

United States Senate

March 23, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer,

As you work to draft economic relief packages to respond to the ongoing health and economic crisis caused by the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), we urge you to include support for the fishing industry, which is facing severe economic hardship as a result of this pandemic.

The fishing and seafood industries are essential drivers of the American economy, with \$5.6 billion worth of fisheries products landed and \$11.6 billion worth of fisheries products processed in 2018.¹ The COVID-19 outbreak has caused restaurants across the United States to shutter, eliminating a key customer base for the fishing and seafood industries. Large export markets in virus-affected countries like China have also been disrupted. Additionally, many fishermen are not eligible for unemployment benefits because they are self-employed. Congress must provide dedicated financial assistance to these vital industries to ensure that, when this crisis has passed, we still have a robust fishing economy.

Some fisheries are completely shut down because there is no market for their fish. Seafood processors are struggling because closed restaurants are no longer buying fresh products. When boats sit idle in port, unable to fish, fishing captains cannot make vessel loan payments or pay crewmembers. Crewmembers often depend on their captains to provide meals during fishing trips, and are therefore lacking meals and pay. Without congressional help, this industry might go bankrupt at the dock.

When evaluating potential support, Congress should consider the establishment of federal procurement programs specifically for U.S. seafood products; helping fishermen with vessel loan payments and refinancing; qualifying fishermen for unemployment insurance; funding federal fisheries disaster assistance; and deploying other financial support mechanisms to maintain the stability of the seafood industry. We also strongly support robust funding for the National Marine Fisheries Service in the regular appropriations process to ensure that the global pandemic does not compromise management of our nation's fisheries.

We urge you to consider the unique and dire plight of the fishermen and seafood producers in the next legislative response to COVID-19. Without assistance, we face the real possibility of losing

¹ NOAA Fisheries, *Fisheries of the United States, 2018* (Feb. 21, 2020), <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/fisheries-united-states-2018>.

a significant portion of our fishing industry to economic challenges caused by COVID-19, and forever changing the character of our working waterfronts.


Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Dan Sullivan
United States Senator