

SUSAN M. COLLINS  
MAINE

413 DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1904  
(202) 224-2523  
(202) 224-2693 (FAX)

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1904

COMMITTEES:  
SPECIAL COMMITTEE  
ON AGING,  
CHAIRMAN  
APPROPRIATIONS  
HEALTH, EDUCATION,  
LABOR, AND PENSIONS  
SELECT COMMITTEE  
ON INTELLIGENCE

April 2, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Ross:

I write with respect to the Department of Commerce's efforts to implement the Assistance to Fishery Participants section in the CARES Act (PL 16-136). The seafood and aquaculture industries are experiencing severe financial harm from disruptions to supply, demand, and labor caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Those who make their livelihoods harvesting, transporting, processing, distributing, and preparing the bounty of our oceans have incredibly complex and inter-reliant business models. I am pleased that, as a result of my and other coastal state members' advocacy, the Assistance to Fishery Participants provision was included in the CARES Act to provide relief that is targeted specifically for these iconic and essential engines of Maine's economy. It is critical that the \$300 million in fishery-related assistance reach those who need it expeditiously in order to manage this period of uncertainty and emerge as strong as before.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is experienced in allocating and distributing assistance, such as under both the Magnuson-Stevens Act and the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act. To the greatest extent possible, I encourage the use of existing data, analytics, and procedures to administer this relief as soon as possible, and ask that:

- NOAA work with regional fisheries management commissions to distribute the funds to the various coastal states with eligible stakeholders;
- Each state has reasonable flexibility to distribute money in the ways that will do the most good for the unique challenges present in their jurisdiction;
- With respect to how the total amount will be allocated between states, NMFS use comparative methods and averages that span multiple years—as is common with other fisheries disaster calculations. For example, relying upon comparative ex-vessel revenue losses for the early part of this year would not appropriately reflect seasonal fishery, supply chain, or aquaculture business losses; and

- Given that the onset of this pandemic was so sudden and the need is immediate, NMFS continue to move quickly to get relief funds out to the states, and that accountability be achieved through a requirement that each state submit a spend plan to the agency for approval prior to distribution to businesses and harvesters.

Thank you for your attention to and consideration of these important priorities regarding the allocation of this assistance, which Congress has entrusted your Department to administer effectively, fairly, and as quickly as practicable. I ask that you please provide regular updates on NMFS's plans and timeline for the swift implementation of this important relief program directly to me or to my staff [REDACTED] at [REDACTED].

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator

cc: Chris Oliver, Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries