



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

September 4, 2013

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chairwoman
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice, and Science
and Related Agencies
142 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice, Science
and Related Agencies
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski and Ranking Member Shelby:

The Department of Commerce recently declared a fishery disaster for the oyster industry Apalachicola Bay, Florida, and we are committed to securing funding for this declaration. We strongly support the Fisheries Disaster Mitigation Fund in the FY 2014 Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations bill, and we look forward to assisting your efforts to build support for this fund as the appropriations process continues.

The state of Florida requested a Commercial Fisheries Failure declaration from the U.S. Department of Commerce on September 6, 2012. After careful review of the data provided by the state of Florida, the declaration was granted by the Commerce Department on August 12, 2013. According to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), production estimates from the 2012 oyster harvesting season are at the lowest levels in 20 years, and oyster densities have decreased from 430 to 64 oysters per square meter. As a result, over 2,500 jobs have been impacted in the Apalachicola Bay region. The state of Florida projects that with the continued decline in landings, revenue losses are expected to increase and remain lower than the historical average until the oyster population begins to rebound, which could take up to three years.

Your committee's recommendation for \$150 million for the Fisheries Disaster Mitigation Fund included in the reported version of the FY 2014 Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations bill is a strong first step to bring relief to the fishing communities that have been affected by natural disasters or fishery failures over the last few years. While the funding needs for the outstanding declared fishery disasters are unclear, ensuring that there is funding through the regular appropriations process will provide more certainty to the affected fishing communities. We commend you for your leadership on this issue.

The accompanying report language for the FY 2014 Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations bill states that the \$150 million funding allocation should be prioritized for fishery disasters that were declared in 2012. While the fishery disaster in Apalachicola Bay occurred over the course of 2012, FDACS and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission

collected landings data April 2013. Therefore, the Commerce Department was not able to make disaster declaration until early August 2013. To that end, we request that you change this funding prioritization report language to include declarations [and disasters by date of enactment of this legislation]. This change would ensure that the communities in the Apalachicola Bay region would have the same opportunities for disaster funding afforded to other fisherman nationwide.

We understand that several regions have recently experienced fisheries disasters and are also in need of funding for economic losses and ecosystem restoration. We would like to join the coalition of Senators who represent these areas and also support this fishery disaster spending in the appropriations bill.

Once again, we thank you for your work on the FY 2014 FY 2014 Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations bill, and we look forward to supporting its passage in the Senate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Nelson" with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Senator Bill Nelson

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marco Rubio" with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Senator Marco Rubio