

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 15, 2010

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and  
Science  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and  
Science  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Mikulski, and Ranking Member Shelby:

The President's Fiscal Year 2011 request for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) does not adequately reflect the critical need for greater investment in the science that supports our Nation's fisheries. To rectify this shortfall, we ask for an investment of an additional \$47 million over the President's request to fund integral fisheries data collection and monitoring programs. We believe this is a small investment for an industry so fundamental to our nation's economy.

According to NOAA, commercial fishermen landed \$4 billion worth of fish in 2006, generating \$103 billion in sales, \$44 billion in income, and 1.5 million jobs. Recreational angling generated \$82 billion in sales and an additional 500,000 jobs. NOAA has also estimated that rebuilding U.S. fish stocks would increase the annual landings value by \$2.2 billion per year. To help achieve this goal, in the 2006 reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), Congress included a new mandate that annual catch limits (ACL) be set in 2010 for all fisheries subject to overfishing and in 2011 for all other fisheries.

In 2009, the Department of Commerce's Inspector General completed a review of the work of the Northeast Fishery Science Center<sup>[1]</sup>. The review found that fisheries scientists were adhering to the MSA's directive to apply the best available science, but as one senior NMFS official was quoted in that report, the best available science "does not always mean 'good science.'" Because this data directly impacts both the sustainability of fish populations and the economic viability of our fishing industries, we see a clear need to provide better science to support our fisheries.

Furthermore, NOAA is promoting the development of "catch share" programs to manage our Nation's fisheries. NOAA's draft Catch Share Policy, issued in December 2009, defines a catch share program in part as a management strategy that allocates "a specific portion of the total allowable catch to individuals, entities, cooperatives, communities, or other entities...." Catch shares have already been implemented in 14 Federal fisheries nationwide, and two more are currently in development. All fishery management regimes, whether they include catch shares or not, must be supported by sufficient quality and volume of data in order to be successful.

Rebuilding U.S. fisheries that achieve their full economic and biological potential will necessitate development of ACLs in which fisheries managers and the commercial and recreational fishing industries can have complete confidence. As such, funding for stock assessments, analyses,

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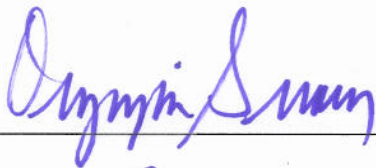
<sup>[1]</sup> Department of Commerce Inspector General, letter to Senator Olympia Snowe re: Northeast Fishery Science Center, February 26, 2009. Available at: <http://www.oig.doc.gov/oig/reports/2009/index.html>

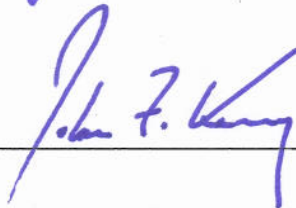
cooperative research, and the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) should be one of NMFS's highest priorities. Unfortunately, the President's budget request does not adequately invest in these fundamental programs—in some cases actually reducing funding from Fiscal Year 2010 levels. Therefore, we respectfully request that you make increases in the following line items, to address the needs of all fisheries managers.

- **Stock Assessments: +10 million over the President's request for a total of \$61.7 million.** Increased funding will reduce the scientific and management uncertainty that limits the ability of the Councils to set ACLs that maximize catch while rebuilding fish stocks.
- **Cooperative Research: +\$10 million for a total of \$17.1 million.** Increased funding will provide much needed data and increase fishing industry confidence in the science being used to make management decisions.
- **Fisheries Statistics: +\$11 million for a total of \$32.4 million.** The 2006 amendments to the Magnuson Stevens Act required the Agency, within two years, to improve the quality and accuracy of MRIP, with a goal of achieving acceptable accuracy and utility for each fishery. That goal has not been met, and significant funding is needed to ensure timely data collection and analysis that will result in real time management decisions that both the Councils and the recreational fishing industry have sought.
- **Fisheries observers: +\$10 million for a total of \$48.8 million.** Like cooperative research, additional funding will provide improved data and increase industry confidence in the science being used to make management decisions.
- **Survey and Monitoring Projects: +\$6 million for a total of \$30 million.** Additional funding will improve estimates of stock size and fishing impacts—another critical aspect of setting ACLs that maximize catch while rebuilding fisheries.

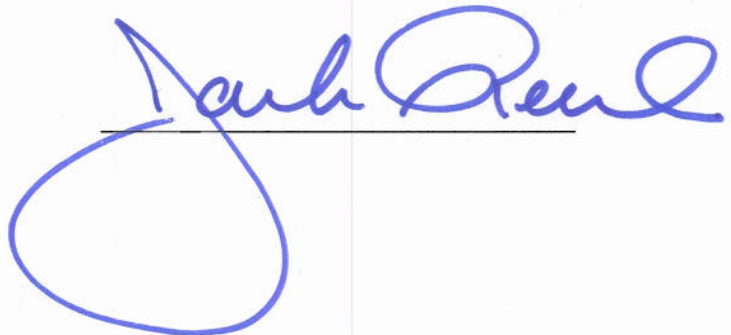
These increased investments will result in a higher degree of confidence in our stock assessments, which will quickly pay dividends by reducing the amount of time it will take our fisheries to rebuild, and in some cases, allowing higher catch levels in the very near term. If you have further questions about this request, please feel free to contact Michael Conathan (x4-3757) on the Senate Commerce Committee, or Jeff Lewis (x4-8645). Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

  
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