



09/03/2024

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
United States Senate
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cantwell,

We represent the commercial salmon fleet, for hire charter vessels, and charter river guides in California, all of which are small family businesses that depend on Pacific salmon for our livelihoods and to provide food and recreation for fellow Californians. We are writing to urgently request your support in expediting the distribution of the 2023 and 2024 Pacific Salmon Disaster Relief funds. As you are aware, salmon fishing communities have been facing unprecedented challenges due to the back-to-back closures of the 2023 and 2024 ocean salmon seasons, resulting from critically low population estimates for Sacramento and Klamath River fall Chinook salmon.

On April 6, 2023, the Pacific Fishery Management Council unanimously recommended this closure, and Lieutenant Governor Eleni Kounalakis promptly requested a federal fishery disaster declaration, which was approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce on October 30, 2023. Following this approval, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) was notified on February 15, 2024, that \$20,625,729 had been allocated by the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to respond to this disaster. Although this amount was less than requested and disappointing, we supported the spend plan developed by CDFW as the best option to try and get relief to our members without further delay.

In April 2023, representatives of the salmon industry stood side by side with elected leaders who promised to distribute funds with all due haste, recognizing the severity of the economic collapse. However, despite these allocations and the efforts of Senator Huffman, Senator Padilla, and others, the funds have yet to be distributed. The prolonged delay is causing severe hardship for ocean fishermen, charter vessels, and river guides, all of whom are struggling to

survive. Many have already been forced to leave the industry due to the lack of any mitigation measures, and we fear our fleets may never recover

We simply cannot afford to wait any longer. It is our understanding that the 2023 disaster package is currently stuck in the NOAA Grant Program, and your intervention could help expedite the final stages of this process. These funds are a lifeline for the affected communities, and the continued delay is jeopardizing the future of our commercial fishing industry. We are now in the midst of a second closure for 2024, and it is imperative that not only the relief funds for 2023 are distributed immediately but also that the 2024 Disaster Program is processed quickly so we do not face similar delays. If the same timelines and bureaucratic delays are encountered with the upcoming 2024 funding, it is likely that fishing communities will not see that money until 2026. We must do better.

We respectfully urge you to intervene and assist in the swift distribution of these critical funds, and to ensure that 2024 disaster funds are more expeditiously appropriated and distributed to those who are economically suffering. Your leadership and support are essential in ensuring that these communities receive the relief they so desperately need.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to your support and action.

Sincerely,

Lisa Damrosch
Executive Director
Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations

James Stone
Executive Director and President
Northern California Guides and Sportsmen's Association

John Atkinson
Golden Gate Fishermen's Association

Cc: Gavin Newsom, Governor, State of California
Senator Alex Padilla
Senator Laphonza Butler
Representative Jared Huffman
Representative Adam Schiff
Wade Crowfoot, Secretary, California Natural Resources Agency
Chuck Bonham, Director, California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Craig Schuman, Marine Region Manager, California Department of Fish and Wildlife