

# United States Senate

June 5, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

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

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer,

We write to reiterate and strengthen our call for the inclusion of additional fisheries assistance in the next COVID-19 recovery package. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, signed into law on March 27, 2020, included \$300 million in funding to assist fisheries affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. On May 7, 2020, the Department of Commerce divided that funding among 31 states, tribes, and territories. States are currently determining how to distribute their allocations among those eligible for aid, including the commercial fishing fleet, seafood processing companies, aquaculture businesses, and the for-hire recreational fishing fleet. Massachusetts was allocated \$28 million from the first round of aid, but far more assistance will be needed to address the full economic impact of this crisis on these sectors of the fishing industry, which is currently projected to reach \$500 million for the year in Massachusetts alone.

The fishing and seafood industries are essential drivers of the American economy, with \$5.6 billion worth of fisheries products landed and \$11.6 billion worth of fisheries products processed in 2018.<sup>1</sup> Compared to the previous five-year average, in March and April of this year, Massachusetts bivalve shellfish landings lost 60 percent of their value, lobster landings lost 40 percent of their value, recreational head boats have been completely shut down, and seafood processors have lost their usual restaurant market.<sup>2</sup> As the pandemic continues, the severity and magnitude of this crisis only become more apparent.

With an estimated annual revenue of \$1.4 billion, these four sectors — commercial fishing, aquaculture, seafood processing, and for-hire recreational fishing — expect pandemic-related losses of 35 percent, leading to approximately \$500 million in lost revenue over the year. The \$28 million in CARES Act fisheries assistance allocated to Massachusetts is not sufficient to help the four fisheries sectors survive revenue losses beyond April, and the pandemic is far from over. Preliminary data show that the total decrease in value of commercial landings in Massachusetts during March and April alone was around \$27 million, a figure that will increase substantially as the summer months would typically bring peak harvests.<sup>3</sup> In 2019, the lobster fishery landed \$4.03 million in March and April, yet landed \$81.7 million from June through

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<sup>1</sup> NOAA Fisheries, *Fisheries of the United States, 2018* (Feb. 21, 2020), <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/fisheries-united-states-2018>.

<sup>2</sup> Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, CARES Relief Advisory Panel Meeting slide deck (June 2, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

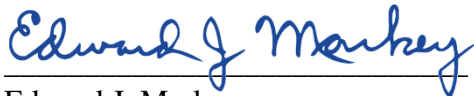
The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
June 5, 2020  
Page 2

December, a roughly six-fold increase in the average monthly rate of landings. Similarly, sea scallop landings in March 2019 netted \$25.8 million, yet by July, the monthly landings had more than doubled to \$55.3 million. Fishing companies depend upon these substantial summer harvests in order to keep workers employed and businesses afloat. Future fisheries assistance funding will have to be significantly higher in order to reflect the impact that the ongoing economic losses driven by the pandemic will have on the usual summer peak of landings and revenues.

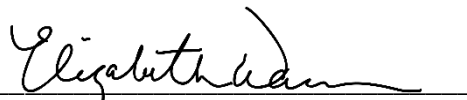
On May 6, 2020, we joined twenty-three of our senate colleagues in requesting at least \$1 billion in support for the fishing and seafood industries nationwide in a future relief package and \$2 billion in additional USDA Section 32 purchases. As we learn more about the ongoing nature of this crisis and the magnitude of its effect, it becomes increasingly clear that for the fishing and seafood industries in Massachusetts to be made whole, these sectors in our state will require a total of \$500 million in assistance. Without this additional aid, we face the real possibility of losing a significant portion of our fishing and seafood industries to economic challenges caused by COVID-19, forever changing the character of our working waterfronts.

We urge you to provide increased assistance for Massachusetts fisheries in the next COVID-19 recovery package.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator