

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 25, 2015

The Honorable John Culberson
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
House Appropriations Committee
H-309, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chaka Fattah
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
House Appropriations Committee
1016 Longworth
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Culberson and Ranking Member Fattah:

We request your assistance to provide adequate levels of funding for fiscal year (FY) 2016 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) marine fishery data and resource management programs through the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

Fisheries conservation and management requirements have increased substantially since the last reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). The fishery management councils and NOAA Fisheries have imposed a variety of restrictions designed to ensure sustainable fisheries and rebuild overfished stocks. Reductions in harvest quotas to avoid bycatch of overfished stocks and vast closed areas to protect both fish stocks and their habitats have been implemented. Progress on ocean and fisheries initiatives has been slowed by the sheer amount of scientific knowledge needed to provide conservation while allowing sustainable commercial and recreational harvests to occur on healthy fish populations.

For FY 2016, NOAA is proposing structural changes to NMFS Operations, Research, and Facilities (ORF) budget accounts. Many accounts have been grouped into one broader Programs, Projects, and Activities (PPA) category. These proposed changes are reflected in our requests.

We would like to provide the following views and comments on core NOAA marine programs:

PPA: Regional Councils and Fisheries Commissions

- **Regional Councils and Fisheries Commissions:** The Regional Fishery Management Councils ("RFMC") are the workhorses of the Federal regulatory process for marine fisheries. Each RFMC is working to revise fishery management plans under its jurisdiction to end overfishing and rebuild fish stocks. This line item also funds the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Fisheries Management Act, a fisheries management program directed at inter-jurisdictional fisheries on the East Coast and administered by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The three Interstate Marine Fisheries Commissions funded annually within this account to assist the States, NOAA Fisheries and the Councils develop and monitor management regimes for fisheries that are inter-jurisdictional in nature. **We support \$33,470,000 specifically for Regional Councils and Fisheries Commissions. Inter-Jurisdictional Fisheries Act (IJFA) Grants** (see

below) are also proposed to be included in this PPA, bringing the total for the Regional Councils and Fisheries Commission to \$35,975,000.

- **Inter-Jurisdictional Fisheries Act Grants:** The IJFA was established by Congress to promote state activities in support of the management of inter-jurisdictional fishery resources throughout their range. The IJFA supports the monitoring and assessment programs of the States and Interstate Commissions, as well as funding for research to gauge the health of commercially and recreationally important fish stocks. The IJFA is a matching grant program. Funds received by the States are matched on a dollar-for-dollar basis. This is a successful example of an effective and affordable federal/state partnership designed specifically for the management of nearshore fisheries with inter-jurisdictional boundaries. These funds are also used to combat the spread of marine invasive species. **Congress appropriated \$2,500,000 in FY 2015 for the Inter-Jurisdictional Fisheries Act (“IJFA”) Grants to States Program, restoring this program after cuts in FY 2011 and 2012. We support the FY 2016 request of \$2,505,000, which accounts for slight inflationary increases, to maintain this important collaboration between the Federal Government and the States.**

PPA: Fisheries Data Collections, Surveys, and Assessments

- **Fish Information Networks:** The key data programs for the Nation are funded through the Fishery Information Networks. These include the commercial fishery data program for the West Coast (“PACFIN”); the commercial fishery data program for the North Pacific (“AKFIN”); and the recreational fishery data program (“RECFIN”). These are joint federal-state programs designed to collect, assimilate, and distribute baseline fisheries data. The information is used by the North Pacific and Pacific Fishery Management Councils, NOAA Fisheries, the West Coast States, and the U.S.-Canada Pacific Salmon Commission to manage annual fishing seasons. **We recommend funding at the FY 2016 request of \$22,080,000.**
- **Expand Annual Stock Assessments—Improve Data Collection:** The fishery stock assessment account funds the collection of adequate and timely fishery dependent data, a Federal obligation strengthened by the Congress when it reauthorized the MSA. **We recommend full funding of the FY 2016 budget request of \$73,749,000.**

PPAs: Fisheries Data Collections, Surveys, and Assessments and Habitat Management and Restoration

