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August 13, 1998

The Honorable William M. Daley  
Secretary of Commerce  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
14th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am formally requesting you declare a fishery resource disaster pursuant to Section 312 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Act) so assistance can be provided to the adversely impacted fishers, communities, small business owners, and their employees living in the disaster area. I am hopeful during your upcoming visit you will have an opportunity to assess the disaster situation firsthand.

On July 30, 1998, I declared a disaster for the Bristol Bay, Kuskokwim, and Yukon River regions in western and interior Alaska due to the catastrophic collapse of the salmon returns. The failure of these salmon runs has been linked to weather-related record high ocean temperatures which disrupted the Bering Sea food chain causing food stress and mortality in fish, seabird, and marine mammal populations. A more detailed description of the disaster area and of conditions causing the disaster are set out in the enclosures to this letter. I have activated the state emergency operations plan and have committed state resources in a comprehensive response.

As you will recall, in 1997 Alaska also suffered unprecedented low salmon returns in the Bristol Bay and Kuskokwim River drainages. In response, funds were made available under Section 312 of the Act. The state provided personal economic assistance and is in the process of providing matching grants to communities so those federal funds can be utilized for employment and needed economic development projects.

The failure of the salmon runs this year is more widespread and, due to the collapse last year, the devastating impact of the commercial fisheries crash has been compounded. As described in the enclosures, the 1998 Yukon chinook catch was the lowest since Alaska statehood. The Bristol Bay sockeye catch was the lowest since 1977. There are more than 80 communities in the disaster area, and all are dependent upon salmon for economic and social survival. The situation this year has deteriorated; and individuals in the communities are unable to pay for food, essential utilities, and home heating fuel now and through the upcoming winter. Further, nearly all of these communities rely on subsistence to supplement their cash economy. In some

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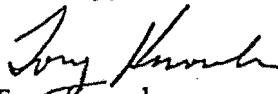
communities, this disaster has caused a serious depletion in these traditional subsistence food sources.

As described in the enclosed documents, the state is already engaged in a comprehensive effort to provide desperately needed assistance and services to affected residents of the disaster area. We have also requested the President declare a major disaster.

A declaration under Section 312 is needed to expand the types of assistance we have been and are able to provide. Specifically, financial assistance is needed to assist the affected communities and to improve fisheries research, management, and coordination to help restore the fisheries and prevent similar failures in the future. While climatic change cannot be prevented, there are things government, as the stewards of the resource, can do to restore fisheries, to anticipate changes in production so that similar dramatic changes do not lead to economic failures, and to prepare those dependent upon the resource for those changes. We will be discussing funding under the Act with our Congressional Delegation.

I appreciate your attention to this matter. If I may be of further assistance, please call me at (907) 465-3986 or have a member of your staff call John Katz of my Washington D.C., office at (202) 624-5858.

Sincerely,

  
Tony Knowles  
Governor

**Enclosures**

**Attachment 1 Disaster Declaration**

**Attachment 2 ADF&G analysis**

**Attachment 3 Salmon Cabinet Assessment**

cc. **The Honorable Ted Stevens**  
**The Honorable Frank Murkowski**  
**The Honorable Don Young**  
**John Katz, Governor's D.C. office**  
**Jake Lestenkof, Commissioner, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs**  
**Mike Irwin, Commissioner, Department of Community and Regional Affairs**