

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2405

June 26, 2019

COMMITTEE ON
APPROPRIATIONS

COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION,
AND FORESTRY

COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND
NATURAL RESOURCES

COMMITTEE ON
RULES AND
ADMINISTRATION

The Honorable Wilbur Ross, Jr.
Secretary of Commerce
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Ross:

The Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Act (Public Law 116-20), enacted on June 6, 2019, provides \$150 million to the Department of Commerce for fishery disaster assistance. As you evaluate requests for fishery disaster relief and oversee the distribution of these funds, I respectfully request that you give careful consideration to the challenges facing the fishing and seafood communities on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Months of record rainfall, spring runoff, and disastrous flooding throughout the Mississippi River Basin has resulted in excess nutrient loading to the Gulf of Mexico. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has forecasted the hypoxic zone in the Gulf to reach record size this summer. The negative effects on all segments of Mississippi's fishing and seafood industries are becoming more evident each day. On May 31, 2019, Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant submitted a request to you for a fishery disaster determination under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

Subject to the availability of appropriations, section 315 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (16 U.S.C. 1864) provides you the authority to establish a regional economic transition program to provide immediate disaster relief assistance to commercial and recreational fishermen, charter fishing operations, domestic seafood processors, and owners of related fishery infrastructure affected by a catastrophic regional fishery disaster. Given the mounting challenges on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, existing authorities under current law, and available funding, I urge your department to take swift action to provide fishery disaster relief, as requested by Governor Bryant.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to continuing to work with you to help the people of the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Sincerely,



CINDY HYDE-SMITH
United States Senator