

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 15, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Ross:

As the nation responds to mitigate the economic impacts of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we urgently ask that you provide immediate relief to Florida's fishing and seafood industry.

Florida's fishing industries have experienced several crises in recent years. Impacts from Hurricanes Irma and Michael, major fish kills caused by harmful algal blooms, significant habitat loss in the Florida Reef Tract due to coral bleaching and disease, and massive seagrass die offs in many of our state's estuaries have taken their toll. Even for those businesses who have endured these events, the economic crisis we face today as a result of the pandemic may prove fatal without your assistance.

With more than 1,300 miles of coastline and world class fisheries, Florida is widely regarded as the fishing capital of the world. Across our state, those fishermen and businesses who helped Florida earn that title are selling off their last catches for pennies on the dollar and docking their vessels indefinitely, some fear permanently. The cascading effect of losing this vital supply chain would be immense. The secondary seafood processors, restaurants, fish markets, and grocery stores that prepare, process, and sell fresh, locally-sourced seafood across the country and to Florida's 21 million residents, would no longer have reliable product sources. Unfortunately, this pandemic has caused many to face the very real threat of going out of business. A collapse of these industries would be extremely harmful to those families and communities that depend on them, to Florida's tourism industry, and to Florida's trillion-dollar economy as a whole. But it would also be felt when this nation overcomes the pandemic, and the seafood supply is no longer able to meet demand.

The *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act* appropriated \$300 million in emergency funding for the Department of Commerce to provide assistance, such as direct relief payments to fishery participants, including "Tribes, persons, fishing communities, aquaculture businesses... processors, or other fishery related businesses" who have experienced economic losses as a result of the pandemic. We ask that you work expeditiously to provide guidance with regard to the disbursement of these funds, taking into account the full range of sectors harmed by this crisis. Additionally, existing law authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to work with the Secretary of Commerce to undertake market stabilization commodity purchases for food-producing fishing industries. We urge you to coordinate with Secretary Perdue to utilize

this authority to ease the burden this crisis has placed upon our commercial fishing industry. We also urge you to continue coordinating with the Small Business Administration, the Treasury Department, Regional Fishery Management Councils, and other stakeholders to guide fishing and seafood businesses to the relief available under the Paycheck Protection Program. Finally, we urge you to expedite consideration of the State of Florida's pending Fisheries Disaster Declaration request concerning red tide events between 2015 and 2019, which took a devastating toll on our ecosystems.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that Florida's fishing industries can continue to supply our nation with the very best seafood.

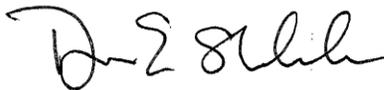
Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Rick Scott
U.S. Senator



Donna Shalala
Member of Congress



Stephanie Murphy
Member of Congress



Matt Gaetz
Member of Congress



Mario Diaz-Balart
Member of Congress



Gus Bilirakis
Member of Congress



Debbie Wasserman Schultz
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Debbie Mucarsel-Powell
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