

Office of the Governor
State of Louisiana

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September 26, 2023

The Honorable Gina Raimondo
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
14th and Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Raimondo:

I write to you today to urgently request a declaration of a fishery disaster as allowed under Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) for both the federal and state waters shrimp fishery in Louisiana.

As indicated in my recent correspondence to President Biden, the many small, family-owned commercial shrimping businesses in Louisiana are facing an unprecedented risk of collapse due to the devastating impacts that large volumes of imported shrimp are having on domestic shrimp dockside prices. Impacts from these anthropogenic factors have caused dramatic unexpected losses, resulting in a serious economic impact for fishers and their communities. As such, this human caused fishery disaster and commercial fisheries failure is in need of immediate and substantive attention from the federal government and for support through any federal means available. Our local shrimping businesses are facing an economic catastrophe with 2023 (July 2022 – June 2023) dockside prices at \$1.14 per pound compared to \$2.78 per pound in 2014.

The cause of this disaster and commercial fishery failure is not the result of a mismanaged resource or the result of a significant environmental change. Instead, this crisis is the result of economic and regulatory factors beyond the control of shrimp fishers and fishery managers. The allowance of an abundance of cheap, imported shrimp into the national marketplace has caused prices for our domestic fishermen to fall to an unsustainable low level. This level of imports is indicative of regulatory failure from a lack of health inspections, uneven tariff enforcement, inadequate anti-dumping enforcement, and undetected seafood fraud. The disaster is man-made and beyond the control of fishery managers to mitigate through conservation and management measures. There has been a significant loss of access to the shrimp resource since shrimpers cannot afford to fish due to low dockside prices compared to high cost fishing-related expenses. When shrimpers do not fish, there are cascading effects throughout the regional economy from

processing facilities, to distributors, to restaurants and grocery stores, to local communities, and beyond.

The following are additional details for you to consider related to this disaster declaration request:

- Volumes of imported shrimp are so large that they have caused the price shrimp fishers receive for their catch to have declined for years, but this year's prices are at an unprecedented low level that has brought the activity of the industry to a halt. Dockside value of Louisiana shrimp is more than 30% lower than the average of the past five years and nearly 40% lower than the average of the past decade.
- Current tariff levels on imported shrimp do very little to curb the volume of imported shrimp.
- Tariff monies were once available to shrimp businesses to offset annual business expenses, but are now directed into the U.S. Treasury (the "Byrd Amendment" that set aside tariff monies for shrimpers was repealed in 2005) leaving shrimpers with little resources to withstand the tremendous impacts of this high level of low-priced imports.
- Despite anti-dumping provisions being renewed against certain countries, the volume of imported shrimp continues to surge into the U.S. as other countries develop shrimp aquaculture industries intended for export.
- An extremely small percentage of imported seafood is inspected by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for banned substances, leading to a public health concern for consumers and allowing for large volumes of shrimp product to enter the country without inspection.
- Imported seafood products that fail inspections at certain ports are rerouted by suppliers to other U.S. ports of entry, and still are able to enter into commerce instead of being destroyed or permanently turned away.
- Lingering COVID-19 impacts to restaurants and impacts of inflation on purchasing power have reduced consumption of domestic shrimp with consumers oftentimes choosing less-expensive imported products, or foregoing seafood altogether and replacing with other protein sources.
- The industry lacks sufficient cold storage capacity to accept domestic product. As we understand from our shrimp industry, the vast majority of cold storage capacity is currently held by imported seafood. Since imported shrimp have displaced available space, our shrimpers will continue to face a lack of demand for future catch.
- Current food labeling laws allow for misrepresentation of imported seafood as domestic product if imported seafood is processed in the United States. This compounds the injury of imports to our shrimpers, as consumers are unable to effectively assess what is truly a domestic product. This limits the ability of our shrimpers to differentiate their product in the marketplace.

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We are extremely grateful for any assistance you and your department can provide to our shrimp industry. The Department of Commerce has long had a substantial role in the success of the U.S. shrimp industry that is so crucial to the cultural fabric of our state. An official federal fisheries disaster declaration on the basis of a commercial fisheries failure from these myriad anthropogenic causes, including regulatory factors, may help in obtaining federal financial assistance for our fishers, processors, and docks to weather these conditions and preserve the industry that has existed for generations in Louisiana. The disaster declaration is a first, crucial step in securing funding that can provide relief to the shrimpers facing substantial losses of income from these conditions.

Thank you for considering this critical request. If you have any questions related to this request, please work directly with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries by contacting Assistant Secretary Patrick Banks at 225.765.2370 or via email at pbanks@wlf.la.gov.

Sincerely,



John Bel Edwards
Governor