



April 14, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
1236 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Republican Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
2468 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Democratic Leader  
United States Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

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

As non-profit organizations that regularly partner with the fishing industry to ensure the protection of habitats, wildlife, and healthy fish stocks, we thank you for your bipartisan efforts to support the U.S. economy while combatting the spread and limiting the public health impacts of the COVID-19 virus. We appreciate the inclusion of \$300 million in initial relief dollars for the fishing sector in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act signed into law on March 27.

Securing the health and well-being of Americans must remain at the forefront of all policy decisions. As the federal government works to address this unprecedented public health crisis and turns to economic recovery, we ask that you include continuing support for the nation's fishing industry, including Tribal, subsistence, commercial, and recreational fishery participants, in any future economic relief or stimulus bill. We continue to hear from partners and others in the industry and anticipate additional assistance will be necessary to buttress the seafood economy.

The United States is a global leader in sustainable, wild-caught fisheries; in 2018 commercial fishery landings were valued at over \$5.6 billion.<sup>1</sup> The fishing industry, including commercial and recreational fisheries, supported 1.7 million jobs and generated \$212 billion in sales impacts

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<sup>1</sup> National Marine Fisheries Service. (2018). *Fisheries of the United States Report*.  
<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/fisheries-united-states-2018-report>.

in 2016, the most recent year for which data are available.<sup>2</sup> Tribal and subsistence fisheries have provided a vital source of food security and culture since time immemorial.

Like many sectors, the fishing industry has been hit hard by the COVID-19 crisis. Domestic purchasing of fish caught in U.S. waters has abruptly plunged in recent weeks, especially since many fishing entities sell most of their catch to restaurants. Exports have also slowed, leaving fishermen, distributors, processors, and others without a potential market for their catch.

Businesses that support recreational fishing, ranging from guides and outfitters to the thousands of independently owned retail shops that sell fishing gear, are experiencing significant declines in business as Americans cancel trips and stores close their doors. Many fishermen are small business owners with limited capital to survive a prolonged economic downturn. Some of the most vulnerable members of the fishing community – crew and processing plant workers – will struggle under this dramatic economic downturn.

We urge you to support additional funding targeted to bolster the U.S. fishing industry while maintaining conservation goals, improving connections between fishermen and consumers, and modernizing the domestic fleet through increased use of technology.

Potential opportunities include:

- Vessel loan refinancing and reduction in other fees;
- Elimination of tariffs that burden fishing industry businesses;
- Access to unemployment and other emergency benefits;
- Zero-interest loans or grants for small- and medium-sized fishing businesses;
- Disaster relief funding, including additional direct payments to affected members of the fishing industry;
- Increased market access through federal buying programs, product promotion, and other measures to connect fishermen and consumers interested in sustainable, safe seafood purchasing, such as community-supported fisheries programs and technology-based tools;
- Accelerated rollout of electronic reporting and monitoring technologies;
- Cooperative research, bycatch reduction engineering program, and other grant, research, and funding opportunities that can both improve science and technology and serve as a supplemental source of income for fishermen; and
- Preservation, improvement, restoration, and rehabilitation of working waterfronts to ensure fishermen, processors, and other parts of the seafood supply chain have access to state-of-the-art technology and facilities that necessitate successful, modern, and efficient business operations.

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<sup>2</sup> National Marine Fisheries Service. (2016) *Fisheries Economics of the United States Report*. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/fisheries-economics-united-states-report-2016>.

We have a responsibility to protect the livelihoods of the men and women who provide us with fresh, safe seafood and who have led the world in sustainability. Doing so also assures people across the country continued access to these healthy and sustainable food choices.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

/s/ Monica Goldberg  
Chief Counsel, Oceans  
Environmental Defense Fund

/s/ Chris Dorsett  
Vice President, Conservation  
Ocean Conservancy

CC:  
The Honorable Wilbur Ross, Secretary of Commerce  
The Honorable Dr. Neil Jacobs, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Environmental  
Observation and Prediction