



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND  
**OFFICE OF GOVERNOR GINA M. RAIMONDO**

October 14, 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:

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.

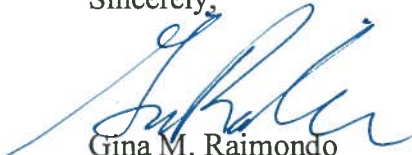
The Rhode Island-based fishery has seen a steady decline in landings (-93%) and ex-vessel value (-81%) over the last six years, while participation has stayed relatively stable.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Lbs landed</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Avg Price</b>	<b># Vessels</b>
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,



Gina M. Raimondo  
Governor