

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 15, 2020

Chris Oliver
Assistant Administrator
NOAA Fisheries
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Barry Thom
Regional Administrator, West Coast Region
NOAA Fisheries
1201 NE Lloyd Boulevard
Portland, OR 97232

Dear Assistant Administrator Oliver and Regional Administrator Thom,

We write to ask that your administration work with our partners and constituents in the fisheries industry to give them the flexibility they need to protect both their workers and their businesses during the coronavirus pandemic.

These are unprecedented times, and our constituents in fishing communities up and down the Pacific Coast are looking to your agency to take additional temporary steps to assist the fishing industry. Commercial fishing is classified as an essential industry in this pandemic. The health and safety of everyone involved in this industry is of paramount importance to us. Fishing crews, processing plant workers, and essential support service providers are working hard to maintain the food supply chain, keep our constituents employed, and support coastal economies.

Our partners at organizations including the Pacific Fishery Management Council, West Coast Seafood Processors Association, Midwater Trawlers Cooperative, Fishermen's Marketing Association, Oregon Trawl Commission, and United Catcher Boats have reached out to us with concerns about many issues, chief among them the continued requirement for at-sea and shoreside observer coverage in the Pacific Coast Trawl Groundfish fishery as though it were business as usual. Observers travel around, moving between vessels and shoreside facilities frequently, essentially acting as a potential vector for the disease. Even if none of the working observers feel sick, there is certainly the possibility that some of them are asymptomatic carriers which not only endangers themselves but everyone they are in close contact with during the course of their job. The Pacific Coast trawl industry has worked hard, in partnership with NMFS, to monitor the catch and bycatch in their fisheries. They request flexibility around observer requirements, and we want to ensure that their requests are heard and honored.

There are additional areas in which our industry partners have requested your assistance in easing financial burdens and modifying requirements to ensure that the highest health and safety standards are being upheld while the industry continues to operate under increasingly challenging market

conditions. We have attached letters from several Pacific Coast industry groups, and request that you work with them on the recommendations listed in their letters.

Thank you for your consideration, and for working with us and with the fishing industry to ensure that this essential industry can continue to provide jobs and seafood in a safe, healthy manner.

Sincerely,



KURT SCHRADER
Member of Congress



RON WYDEN
U.S. Senator



PETER A. DeFAZIO
Member of Congress



JEFFREY A. MERKLEY
U.S. Senator



MIKE THOMPSON
Member of Congress



SUZANNE BONAMICI
Member of Congress

CC: Phil Anderson, Chairman, Pacific Fishery Management Council