

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

February 28, 2017

The Honorable Wilbur Ross  
Secretary  
Office of the Secretary  
Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Ave., N.W.  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Ross:

We are writing to express our concerns regarding the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) vote to approve devastating restrictions on New Jersey's fishing community and urge you to consider delaying any reductions or changes in summer flounder fishing quotas until a new stock assessment can be completed and a new approach can be crafted. Additionally, we urge you to prioritize the completion of such a stock assessment in the coming year in order to better understand the status of the summer flounder stock and ensure that New Jersey fisherman are not unduly burdened by the lack of sufficient data.

As you are aware, after the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) issued its Rule to Implement Fishing Year 2017-2018 Summer Flounder Specifications, ASMFC's members voted to approve Option 5 of Appendix XXVIII—which will increase the size limit of the acceptable catch to 19 inches and decrease the allowable bag limit to three a day.

Our delegation, the State of New Jersey, and our fishing community are united in our opposition to the size and bag limits included in Option 5 and approved on February 2, 2017. The decision will impose severe and restrictive regulations on our fishing community and will have devastating consequences for fisherman and coastal communities in New Jersey.

If implemented, a reduction of this magnitude will have harsh and immediate economic consequences for families and businesses along New Jersey's 130 mile shoreline—many still struggling to fully recover from Superstorm Sandy. The impact will be felt not only in fisheries and fishing communities, but by the local businesses that rely upon the industry, the governments that depend on the revenue generated by these activities, and other industries—such as tourism—that are staples along the Jersey Shore.

Of particular concern, as New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bob Martin laid out during the ASMFC meeting last week, is the methodology used to determine the stock population. The Commissioner highlighted that the State's data has consistently shown

that New Jersey's flounder population has been stable since 1992. Commissioner Martin pointed to New Jersey's annual Ocean Trawl Survey, which has been conducted for nearly 30 years.

This survey consists of 5 cruises a year, through 35 randomly selected stations during each cruise, covering depths to 90 feet. The data have consistently shown that the fluke population in the waters off the coast of New Jersey has remained stable since at least 1992, and, in fact, shows a slight but measurable improvement.

Our Delegation is committed to limiting overfishing and ensuring that stocks remain stable to allow both current and future generations to participate in recreational fishing activities along our coast. A balanced approach based on the most up-to-date and accurate science—as a new assessment would provide—can help achieve these goals. To implement a reduction of this size, in the absence of reliable data that truly reflects the size of the stock, would be ill-advised and deeply harmful.

Accordingly, we respectfully request that you immediately move to delay any 2017 regulation, prioritize a review of the science with a comparison of the methodology put forth by NOAA and by Dr. Patrick Sullivan of Cornell University, and ultimately work with us to ensure the sustainability of the stock while protecting the viability of our coastal communities.

We appreciate your time and attention to this issue and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Rep. Christopher H. Smith



Rep. Frank LoBiondo



Senator Cory A. Booker



Senator Robert Menendez



Rep. Tom MacArthur



Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr.



Rep. Donald Norcross



Rep. Bill Pascrell



Rep. Josh Gottheimer



Rep. Donald M. Payne, Jr.



Rep. Leonard Lance

*R. P. Frelinghuysen*

Rep. Rodney P. Frelinghuysen