



**STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE**  
**OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR**

**CHRISTOPHER T. SUNUNU**  
Governor

September 10, 2020

The Honorable Wilbur Ross, Secretary  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Re: Atlantic Herring Fishery Disaster Request

Dear Secretary Ross,

As with our neighboring Gulf of Maine states, the State of New Hampshire has a long history of participating in the Atlantic herring fishery. This valuable forage fish continues to be the preferred and primary bait for the lobster fishing industry, an important commercial fishery in New Hampshire. The most recent stock assessment (2018) indicated the Atlantic herring stock was experiencing record low recruitment from 2013 through 2017. The stock is currently undergoing an updated assessment where preliminary information shows recruitment is continuing to decline. This has necessitated drastic reductions in the quota available to the Atlantic herring fishery with further cuts forthcoming. The 2019 quota for the entire fishery was 15,574 metric tons, a significant decrease from 2018's initial quota of 110,000 metric tons. These factors have resulted in a decline in New Hampshire Atlantic herring landings of greater than 90 percent in 2019 compared to the previous five-year average (2014-2018). Under Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, I would like to formally request a commercial fishery failure in the Atlantic herring fishery for the State of New Hampshire due to the Atlantic herring resource disaster.

Our neighboring coastal states have filed similar request letters on July 6<sup>th</sup> (Maine) and August 18<sup>th</sup> (Massachusetts). The severe losses due to a commercial fishery failure, as stated in our neighboring states, are similarly impacting the New Hampshire Atlantic herring fleet. New Hampshire's herring harvesters have experienced a 98 percent decrease in herring landings and 97 percent decrease in ex-vessel value in 2019 compared to the 2014 through 2018 average (see table below).

Year	Landings (Pounds)	Ex-Vessel Value	Ex-Vessel Price/LB
2014-2018 Average	1,809,438	\$370,964	\$0.16
2019	40,400	\$12,120	\$0.30

There are six NOAA Fisheries Atlantic herring Category C and 95 Category D permitted vessels owned by New Hampshire residents or resident businesses. The recently active New Hampshire herring fleet consists primarily of bottom trawl vessels fishing with small mesh in federal waters in Atlantic herring Management Area 1A. These vessels may be targeting Atlantic herring or herring may be bycatch when targeting other species. They have been an important local source of bait for both the lobster and tuna fishing industries. A smaller component of the fishery is made up of non-resident purse seine vessels. These vessels land primarily in the ports of Portsmouth and Seabrook. Landed herring is stored locally or transported and sold as bait. The impacts of reduced availability go well beyond the herring harvesters and include other fisheries and shore-side infrastructure.

A number of management actions, beginning with an in-season adjustment to reduce the quota in 2018, have occurred within the Atlantic herring fishery in response to declining spawning stock biomass. Despite the fishery not exceeding the quota, since at least 2003, and failing to catch the quota by 12 percent or more in each year since 2015 (See Table 22 in Framework 6 to the Atlantic Herring Fishery Management Plan), the stock is not rebuilding. The impacts in the reduction of quota available to the New Hampshire fleet will likely have negative economic impacts for a number of years.

The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department is prepared and willing to assist in the evaluation of this request. Please contact Cheri Patterson or Renee Zobel at (603) 868-1095 for additional information or questions.

Sincerely,



Christopher T. Sununu  
Governor

Cc: Chris Oliver, NOAA Assistant Administrator  
Michael Pentony, GARFO Regional Administrator  
Maggie Hassan, NH Senator  
Jeanne Shaheen, NH Senator  
Chris Pappas, NH Representative  
Annie Kuster, NH Representative  
Scott Mason, Executive Director, NH Fish and Game  
Cheri Patterson, Chief of Marine Fisheries, NH Fish and Game