

September 2016

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 16, 2016

Eileen Sobeck
Assistant Administrator of Fisheries
NOAA Fisheries
1315 Ease West highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Ms. Sobeck,

We are writing at the request of Pacific Northwest fishermen and local seafood processors who have expressed concern about the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) delay in the implementation of the new trawl gear regulation package for the groundfish fishery.

At the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) meeting in March of this year, the Council voted to approve the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel's final preferred alternatives to the Trawl Catch Share Program gear regulations. These new regulations would allow the fleet to configure gear in a manner that is most efficient for catching target species, while best excluding non-target species. These final preferred alternatives to the gear regulations were passed with the unanimous support of the Council, including NMFS.

After the adoption of these recommendations at the March meeting, NMFS stated that these new regulations would be promulgated by January 1, 2017. This timing is essential because after new stock assessments showed that many rockfish stocks had been rebuilt years ahead of schedule, the PFMC approved rockfish trawl allocations for the 2017-2018 biennium that will allow for the first targeted rockfish fishery in almost 20 years.

Now, with less than three months until implementation, some PFMC members are being told by NMFS staff that these regulations will be delayed by more than six months, most likely until the summer of 2017. Delaying these regulations will essentially limit the rockfish fishery to the latter half of the year, during the height of the whiting season. This will create crippling capacity and supply and demand problems for both the fleet and processors, dramatically reducing the value of rockfish landed during 2017.

We ask that you release the new Trawl Catch Share Program gear regulations by January 1, 2017, as was originally scheduled. In addition, we request an update on the status of this project and further detail on the cause of the delay by November 15, 2016.

Sincerely,



KURT SCHRADER
Member of Congress



RON WYDEN
U.S. Senator



PETER DeFAZIO
Member of Congress



JEFF MERKLEY
U.S. Senator



JARED HUFFMAN
Member of Congress



PATCY MURRAY
U.S. Senator



GREG WALDEN
Member of Congress



MARIA CANTWELL
U.S. Senator



JAMIE HERRERA BEUTLER
Member of Congress



DENNY HECK
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EARL BLUMENAUER
Member of Congress



SUZANNE BONAMICI
Member of Congress



DEREK KILMER
Member of Congress