

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 6, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

We write to urge the inclusion of support for the American seafood industry in the next coronavirus relief measure. Our seafood processors and fishermen have been dealt a significant economic blow as a result of coronavirus and are in desperate need of federal assistance.

The seafood industry is critical to local and regional economies across the country. In 2016, the industry supported over one million good-paying jobs and generated more than \$144 billion in sales, adding an estimated \$61 billion to the nation's GDP. In addition to the jobs, families, and communities it supports along every part of our country's coastlines, the seafood industry fuels jobs throughout the country in processing and distribution.

Due to efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19, which has led to a near total shutdown of restaurants and other outlets serving fresh seafood, the supply chain of fishermen and seafood processors has been decimated. Notably, more than 68% of the \$102.2 billion that consumers paid for U.S. fishery products in 2017 was spent at food service establishments. It has been reported that many of the nation's fisheries have suffered sales declines as high as 95 percent. In addition, while many other agricultural sectors have seen a significant increase in grocery sales, seafood has been left out of that economic upside, as stores have cut back on offerings.

We strongly urge you to build on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's recently-announced seafood purchases and include in the next coronavirus relief package at least \$2 billion for the USDA to purchase additional domestically harvested and processed seafood products and distribute them to local, state, and national non-profits providing food to hungry Americans. Given that few seafood producers have historically participated in USDA commodity purchasing programs, we request that \$1 billion be set aside to finance the purchase by USDA of seafood products that have not typically been purchased and that have experienced economic impacts as a result of coronavirus.

We also ask that you include an additional \$1 billion for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration under the terms of section 12005 of the CARES Act (P.L. 116-136) in order to provide direct relief to Tribal, subsistence, commercial, and charter fishery participants impacted by coronavirus. We request that Congress appropriate and direct the Secretary to immediately make funding available to all fishery participants, including commercial and recreational fishing and seafood businesses that have been impacted by declines in tourism and the closure of restaurants and other food service industries.

The seafood industry is currently facing an unprecedented collapse in demand because of the novel coronavirus. We urge you to facilitate the government purchase of seafood products that would both ensure stability in this key sector and provide healthy, domestically produced food for Americans.

Thank you for your attention to this critical request, and for your continued support of America's seafood industry.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley

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Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed

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Jack Reed  
United States Senator

/s/ Lisa Murkowski

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Lisa Murkowski  
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

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Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

/s/ Bill Cassidy, M.D.

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Bill Cassidy, M.D.  
United States Senator

/s/ Mark R. Warner

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Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator

/s/ Dan Sullivan

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Dan Sullivan  
United States Senator

/s/ Ron Wyden

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Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

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Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand

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Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

/s/ Dianne Feinstein

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Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

/s/ Sheldon Whitehouse

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Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator

/s/ Thomas R. Carper

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Thomas R. Carper  
United States Senator

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin

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Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

/s/ Angus S. King, Jr.

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Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren

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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

/s/ Susan M. Collins

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Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher A. Coons

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Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator

/s/ Tim Kaine

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Tim Kaine  
United States Senator

/s/ Brian Schatz

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Brian Schatz  
United States Senator

/s/ Kamala D. Harris

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Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey

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Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker

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Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher S. Murphy

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Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator

/s/ Mazie K. Hirono

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Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator