

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 18, 2020

The Honorable Neil Jacobs, Ph.D.
Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Environmental Observation and Prediction
Acting Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW, Room 5128
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Under Secretary Jacobs,

We are writing to respectfully request the continued waiver of At-Sea Monitoring (ASM) for the Northeast Fisheries. Extending the temporary suspension is critical to both protecting the health and welfare of fishermen who are working to sustain their operations and to maintaining our region's seafood supply during the continued COVID-19 pandemic.

We appreciate the March 24, 2020 emergency action that was issued by NOAA in response to COVID-19, which provides the authority to waive ASM while maintaining conservation efforts and providing an ongoing supply of fish to markets. The emergency action was issued to protect public health and ensure the safety of fishermen, observers and others. Three months later, those same protections are still essential for crews and monitors as we have yet to develop either a vaccine or an effective treatment for the virus, and there is a high risk of COVID-19 transmission in close quarters.

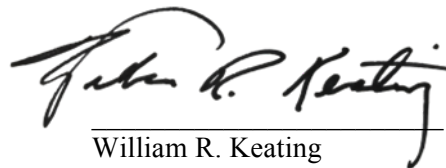
We value NOAA's efforts to maintain efficient monitoring systems that support the sustainability of the Northeast Fishery. ASM, however, is not a program that can be easily adapted to the social distancing protocols currently required to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As the pandemic continues, we question how monitors can be redeployed safely and effectively, particularly given the limited space on ships, demographics of the Northeast Fisheries—many fishermen are aged 55 and older—and transience of observers who often travel from region to region and ship to ship.

We urge you to continue to prioritize the health and safety of fishermen, their families and the communities surrounding the Northeast Fishery during the ongoing pandemic and extend the ASM waiver. This extension is both essential to human health and to sustaining the welfare of a regional fishing industry that has been significantly impacted by COVID-19.

Sincerely,



Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



William R. Keating
Member of Congress

CC: Michael Pentony, Regional Administrator, NOAA Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office