

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 27, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Room S-146, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators McConnell, Schumer, Cochran, and Leahy:

The damage left behind by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria remains devastating for many communities in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. We believe that Congress must provide further aid as soon as possible to assist in the relief and recovery efforts for our fellow American citizens. Additionally, as you begin preparing a supplemental appropriations package for communities struck by these hurricanes, we urge you to remember all the communities impacted by natural disasters, and include emergency supplemental funding for declared and ongoing fisheries disasters.

While the impacts of an extremely low run in a fishery or a complete fishery closure are harder to visualize than the impact of flood or wind damage, a collapsed fishery is indisputably a disaster for local and regional communities. Fishermen and women can make their yearly living during a single fishing season, and must continue to pay mortgages on their vessels, mooring fees, maintenance and feed their families while their income is almost entirely eliminated during a fishery closure or disaster. Currently, the Secretary of Commerce has declared nine disasters for fisheries in 2017, and another disaster assistance request is pending in southern Oregon and northern California. As a full accounting takes place and fishery seasons move forward in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic, it is likely there will also be fishery disaster declarations in those regions that deserve our full attention.

These fishery disasters threaten the bedrock industries in many coastal regions and economies, including commercial and recreational anglers, processors and supporting industries such as gear stores, boat repair facilities, and tourism. Fishery disasters have ripple effects that are felt throughout our communities and for years after the incidents. These industries supported 1.6 million full- and part-time jobs in fishing and across the broader economy in 2015 and contributed \$97 billion to the U.S. GDP.

It is essential that the Senate treat fishery disasters appropriately, and provide emergency funding that can enable fishermen and communities to recover from lost catches in the form of grants, job retraining, employment, and low interest loans. This emergency funding also helps makes the fisheries more resilient through fishery data collection, resource restoration, research, and fishing capacity reduction programs to prevent or lessen the effects of future disruptions to fisheries.

Thank you for attention to this letter and considering those affected by disasters across the United States as a disaster aid package is crafted. We look forward to working with you in the coming days to address these challenges and helping those impacted by recent hurricanes and other natural disasters across the nation.

Thank you for consideration. We look forward to working with you on this critical issue.

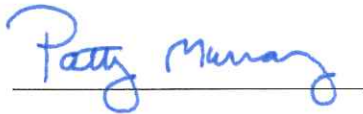


Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Sincerely,



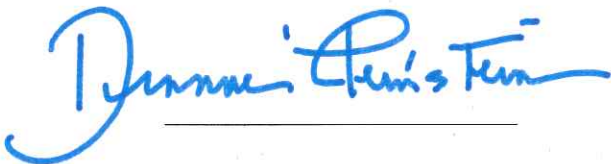
Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



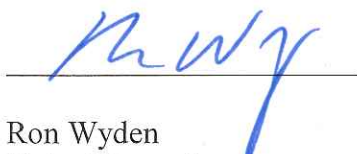
Dan Sullivan
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator