

May 23, 2018

Senator John Thune, Chairman
Committee on Commerce, Science, and
Transportation
United States Senate
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Congressman Rob Bishop, Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
United States Congress
123 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Bill Nelson, Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science, and
Transportation
United States Senate
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Congressman Raul Grijalva, Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources
United States Congress
1511 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Thune and Bishop, and Ranking Members Nelson and Grijalva;

On behalf of Florida's commercial fishing industries, we write to you today to offer our support for the *Young Fishermen's Development Act* (S. 1323 and H.R. 2079).

Today's young fishermen must navigate a daunting world in their quest to establish a successful fishing businesses. High cost of entry, financial risk, limited entry-level opportunities and a complex web of state and federal regulations often present hurdles that disenfranchise and deter these aspiring businessmen and women. Fishing isn't just about catching fish anymore – fishermen today need to be captains, business owners, accountants, mechanics, marketers, scientists, and managers. We have an obligation to the next generation to chart a course forward that carries on our fishing legacy and seafood heritage in the face of these challenges. The *Young Fishermen's Development Act* is a strong step in that direction.

The *Young Fishermen's Development Act* is modeled after the successful program for young domestic farmers and ranchers, and would create a first-of-its-kind national program exclusively dedicated to assisting, educating and training the next generation of commercial fishermen. This program would provide competitive grants to foster collaborative state, tribal, regional and local partnerships; promote mentorship opportunities for retiring fishermen and vessel owners; and provide support for regional training and education programs focused on accountable, sustainable fishing and sound business practices. Critical funding for this program would be allotted from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Asset Forfeiture Fund – a provision that is both fiscally conservative and symbolic.

Seafood is synonymous with the Sunshine State and young fishermen are the lifeblood of our commercial fishing industry. Florida produces over 84 percent of the nation's supply of grouper, pompano, mullet, stone crab, pink shrimp, spiny lobsters and Spanish mackerel. In fact, 99.9 percent of the nation's spiny lobster and 99.5 percent of the nation's stone crab are harvested from

our waters. Looking just at the top 20 species landed in Florida, the hardworking fishermen and women of Florida harvested 75.3 million pounds of seafood in 2015, with a dockside value of \$230.2 million. The Sunshine State generates \$17.7 billion in total seafood sales, second in the country only to California.

We thank Senators Sullivan, Murkowski, Markey and Cantwell for introducing S. 1323, and Congressmen Young and Moulton for introducing H.R. 2079. Their bipartisan leadership on this program is invaluable. And we would especially like to thank our own Congressman Crist for his cosponsorship of H.R. 2079 and his commitment to Florida's young fishermen.

We want to know that when we retire, there are some smart, energetic and educated young men and women that have the skills and the drive to protect what our generation has helped build. To that end, we ask you to help us ensure that the next generation of commercial fishermen is well prepared to sustainably harvest America's seafood and feed the growing consumer demand of our great nation. Please support our young fishermen and secure a bright future for a nation of seafood consumers by advancing the *Young Fishermen's Development Act* (S. 1323 and H.R. 2079).

Sincerely,

Capt. Mike Colby, President
Clearwater Marine Association
Clearwater, Florida

Capt. Jim Zurbrick, President
Fish For America USA LLC
Steinhatchee, Florida

Capt. Bill Kelly, Executive Director
Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association
Marathon, Florida

Capt. Glen Brooks, President
Gulf Fishermen's Association
Bradenton, Florida

Capt. Bubba Cochrane, President
Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance
Galveston, Texas

Capt. Jason DeLaCruz, Executive Director
Gulf Wild
Largo, Florida

Capt. Robert Spaeth, Executive Director
Southern Offshore Fishing Association
Madeira Beach, Florida

cc: Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
House Committee on Natural Resources
Florida Senate and Congressional Delegation