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Congressman Don Young  
2314 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Lisa Murkowski  
522 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Dan Sullivan  
302 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

April 22, 2020

Dear Congressman Young and Senators Murkowski and Sullivan,

Thank you for inviting comment on Alaska's pandemic response needs and for all you are doing to provide relief to Americans in general and Alaskans in particular. Members of the Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association deeply appreciate your efforts and the hard work of your outstanding staff. As outlined below, our priorities range from the community to the regional and statewide level.

### **Working Waterfront**

As you know, Sitka is heavily dependent on the fishing industry to fuel the economy through revenue and employment. Sitka has the largest fleet and harbor system in the state of Alaska and is ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in the state and 11<sup>th</sup> in the nation in the value of the fish landed in our community. For the past five years, the fleet has been handicapped by a haul out/ boatyard business that was increasingly interested in servicing the cruise ship industry instead of the local fishing fleet. When that business announced this winter that it was imminently closing the fishing industry side of its operation, ALFA recognized both a dire need to create a replacement and a tremendous opportunity to develop a boatyard that better serves both the local fleet and the skilled marine support sector operating in Sitka. An ad hoc group of fishermen and marine service sector members initiated conversations with the Sitka Assembly, City administration, and Economic Development Association to identify the best possible replacement site. After careful consideration, the Gary Paxton Industrial Park was selected. This site offers a long-term solution and opportunity for Sitka shipwrights, welders, fiberglass workers, etc., to provide service currently unavailable in Sitka, which will encourage fishermen to perform both annual maintenance in Sitka but also undertake major boat projects that currently demand leaving Alaska to successfully complete.

In short, while the boatyard requires initial investment to launch, over the long-term the haul out and boatyard will both maintain the economic viability of Sitka's small boat fleet and increase economic

activity in Sitka. Securing funding for a haul out and boatyard is one of Sitka's highest legislative priorities and in our mind the most important use of stimulus funding for Sitka. Based on bids received and an analysis of the development costs, the City of Sitka estimates that proper construction of the haul out and boatyard will require \$8 million in capital. Although the City has some savings in an Enterprise Fund that may be used for this project, Sitka will need additional resources to build the necessary infrastructure and engage a boatyard manager. We respectfully request your assistance with securing a grant, low interest loan, or stimulus funding to support this project.

### **Climate Change and Energy Innovation**

Over the past six years, ALFA has worked with industry partners to improve the commercial fishing fleet's fuel use awareness and increase the fleet's fuel efficiency. We have supported both operational and structural changes to reduce our fleet's dependence on fossil fuels. A number of ALFA members are eager to convert their vessels to hybrid or hydrogen powered if resources and infrastructure are in place to support that conversion. The Department of Transportation MARAD program is currently offering funding for push or tug boats to pilot test hybrid or zero emission engines; stimulus funding to DOT or to an Alaska "green bank" to support energy innovation for the commercial fishing fleet would improve both the economic bottom line of the industry as well as the fleet's carbon footprint.

### **Department of Agriculture: US Forest Service**

Southeast Alaska is embedded in the Tongass National Forest, and the forest supports the fishing industry by providing essential spawning and rearing habitat for a host of economically important fish species. Unfortunately, 1,100 culverts built to keep water off of logging roads have collapsed or been filled in by debris, blocking salmon access to 250 miles of spawning habitat. The estimated annual cost to commercial fisheries of salmon blocked by failed culverts is \$2.5 million. Culvert repair would restore salmon access to important spawning habitat and, predictably, increase species resilience as well as economic returns to fishermen, processors and Southeast communities. Stimulus funding for the Tongass should be earmarked for culvert repair.

### **Education and Research:**

Our members recognize the importance of education and support the City of Sitka's request to fund necessary maintenance and repair while maintaining high education standards. We also agree strongly with the City of Sitka that the nonprofits in Sitka that support scientific research, such as ALFA and the Sitka Sound Science Center, are major contributors to the workforce in Sitka that will suffer economically as a result of this health pandemic if government assistance is not provided. Finally, ALFA continues to strongly support funding of young fishermen programs and would welcome a stimulus package that includes the Young Fishermen's Development Act.

### **USDA: Local Food Production**

The pandemic highlighted Alaska's dependence on a long food supply chain and the vulnerability of that system to disruption. Stores emptied of food and other essentials, including seafood. Currently less than 1% of the seafood caught off Alaska stays in Alaska. Alaska producers, fishermen as well as farmers, need grant support to establish the necessary infrastructure and essential connections to customers, but somehow fishermen are repeatedly dropped off the list. For example, the pandemic catalyzed food assistance program highlighted below excludes fishermen:

[https://www.agriculture.com/news/coronavirus-food-assistance-program-announced?fbclid=IwAR0Mjx0cnONrHpl\\_QYCNI5tzQDcdk2BTBjdKGhT\\_1GpTIGhVmEU-LJbOvcs](https://www.agriculture.com/news/coronavirus-food-assistance-program-announced?fbclid=IwAR0Mjx0cnONrHpl_QYCNI5tzQDcdk2BTBjdKGhT_1GpTIGhVmEU-LJbOvcs)


Including fishermen in programs such as the one referenced above or establishing similar programs to support distribution of seafood within Alaska or from Alaska to families in need in the lower 48 would

help Alaska's small fishing businesses recover from the pandemic and ensure both Alaskans and residents of other states have affordable access to Alaska's outstanding seafood.

We understand and greatly appreciate that Congress is moving quickly to provide our nation with major relief programs and that Alaska's delegation has had fishermen and coastal fishing communities firmly on your radar as you helped design these programs. We know that you will do all you can to ensure important Alaska projects qualify to receive relief funding and we greatly appreciate your efforts. On ALFA's behalf, we respectfully offer these suggested priorities for Sitka, Southeast, and Alaska.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Linda Behnken". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Linda Behnken  
(Executive Director, ALFA)