

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

September 2, 2020

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Ross:

We write in support of the State of Rhode Island's formal request to designate a fishery failure in the Atlantic herring fishery under Section 312(1a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. We have enclosed a copy of the request.

Although NOAA Fisheries and regional management councils took several actions to improve the health of the Atlantic herring stock, the most recent stock assessment continues to show low recruitment. Further, the Rhode Island-based fishery's annual landings decreased by more than fifteen million pounds and annual revenues declined by nearly \$2 million since 2014, despite steady participation.

The Atlantic herring fishery is of vital importance to Rhode Island's fishing industry. In these uncertain times, when our seafood industry as a whole has suffered massive economic losses, it is crucial we provide the support our fishermen need.

We look forward to your swift action and thank you for your attention to this critical matter to our state and our constituents.

Sincerely,



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



James R. Langevin
Member of Congress



David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress

Enclosure



RHODE ISLAND
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
235 Promenade Street, Room 425
Providence, Rhode Island 02908

August 31, 2020

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Re: Atlantic Herring Fishery Disaster Request

Dear Secretary Ross,

I am writing you this letter on behalf of Governor Gina M. Raimondo. The Rhode Island commercial fishing industry has remained productive and competitive in recent decades by relying on the diversity of the fleet to target different species as stock statuses change and fisheries management dictate. Part of our diverse fishing portfolio involves the Atlantic herring fishery, with both large-scale fishing operations targeting herring, as well as a smaller opportunistic fleet that historically generated landings during the winter months when many other species had moved to offshore grounds. This fishery has been an important source of revenue for a portion of the fleet when they might otherwise lack a seasonal opportunity. In recent years, the herring stock has experienced low recruitment, resulting in historically low coastwide landings, including for our Rhode Island fleet.

As you are aware, multiple New England states with vested interest in the herring fishery have contacted the administration to express their concerns. At times, the herring fishery can be a mixed species fishery where significant declines in total allowable catches also affect the fleet's ability to target species such as mackerel. In addition, herring has been used as bait in the American Lobster and Jonah crab fisheries which, along with vessel owners, captains and crew, and shoreside processors, are an important part of the Southern New England inshore and offshore fleet and contribute to the state's overall fisheries related economy.

The science community and fishery managers from NOAA Fisheries and regional management councils have taken numerous actions to constrain the herring catch; however, the Atlantic herring stock is not rebuilding. The most recent stock assessment continues to show a decline in the spawning stock biomass and poor recruitment, which are expected to continue into the near future. While the cause of the poor recruitment is not well understood by fishermen and fisheries scientists, this period of low recruitment ultimately prompted the New England Fishery Management Council and NOAA Fisheries to reduce catch limits and implement other management measures to constrain the annual harvest.

The Rhode Island-based fishery has seen a steady decline in landings (-93%) and ex-vessel value (-81%) over the last six years, while participation has stayed relatively stable.

Year	Lbs landed	Value	Avg Price	# Vessels
2014	16,505,456	2,276,771	0.17	22
2015	10,430,744	1,373,379	0.17	26
2016	9,538,587	1,525,424	0.19	27
2017	4,535,139	938,667	0.18	27
2018	2,159,432	554,660	0.22	26
2019	1,233,325	435,817	0.3	23

Similar to other New England states that have historically relied on the herring resource as part of their annual fishing activity, the State of Rhode Island would like to formally request the designation of a fishery failure in the Atlantic herring fishery under Section 312(1a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

Thank you for considering this request. Please let us know if you have questions or would like to review a more in-depth analysis of the impacts of the herring stock status on Rhode Island's fishery participants and the associated businesses.

Sincerely,



Janet Coit
Director