

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1904

May 8, 2019

Dr. Michael Rubino
NOAA Fisheries
1315 East West Hwy, Bldg. SSMC3,
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3282

Dear Dr. Rubino:

Congratulations on your new role as Senior Advisor for Seafood Strategy at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Supporting the development and growth of markets for U.S. fisheries products is of great importance to our nation's fishermen, aquaculturists, and seafood dealers, and I welcome the opportunity to highlight the importance of these efforts to the State of Maine.

During Secretary Ross' confirmation process, I was very encouraged to hear him assert that one of his top priorities would be working to reverse America's seafood deficit. Unfortunately, seemingly little progress has been made by way of ending this trend, but I am hopeful that your appointment will elevate this critical issue within the Department.

Maine's seafood industry has long been a strong economic engine for the state and the lifeblood of countless coastal communities, supporting the livelihoods of thousands who catch, harvest, process, transport, and cook our wide range of ocean delicacies. The lobster industry is especially significant with an in-state economic impact of approximately \$1.5 billion each year.

I have been in regular correspondence with Ambassador Lighthizer about the continued harm being caused to the U.S. lobster industry by escalating tariffs and international trade barriers. According to the Maine International Trade Center, Maine lobster exports to China were up 169 percent for the first six months of 2018 over the previous year. This promising trend gave U.S. lobster dealers every indication that China would continue to be a robust market opportunity. Since the new 25 percent tariff was imposed last June, however, U.S. lobster exports to China have plummeted to negligible levels. One lobster dealer in Maine has seen a 90 percent decrease in his exports to China and has watched his Chinese customers forge new business partnerships with Canadian competitors. Even when the tariffs are lifted, the detrimental impact on U.S.-China dealer-to-consumer relationships will be difficult to undo.

These enduring losses compound the economic hardship already burdening the industry after the implementation the Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (CETA) between the European Union and Canada. CETA eliminates and phases out tariffs on Canadian lobster sent to the EU, while U.S. exporters still face tariffs of 8 percent, 16 percent, and 30 percent on live, frozen, and processed lobster, respectively.

While I recognize that trade negotiations are ongoing and that you may have limited influence on these negotiations, I am eager to work with you to develop new and expand existing markets for lobster and other American seafood.

As Maine's lobster industry is weathering the storm of international trade uncertainty, aquaculture operations throughout the state are increasing substantially – both in the water and on land. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's recently released Agriculture Census includes encouraging data on the rise of aquaculture, finding that from 2012 to 2017, farmed oyster sales in Maine nearly doubled in value to over \$10 million dollars annually. From oysters and mussels to kelp and salmon, Maine is diversifying and expanding its aquaculture crops at an impressive rate.

This industry is increasingly well-poised to fulfil the growing high-quality protein needs not only of Americans, but populations all across the globe as well. This potential cannot be realized, however, unless the U.S. commits to aggressively pursuing international markets for these products. I am encouraged by your extensive prior work on aquaculture and trust that your expertise and experience will be instrumental to achieving the mission set out for this new position.

I appreciate your willingness to serve fishermen, aquaculturists, and seafood dealers in Maine and across the country, and look forward to working with you to fully realize the economic benefits of dramatically increasing American seafood exports. I also invite you to join me on a visit to Maine in the coming months to see firsthand how integral the seafood sector is to our coastal communities and economy.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator