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July 21, 2020

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary of Commerce
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Ross:

I write in support of the State of Maine's request for a declaration of fishery failure in the Area 1A Atlantic herring fishery. While Maine's seafood industry at large is already experiencing severe financial harm due to COVID-19-related disruptions, concerning trends highlighted through recent stock assessments indicate that the Atlantic herring fishery is in a particularly volatile state. Historically, Atlantic herring has been processed for consumption, but Atlantic herring is currently one of the primary bait sources used by Maine's lobster fishery. On July 6, the Governor of Maine formally requested assistance for the Maine Atlantic herring industry under section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. I strongly support this request for assistance to an industry so central to the State of Maine's identity and economy.

The 2018 stock assessment for Atlantic herring highlighted five consecutive years of extremely low recruitment, representing a 77 percent reduction in spawning potential from the previous stock assessment. Given these results, the Annual Catch Limit (ACL) for 2019 represent an 85.6 percent reduction in quota, and the ACL for 2020-2021 represents an 89 percent reduction in quota. This minimal quota caused the current preliminary estimate of Atlantic herring landings in Maine ports to decrease by 83 percent from the five-year average of 25,127 metric tons (2014 to 2018) to 4,253 metric tons in 2019. Moreover, during the 2019 season, there were only nine weeks where Atlantic herring was landed, compared to 29 weeks in 2017.

The drastic reduction in Atlantic herring quotas has caused significant losses in primary income and threatened job security for many in the herring industry. Given the unstable status of our Atlantic herring fishery, and its role in supporting Maine's iconic lobster industry, I support the State of Maine's commercial fishery failure declaration request. It is unclear how Maine's Atlantic herring fishery will survive another season without immediate financial assistance.

I once again urge you to declare a fisheries disaster for the Maine Atlantic herring industry and immediately make funds available under Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, as well as provide any other assistance that might be available. I appreciate your expeditious consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator