

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

October 20, 2022

The Honorable Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable House Appropriations Committee Chair Rosa DeLauro
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Chair DeLauro:

Please strongly consider appropriating disaster relief funding to assist the individuals, families, businesses and communities that are suffering deep short-term financial pain which will be followed by long-term economic damage from the total shutdown of this fall's Bering Sea snow crab fishery and Bristol Bay red king crab commercial fishery harvests due to historically low stocks.

I request inclusion of \$250 million in fisheries disaster funding in an end-of-the-year funding vehicle as Congress moves toward adjournment. Because that amount exceeds what is available at the Department of Commerce for fisheries disasters, I request an emergency appropriation to ensure sufficient funding for the crisis we face in Alaska. Such funding is allowed under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, Sec. 312(a).¹

This is the first time ever that the Bering Sea snow crab harvest is closed, and the second consecutive closed season for the fall red king crab harvest. Thousands of boat owners, crew members, seafood processor workers, wholesalers, retailers and service industry workers are and will be affected by this biologically and environmentally necessary — but economically devastating — shutdown of their livelihood. Unfortunately, this is not a one-time event that is easily handled by individuals and communities dependent on the annual harvest. Last year's snow crab harvest was the smallest in more than 40 years.

Of course, the hope and intent of these fishery management closures are to rebuild healthy and sustainable crab stocks but, until then, participants in the industry will need to financially stay

¹ "At the discretion of the Secretary or at the request of the Governor of an affected State or a fishing community, the Secretary shall determine whether there is a commercial fishery failure due to a fishery resource disaster as a result of (A) natural causes; (B) man-made causes beyond the control of fishery managers to mitigate through conservation and management measures, including regulatory restrictions (including those imposed as a result of judicial action) imposed to protect human health or the marine environment; or (C) undetermined causes." 16 U.S.C. § 1855(a).

afloat until they can go back out on the water and earn a living. Disaster funding is certainly not a long-term alternative to a productive fishery and sustainable harvest, but it is a crucial way to support people, communities and their jobs while we simultaneously support rebuilding the crab stocks.

Scientists continue researching the causes of the crab population collapse, which include stressors from warmer water, increased ocean acidity and bycatch mortality caused by other gear types working in the crab habitat area. Hopefully, we will learn more of the cause and possible remedies, and how to better manage the fishery in a changing climate. Until then, the people dependent on the fisheries are in a disastrous situation. “Overall, [it is a] pretty dire situation for snow crab,” Katie Palof, a federal fisheries researcher and co-chair of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council’s Crab Plan Team, told the council at its meeting on Oct. 6.

It is dire for the communities that depend on the fisheries too. St. Paul, a Bering Sea island community of fewer than 500 residents, typically earns 85% of its municipal revenues from crab landings and processing. Nikolai Sivertstol, a board member for the Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers, told the North Pacific Fishery Management Council on Oct. 6: “We do not have the cushions to weather years on end of inactivity. Our crews will move on. The banks will shun us. The businesses in all the local communities that support us will have to move on, too,” Sivertstol explained. Most of the crab harvesters are small businesses.

To ensure that as few families and businesses as possible “move on,” please include \$250 million in fishery disaster funding as an emergency appropriation. I believe this robust emergency appropriation would allow boat owners, crew members, processors, service businesses and the communities that are so dependent on the fleet to make their debt payments, remain viable and return to work when crab stocks recover.

I request your consideration of this pressing need to help so many people.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Sattler Peltola". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Sattler Peltola
Representative for All Alaska