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OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR



STATE CAPITOL
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA 36130

KAY IVEY
GOVERNOR

(334) 242-7100
FAX: (334) 242-3282

STATE OF ALABAMA

October 3, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Raimondo:

I write to you today to urgently request the declaration of a fishery resource 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 fisheries in Alabama. I also ask that you review United States shrimp import tariff policies that could offer long-term benefits for the Alabama shrimping industry.

Many small, family-owned commercial shrimping businesses in Alabama 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 commercial fishery failure due to a human-caused fishery resource disaster needs immediate and substantive attention from the federal government. Our local shrimping businesses are facing an economic catastrophe with 2023 dockside prices at \$1.64/pound compared to \$3.01/pound in 2013. When accounting for inflation, 2013 dockside prices would be more than \$4.00 a pound today.

The cause of this fishery resource disaster 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 shrimpers 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 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.

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


- The increasing volumes of imported shrimp have caused the price shrimpers receive for their catch to decline for years, but this year's prices are at an unprecedented low level that has brought the industry to a halt. Dockside value of shrimp is more than 60% lower than the price a decade ago, even as inflation has added far greater pressures to the industry.
- 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 few 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 United States as other countries develop shrimp aquaculture industries specifically 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 to enter the country without inspection.
- Impacts of inflation on purchasing power have reduced consumption of domestic shrimp, with consumers often choosing less-expensive imported products or forgoing seafood altogether and replacing it with other protein sources.
- 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.

We would be 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 fishery resource disaster declaration based on a commercial fishery failure from these myriad anthropogenic causes, including regulatory factors, may help in obtaining federal financial assistance for our fishers and processors to weather these conditions and preserve this critical industry in Alabama. 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.

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Thank you for considering this critical request. If you have any questions related to this request, please work directly with Commissioner Chris Blankenship at the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. He can be reached at 334-242-3486 or via email at dcnr.commissioner@dcnr.alabama.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kay Ivey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kay Ivey
Governor