

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 11, 2012

The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski, Chairwoman  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, & Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Mikulski and Ranking Member Hutchison:

We are writing in support of including federal fisheries disaster funding in any emergency supplemental appropriations bill developed in response to Superstorm Sandy. Over the past year, extreme weather and other natural events have wreaked havoc on commercial and recreational fishermen in our states, leading the Secretary of Commerce to declare federal fisheries disasters. Despite these declarations and the ongoing hardship, Congress has not yet appropriated funds.

As you know, the Secretary of Commerce is authorized to declare federal fisheries disasters under Section 308(d) of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act and Section 315 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. These designations allow Congress to appropriate federal relief funds to alleviate the harm caused by natural disasters to fisheries and the fishing industry. The disaster assistance funds can be used to repair or restore fishing equipment and infrastructure, compensate for losses, restore fisheries habitat, support workforce education, provide low-interest loans, and conduct monitoring and cooperative research focused on improving stock assessments.

Currently, federal fisheries disasters have been declared in nine states in response to four different events:

- **Superstorm Sandy** – On November 16, 2012, a federal fisheries disaster was declared for New Jersey and New York due to the damage caused by Superstorm Sandy. The high winds and storm surge devastated marinas, destroyed fishing vessels, and resulted in severe economic losses for both commercial and recreational fishermen.
- **Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Fishery** – On September 13, 2012, a federal fisheries disaster was declared for Rhode Island, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Connecticut. The projected reductions in the total allowable catch for certain critical groundfish stocks will have a significant impact on many of the same coastal communities that were hit by Sandy. Despite

strict adherence to new and rigorous management practices by fishermen, key fish stocks have not returned. Slow recovery and declining fish stocks will continue to have a negative impact on commercial fishing, harming local communities and economies.

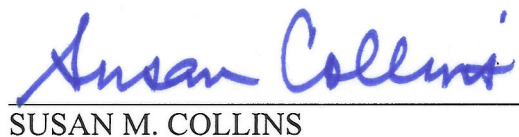
- **Alaska Chinook** – On September 12, 2012, a federal fisheries disaster was declared for Alaska Chinook salmon fisheries in the Yukon River, Kuskokwim River, and Cook Inlet. Thousands of Alaskans have been impacted including commercial fishermen, sport fishermen, and subsistence-based residents. Beyond direct impacts, indirect impacts have been felt by communities through reduced tax revenue, reduced work for processor employees, and reduced income for fishery dependent businesses.
- **Mississippi Oyster and Blue Crab** – On September 12, 2012, a federal fisheries disaster was declared for commercial oyster and blue crab fisheries in Mississippi. Historic flooding of the lower Mississippi River required opening of the Bonnet Carré Spillway on May 9, 2011. This action released substantial amounts of freshwater into the Mississippi Sound, impacting the entire ecosystem. Mississippi's oyster and blue crab fisheries were extensively damaged, resulting in severe economic hardship for commercial fishermen still recovering from the devastating impacts of Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill.

Fishing is an integral part of our states' economies and cultures. These disasters have devastated fishing families and coastal communities and there is an urgent need to provide federal assistance. We urge you to move swiftly to appropriate funds for these federal fisheries disaster declarations.

Sincerely,

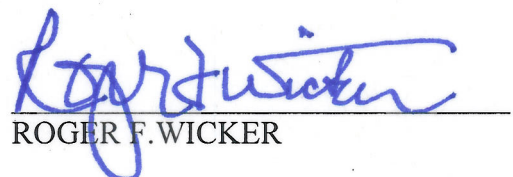
  
FRANK R. LAUTENBERG

  
LISA MURKOWSKI

  
SUSAN M. COLLINS

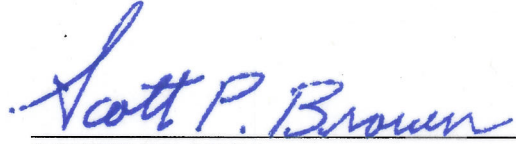
  
JACK REED

  
ROBERT MENENDEZ

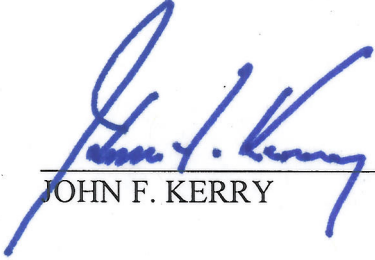
  
ROGER F. WICKER



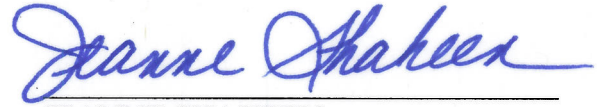
CHARLES E. SCHUMER



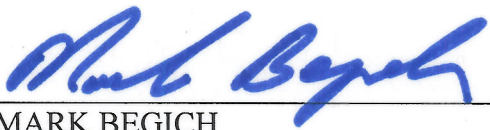
SCOTT BROWN



JOHN F. KERRY



JEANNE SHAHEEN



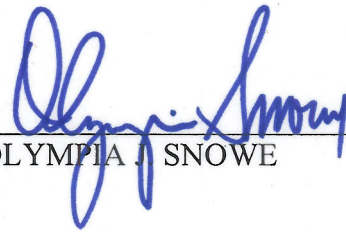
MARK BEGICH



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KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND



OLYMPIA J. SNOWE