its next stimulus and recovery package, we look forward to the inclusion of additional relief for our industry. To mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our industry and businesses and ensure our continued ability to operate, we ask Congress to take the following actions:

- 1) **Provide no less than an additional \$1.5 billion to Sec. 12005, Assistance to Fishery Participants, of H.R. 748, the CARES Act, to provide relief from severe economic impacts felt by the commercial fishing industry as a result of COVID-19.** This program is designed to provide assistance to commercial and charter fishery participants, as well as other fishery-related

stakeholders, affected by COVID-19. While we are extremely grateful for the \$300 million initially authorized and appropriated for this program, it is quickly becoming clear that as this money is divided among state and federal fisheries and a variety of user groups, it will not go far in addressing the losses we have felt in the commercial fishing industry. For perspective, commercial fishing landings at the port of New Bedford in 2018 were valued at \$431 million, nearly one and a half times the amount of money included in the first appropriation for this assistance fund. We respectfully ask for additional funding for this critically important program that will provide direct relief to fishermen and our associated coastal communities.

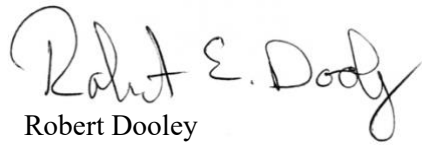
- 2) **Ensure the protection of critical working waterfront infrastructure by providing no less than \$500 million in funding to states through the grant and loan programs established in H.R. 3596, *Keep America's Waterfronts Working Act*.** As many commercial fishermen and waterfront businesses are making tough decisions about which bills to pay and whether to close their businesses for good, we respectfully urge Congress to provide the resources to fund the grant and loan program outlined in H.R. 3596. This bill, which enjoys bipartisan sponsorship and has passed the House, establishes a Working Waterfront Grant Program to provide matching, competitive grants to coastal states to help preserve and expand access to coastal waters for water-dependent businesses. It also creates a loan program for waterfront preservation, modeled after state drinking water loans. The commercial fishing industry has rightly been deemed an essential business because of the role we play in our nation's food security, but in order for our businesses to continue and thrive, we must maintain our access to critical working waterfront infrastructure, including boat docks, fuel docks, ice houses, and fish houses, among others. We are concerned that if the commercial fishing industry and other water-dependent businesses shutter due to COVID-19, waterfront property previously used for industrial purposes will be developed and turned into residential or tourist areas, effectively shutting us out of ever accessing it again. By establishing these grant and loan programs, and funding them at a level no less than \$500 million, Congress will ensure our ability to maintain our waterfront access that is critical for our business operations.
- 3) **Provide no less than \$2 billion for USDA to purchase domestically harvested and processed seafood products.** Because COVID-19 forced many restaurants and other food service outlets to close in an effort to slow the spread of the virus, the commercial fishing industry and associated supply chain businesses have been severely impacted. In fact, in 2017, nearly 70% of the money spent on seafood in the U.S. was spent on seafood consumed at restaurants, cafeterias, and through catering services.¹ While many other sectors of food production have seen targeted support and dollars allocated specifically for USDA purchases, seafood has largely been left out of the picture. We simply ask for USDA funding specifically directed at purchasing seafood products, including those that have not historically been purchased by USDA, to help offset the severe impacts our industry has shouldered due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 4) **Provide oversight of NMFS Observer Program during the COVID-19 pandemic.** We are increasingly concerned about the inconsistent way the NMFS Regional Offices have issued waivers for observer requirements. On March 27th, NMFS published a notice in the Federal Register requesting comments on a temporary rule providing Regional Offices and Science Centers the ability to grant waivers for observer requirements. Comments on this rule overwhelmingly support extended waivers for observer requirements. While some regions have provided temporary waivers pending a final decision, some Regional Offices have allowed those waivers to expire, often without justification, forcing fishing vessels to again take human observers on their vessels as the virus continues to spread around the country. This haphazard patchwork of observer requirements

¹ 2017 NOAA Fisheries of the United States Report <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/fisheries-united-states-2017-report>

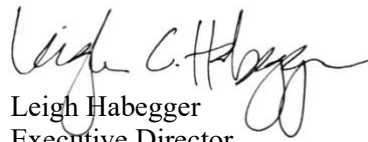
and waivers appears to be inconsistent with the current reality across the country and disregards the risk to human lives. It is especially appalling that fishing vessels are required to take human observers on fishing trips – potentially exposing captains and crew to COVID – when NMFS has repeatedly delayed and cancelled its own scientific research and surveys due to exposure risk for their staff and scientists.

We understand there are many competing requests flooding your mailboxes during this time; however, we ask you and your colleagues in Congress to support us in ensuring our businesses can survive the COVID-19 pandemic and protecting the health of our captains, crew, and shoreside communities. The country's access to seafood depends on it.

Respectfully,



Robert Dooley
President



Leigh Habegger
Executive Director

Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers • Alaska Whitefish Trawlers Association • Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance • Cordova District Fishermen United • Fishermen's Marketing Association • Fishing Vessel Owners' Association • Fort Bragg Groundfish Association • Georges Bank Cod Fixed Gear Sector • Gulf Fishermen's Association • Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance • Maine Coast Fishermen's Association • Midwater Trawlers Cooperative • New Hampshire Community Seafood • North Pacific Fisheries Association • Purse Seine Vessel Owners' Association • Rhode Island Commercial Fishermen's Association • South Atlantic Fishermen's Association • United Catcher Boats