

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

January 17, 2017

The Honorable Penny Pritzker
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Pritzker:

We write today regarding an issue of great concern to Connecticut's fishermen and maritime economy. The Department of Commerce, as you know, through the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), plays an integral role in helping to set the annual catch limits that govern the quantities of fish that can be caught in a given year. These limits can help to restore and sustain our nation's fish stocks, but when irresponsibly implemented based on flawed, outdated data and assumptions, they can have a direct and undue impact on the economic fortunes of fishermen operating from ports in our state.

On December 22, 2016, NMFS published a final rule drastically decreasing the previously proposed annual catch limits for several species of fish critical to the livelihoods of many Connecticut fishermen. Allowing these changes to become final would be disastrous for our state's commercial fishing industry and coastal economy. **In light of the potentially damaging economic consequences wrought by this new rule, we urge you to withdraw it immediately.**

The reductions proposed by this rule are dramatic: it cuts the 2017 catch limit for summer flounder by approximately thirty percent and further reduces the 2018 catch limit by sixteen percent. Under this new system, Connecticut would see its 2017 commercial summer flounder quota reduced by more than 50,000 pounds and its 2018 quota reduced by an additional 20,000 pounds. The rule also calls for a thirty-four percent reduction in the 2017 commercial quota for black sea bass, a limit that will only further compound the economic effects of the restrictions on summer flounder.

Connecticut's commercial fishermen are an integral part of our maritime workforce, contributing millions of dollars annually to our state's economy. Our fleet, however, has faced years of compounding stressors that affect the economic well-being of those who make their living on the sea. A reduction in annual catch limits this large, coupled with dramatic changes in

the quantity and location of fish stocks, would be yet another blow to Connecticut's coastal economy. These dramatic catch limit changes would cause a ripple effect up and down Connecticut's coast. The Department of Commerce should reevaluate these quotas before implementing them.

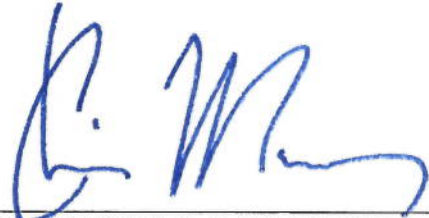
In addition, while we support efforts to maintain healthy fisheries and discourage overfishing, the existing quota allocation system has failed to keep up with a changing ocean. As climate change has driven fish that were once a mainstay in our waters further north, the byzantine and outdated allocation system currently in place has rendered fishermen in Connecticut today unable to catch economically sustainable quantities of fish off their own shores. Connecticut fishermen remain on their docks while boats from states like Virginia and North Carolina freely fish in waters a few miles off our coast. As a result, the reductions proposed by this rule would only exacerbate this already dire and unfair situation. We respectfully request that you prevent its implementation until a modern and equitable quota allocation process that reflects these changing realities can be established.

We thank you for your consideration of this request and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY
United States Senate



JOE COURTNEY
Member of Congress