

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 5, 2017

The Honorable Penny Pritzker
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Pritzker:

We write in regards to a final rule recently announced by NOAA Fisheries to significantly reduce the commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits for summer flounder in 2017 and 2018. This rule will have a dramatic impact on coastal communities in New Jersey that rely on the summer flounder fishery, harming the livelihoods of recreational and commercial fishermen. The consequences of allowing this rule to go forward are serious, and we respectfully request that you consider taking emergency action to prevent these quota reductions from going into effect.

As you know, the final rule announced by NOAA Fisheries reduced the summer flounder Acceptable Biological Catch by 29% in 2017 and 16% in 2018. The recreational and commercial limits were reduced by approximately 30% in 2017 and 16% in 2018 respectively.

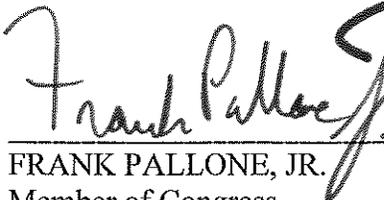
Many of our constituents have raised concerns to us about the science and methodology used by the agency in estimating the summer flounder population to make these determinations. For example, the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) estimated that Connecticut and New York recreational fishermen greatly exceeded limits on summer flounder in 2016, in part due to an increase in fishing trips in July and August. In order for the MRIP estimate to be accurate, there would need to be a 68% increase in fishing trips for Connecticut in those months, and a 35% increase for New York during July and August 2016, an increase of 400,000 people fishing. However, data from the Jersey Coast Anglers Association (JCAA) shows that the number of fishing trips along the Eastern Seaboard has been declining, with a drop of 8 million fishing trips from 2007 to 2014. Many of our constituents feel that a sharp reversal of this trend is unlikely.

These reductions will harm coastal communities that rely on the recreational and commercial fishing industries along the Jersey Shore. From 2007 to 2014, JCAA has reported that there was a loss of 2 million fishing trips in New Jersey, and 40% of fishing trips in New Jersey are in pursuit of summer flounder. In short, these communities are already struggling, and these reductions will result in lost jobs for fishermen, and hardship for their families. Those working in the tourism and boating industries along the Shore will be adversely impacted as well.

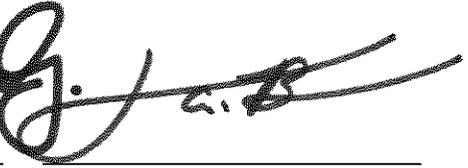
That is why we are respectfully requesting that you consider preventing this rule from going into effect, and directing NOAA Fisheries to reexamine its methodologies and conduct a new benchmark summer flounder assessment before making any decision to reduce summer flounder quotas. New Jersey fishermen and their families should not be made to suffer because a federal agency uses disputed data.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,


FRANK PALLONE, JR.
Member of Congress


ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senator


CORY A. BOOKER
United States Senator


FRANK LOBIONDO
Member of Congress


TOM MACARTHUR
Member of Congress