

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 15, 2012

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We are concerned that recent efforts by your administration to provide disaster relief for agricultural producers, including catfish farmers, affected by drought throughout the United States did not include assistance for the hardworking fishermen and fishing communities in New England.

In light of the deepening disaster faced by Massachusetts fishing communities, we write today to again express our support for a disaster declaration and federal assistance for New England fishermen.

Over the past two years, federal fishing regulators have stalled similar disaster declaration requests from New England states. It was at an October 2011 Congressional hearing that NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco promised to put Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick's disaster declaration request on the "fast track." Since then other New England states have filed similar requests.

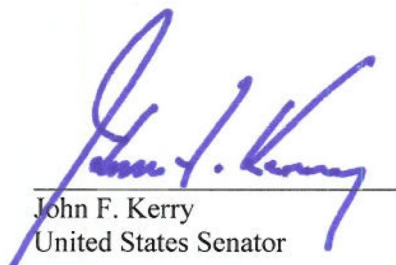
Earlier this month, we again urged the Department of Commerce and NOAA to declare a disaster and put together a plan to provide meaningful relief. The Massachusetts fishing industry has been devastated in recent years and the situation for our fishing communities is becoming increasingly desperate. According to recent estimates, annual catch limits for several important groundfish species next year could be reduced by between 45 percent and 73 percent. This unwelcome news comes at a time when the fleet size has already been decimated by NOAA regulations that have smaller independent operators and fishing communities struggling to survive. More than a third of the New England fleet stands idle and a centuries-old industry is at risk of collapse.


Before you took office, our hardworking fishermen and fishing businesses faced inflated fines and enforcement tactics that violated American standards for decent government conduct. An independent investigator hired by the Department of Commerce found that some of NOAA's misconduct was motivated by a thirst for monetary fines. The proceeds of these fines were used for travel to exotic locations, and the unnecessary purchase of boats for the personal use of NOAA employees.

While the focus continues to be on the situation facing our farmers and ranchers, the lack of recognition and corresponding help for New England fails to recognize our fishermen who endure harsh conditions and put their personal safety at risk to put food on our tables.

We urge you to intervene with the Department of Commerce and NOAA to provide disaster relief for the New England fishery. After two years, now is not the time for more delay.

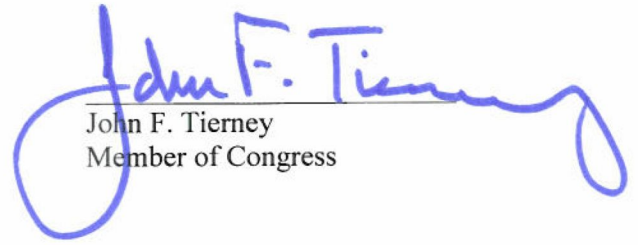
Sincerely,

  
John F. Kerry  
United States Senator

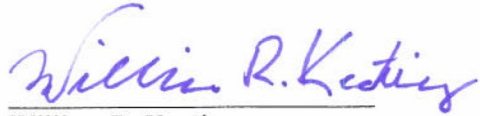
  
Scott P. Brown  
United States Senator



Barney Frank  
Member of Congress



John F. Tierney  
Member of Congress



William R. Keating  
Member of Congress