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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1903

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COMMITTEES:
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION

FISHERIES AND COAST GUARD
SUBCOMMITTEE

FINANCE

INTELLIGENCE

RANKING MEMBER, SMALL BUSINESS

Sarah McLaughlin,
Highly Migratory Species Management Division
Office of Sustainable Fisheries
National Marine Fisheries Service
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

Dear Ms. McLaughlin and National Marine Fisheries Service Staff,

Please accept my welcome to Maine. Thank you for honoring my request to extend the comment period and to add a public hearing in Portland, Maine, regarding the proposed Atlantic bluefin tuna base quotas for all domestic fishing categories issued on March 14, 2011, in the Federal Register.

As you know, this is a challenging economic climate for Maine's tuna fishermen with the skyrocketing costs of diesel, uncertainty surrounding international markets given the nuclear disaster in Japan, and finally an implausible petition to actually list the bluefin tuna on the endangered species list. As Ranking Member on the Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard subcommittee, I directly raised these issues to Administrator Lubchenco earlier this month in a letter and in an oversight hearing regarding NOAA's budget for Fiscal Year 2012.

In view of these economic uncertainties, it is critical that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) develop allocation quotas that maximize the sustainable yield of a valuable fishery like the bluefin tuna. Regrettably, the actions by this Administration to expand sustainable fisheries with respect to the bluefin tuna can at best be described as overly cautious. For instance, last November I led a letter urging Administrator Lubchenco to pursue a modest and scientifically justifiable *increase* in the total allowable catch (TAC) of the western stock of Atlantic bluefin tuna from 1,800 metric tons (MT) within the negotiations at the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). Yet the Administration fought and secured a *reduction* in allowable catch of 50 metric tons despite the fact that, according to NMFS, this level will "allow for continued stock growth under both the low and high stock recruitment." Unfortunately, these actions have exacerbated the challenge of developing the base quotas for both 2011-2012 and will tighten the margins for these fishermen, which we are discussing today.

Specifically, NMFS proposes modifying its accounting of dead discards by subtracting 160 metric tons from the reduced TAC rather than allocating dead discards to specific categories. This reduces the TAC for all user-groups and unfairly penalizes groups that have successfully avoided dead discards. I am concerned that NMFS's proposal will have the counterproductive effect of removing incentives for fishermen to reduce discard rates in each category. I request that NMFS develop a comprehensive plan through cooperative research to reduce dead discards, develop technologies to avoid bluefin tuna bycatch where applicable, and work through the

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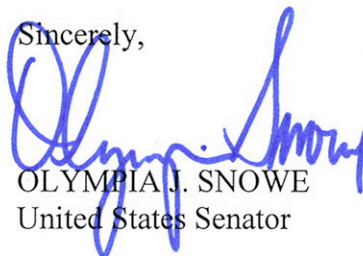
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ICCAT to recognize US tuna fishermen's leadership in protecting bluefin tuna and advocate for increased allocations for coastal communities like Portland. The bottom line is that this issue will continue to undermine efforts to maximize our harvest of bluefin tuna as the stock continues to rebuild. Simply reducing the catch does little to help our tuna fishermen now or in the future.

Again, I thank NMFS for travelling to Portland and I look forward to reviewing the rest of the public comments provided here today and working with you to maximize the sustainable harvest of America's Atlantic bluefin tuna.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Olympia J. Snowe", is written over the typed name and title.

OLYMPIA J. SNOWE
United States Senator