

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 9, 2002

The Honorable Donald L. Evans
Secretary, US Department of Commerce
14th Street and Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Evans:

We are writing to ask that you intervene immediately in an important decision affecting Oregon's coastal economy.

As you know, Oregon continues to lead the nation in unemployment. The economic recession has had a disproportionate effect on the high-tech and natural resource industries, such as forest products and fishing. Oregon's commercial fishing industry helped build our state and continues to employ thousands of people involved in catching, processing and distributing high quality seafood across the country. But that industry, its workers and their families, are being threatened by drastic reductions to the amount of fish that can be caught off the Oregon coast - reductions that may be made with little regard to the economic consequences.

Management of the multi-species Pacific groundfish fishery has been complicated by indications of population declines in some of the more than 80 groundfish species caught off of Oregon, Washington, and California. Members of the Pacific Fisheries Management Council (the Council) - including fishermen, environmentalists and regulators - agree that these fish stocks must be rebuilt and have made management recommendations consistent with this goal.

The Council has tried to balance the need to rebuild the particular stocks that need additional protections with continued harvest of healthy stocks. The Magnuson-Stevens Act, which established the regional fishery management councils, not only calls for this balance but requires the Council to fully consider the local economic impacts in making its recommendations. Again, we remind you that the fishing communities of Oregon are in their worst financial condition in recent history and are depending upon you to carefully craft a balanced management plan.

We are also aware that the data and analyses underlying this year's decisions contain a large number of uncertainties. We encourage the Council to give that information a searching review, assure that its recommendations are based on the most reasonable interpretations, and take into account the actual observations of coastal fishermen about the increasing abundance of some of these stocks.

Secretary Evans
September 9, 2002
Page 2

Earlier this year, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) overturned the measured recommendations of the Council regarding the whiting fishery. This action encourages the perception that NMFS' judgement is based on fear of litigation rather than the careful balance crafted by the Council. Congress created the regional Council structure to better inform federal fishery management, not to have them ignored.

This week the Council will meet in Portland, Oregon to recommend catch limits for 2003. It is vital that NMFS respect the difficult decisions that the Council will be making, and work cooperatively and supportively with them. We urge you to direct NMFS to adopt reasonable 2003 groundfish catch guidelines made by the Council that consider sound science and the economic impact to coastal communities.

We thank you for your consideration of our request on this important issue and hope that you will not hesitate to let us know if we can provide you with any additional information or assistance.

Sincerely,



Gordon H. Smith
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator