

U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Natural Resources

Washington, DC 20515

June 25, 2020

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump:

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit the seafood industry particularly hard, interrupting supply chains and leaving fishermen with limited markets to sell their fresh, sustainable, and healthy seafood products. To address this impact, Congress appropriated \$300 million in the CARES Act to provide immediate relief to Tribal, subsistence, commercial, and charter fishery participants. Unfortunately, the Department of Commerce took nearly six weeks to determine how to allocate the funds. And as of today – three months later – not a single fisherman has received one cent.

While your administration has been unable to distribute the much-needed aid to fishermen that Congress provided, it still had time to craft the May 7 Executive Order on “Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth,” that aims to gut our science-based, sustainable fishery management system. It is reprehensible that you and your administration are intentionally ignoring the real problem: fishermen cannot sell their fish. Rather than developing market solutions or providing Congressionally-mandated economic relief, you replace the current crisis with a manufactured one of excessive regulation, tasking Regional Fishery Management Councils with developing a list of deregulatory actions at a time when the full force of their expertise should be used to find sustainable management solutions that can help fishing businesses. Your Executive Order does nothing to help the industry in the immediate-term and will have long-term negative consequences for both fish and the fishing industry.

The United States has some of the most well-managed and successful fisheries in the world, thanks to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. American fishermen landed \$5.6 billion worth of seafood in 2018, and the U.S. is already one of the largest seafood producers in the developed world. Yet, your Executive Order invites the fishery management councils and the industry to identify unnamed regulations and obstacles to seafood production that, until the pandemic, was already contributing billions to the U.S. economy. The regulations and requirements you claim are burdens on the industry are the very reasons that our fisheries have been rebuilt and are so successful today. Lack of adequate regulation in the past led to disasters in New England—dark days with plummeting fish stocks that we should not seek to relive.

Instead, we should look to the successes of the Magnuson-Stevens Act at a time when the nation has rebuilt 47 stocks, including the rebuilding of the West coast groundfish fishery. Thanks to the

Magnuson-Stevens Act and the Fishery Management Council process, overfishing has ended for many economically valuable fisheries and put overfished stocks on a path to rebuilding – putting money in American fishermen’s pockets. Sustainable fisheries management leads to healthy, resilient oceans and economic opportunity for American fishermen. Your Executive Order threatens this progress and causes Fishery Management Councils to waste precious time and resources. Your quest to deregulate the fishing industry—much like you have done for the oil and gas industry—will hurt the fishing communities who depend on healthy stocks in the long run.

The fishing industry is not lacking fish, nor is it overregulated, and until your trade embargos and the pandemic, it was not lacking markets. Deregulation will not fix these problems and will only hurt fishing communities if we revert to recklessly harvesting resources at an unsustainable rate.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Chair
Committee on Natural Resources



Jared Huffman
Chair
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and
Wildlife

CC: The Honorable Wilbur Ross, Secretary of Commerce
Chris Oliver, Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries
Marcos Hanke, Chair, Caribbean Fishery Management Council
Simon Kinneen, Chair, North Pacific Fishery Management Council
Dr. Thomas Frazer, Chair, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
Philip Anderson, Chair, Pacific Fishery Management Council
Mike Luisi, Chair, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Jessica McCawley, Chair, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Dr. John Quinn, Chair, New England Fishery Management Council
Taotasi Archie Soliai, Chair, Western Pacific Fishery Management Council