

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

November 30, 2011

The Honorable Jane Lubchenco  
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere  
United States Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Room 5128  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Dr. Lubchenco:

Observer data is necessary to fulfill NOAA's responsibility to manage fisheries in our nation's marine waters. In an effort to improve its Groundfish Observer Program, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) took action in October 2010 to expand the program to previously unobserved fleets and provide the agency flexibility to deploy observers in a manner which satisfies standards for randomized placement. The program is expected to improve baseline data to support future decision making and requirements for annual catch limits and accountability measures.

The direct costs of deploying fishery observers under the NPFMC's Groundfish Observer Program have been industry-funded, pay-as-you go. The restructured program will also be funded by industry but requires start up funds to transition from the current program. Lacking federal funding in the first year, fishermen would have to pay for coverage under the existing program while being assessed a fee to support future observer coverage under the new program. It would also delay implementation of the new program for at least one year and prolong expected improvements in catch and bycatch estimates and annual catch limit management.

You have made commitments to fund observers in other regions while they transition to catch share programs. We are concerned funding observers in these other regions might jeopardize your ability to provide start up funds for the restructured North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program. This would impose an unwarranted burden on fishermen in Alaska's small boat and 60-foot to 125-foot vessel fleets.

We believe \$3.8 million in start up funding for the North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program is essential to transition to the improved program. The NPFMC has embraced science-based decision making in managing fisheries resources off Alaska and this program is expected to advance the quality of data informing their management

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decisions. We urge you to provide adequate funds to North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Lisa Murkowski  
United States Senator

Mark Begich  
United States Senator

Don Young  
Congressman for All Alaska

Cc: Mr. Eric Schwaab, NOAA Assistant Administrator for Fisheries  
Mr. Chris Oliver, Executive Director, North Pacific Fishery Management Council