- **Survey and Monitoring Projects:** These are long-term, extended time series stock assessments used to manage fisheries throughout the Nation. For the West Coast, these include West Coast groundfish; the Alaska crab fisheries; Alaska pollock and groundfish, rockfish, halibut, and sablefish. Both the Pacific Fishery Management Council and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council rely upon these fishery surveys to determine annual catch limits and monitor the health of these stocks. **We support the FY 2016 requested level of \$24,503,000.**

PPA: Habitat Conservation and Restoration

- **Habitat Conservation and Restoration:** These programs support efforts to protect and restore coastal and marine habitat to rebuild commercial and recreational fisheries, recover species, and improve the resiliency of coastal communities. Habitat loss and degradation directly threaten the sustainability of our nation's fisheries and the communities that depend on a healthy coast. Funding for habitat restoration directly confronts these challenges. This includes the Community-based Restoration Program ("CBRP"). Through public-private collaboration with states, localities, citizens' organizations, businesses, and colleges and universities, CBRP accomplishes on-the-ground projects to restore the nation's coastal, marine, and migratory fish habitat. **We recommend that Habitat Conservation and Restoration be funded at the very least at the FY 2016 request level of \$57,885,000, with a minimum of \$25,877,000 to maintain level restoration funding for the Community-based Restoration Program (including Coastal Ecosystem Resiliency Grants).**

Program: Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund

- **Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund (PCSRF):** The States of Oregon, Washington, California, Alaska, and Idaho must submit projects on a competitive basis to promote the recovery and sustainability of wild salmon and steelhead stocks. Projects supported by the PCSRF have improved management practices and increased the availability and quality of salmon and steelhead habitat. **We believe that the conservation benefits realized by PCSRF projects justify the base funding amount of \$65,000,000 contained in the FY 2015 appropriations bill and urge that this amount be appropriated in FY 2016 as well.**

PPA: ESA Salmon

- **Pacific and Atlantic Salmon:** Within the Protected Species Research Program, \$60,000,000 was appropriated for Pacific Salmon and \$5,500,000 to Atlantic Salmon in FY 2015. This program strives to recover and sustain all threatened and endangered salmon populations to maintain healthy ecosystems. **We urge that this program be funded at the requested levels of \$62,338,000 and \$6,163,000 for Pacific and Atlantic salmon, respectively.**

PPA: Salmon Management

- **Salmon Management:** This account supports many important salmon management activities on the West Coast and Alaska. These activities include but are not limited to the operation and maintenance of the Mitchell Act hatcheries; the mark and coded wire tag programs; the Pacific Salmon Treaty and the Chinook Salmon Agreement; and ongoing work to establish a genetic stock identification database. **We support funding for this program at the amount of \$33,200,000. This represents an increase of \$3,000,000 over current funding but only partially restores a cut of \$6,000,000 from FY 2013 levels. The increase will help meet obligations faced by the Pacific Salmon**

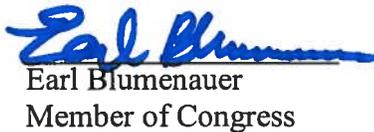
Commission as well growing demands on the Mitchell Act hatchery system to meet production goals while implementing hatchery reforms.

We appreciate your support for the NOAA Fisheries marine resource conservation and data management programs. We ask that you strongly support these budget items as part of your efforts to produce a Commerce-Justice-Science appropriations bill for FY 2016.

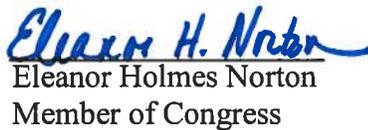
Signed,


Jared Huffman
Member of Congress


Mike Thompson
Member of Congress


Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress


Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress


Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress


Sam Farr
Member of Congress


Lois Capps
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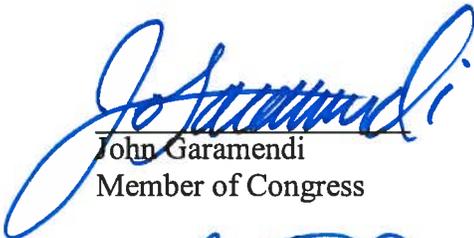
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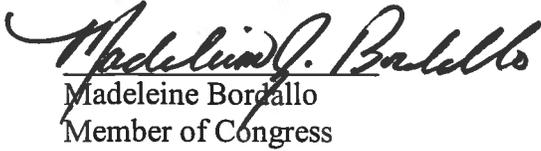
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