



THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
GOVERNMENT HOUSE

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340-774-0001

October 6, 2017

VIA FedEx and Email to: WLRoss@doc.gov

Secretary Wilbur Ross
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave, NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Ross:

As the Governor of the Virgin Islands of the United States, I am writing to respectfully request that you declare a federal fishery resource disaster for the Virgin Islands of the United States ("U.S. Virgin Islands" or "USVI") as outlined in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, 16 U.S.C. § 1864 and 16 U.S.C. § 1864a, and the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act, 16 U.S.C. § 4107, as well as clauses to trigger support from the Economic Development Administration.

On September 6th, 2017, Hurricane Irma struck the U.S. Virgin Islands and devastated the islands of St John, St Thomas and Water Island. Fourteen days later, on September 20th, Hurricane Maria devastated the island of St Croix, and battered the rest of the Territory. Virgin Islanders are a strong and independent people, and we are working hard to rebuild. However, these two unprecedented Category 5 storms destroyed much of our fishery infrastructure, and left many fishers without access to their source of livelihood. This declaration will provide needed relief for businesses and individuals reliant on the Virgin Islands' commercial and recreational fishing industries, and is consistent with past and contemporaneous requests from other areas of the United States.

The Virgin Islands is surrounded by vibrant marine ecosystems that provide commercial and recreational fishing opportunities for residents and tourists alike. According to a Community Profile and Socio-Economic Evaluation report submitted to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ("NOAA") in 2016, the commercial fishery sector is mostly composed of both artisanal fishers using small nets, and commercial fishers who use traditional gears such as spears, hooks and lines, traps etc. Most fishers sell their product in open-air markets, and in 2016, they landed more than 772,555 lbs of fish, most of them caught by traps. The recreational fishery is composed of both private charter boats that generally cater to tourists, and a strong local recreational community. Together, these fisheries are a strong economic engine, and support hundreds of fishers and dozens of fishing communities. They also ensure food security for thousands of residents, including the fishers. A conservative valuation of our commercial fishery economy indicates direct economic effects of over \$5 million annually. The number of saltwater

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fishing anglers that invest in recreational fishing activities in our territorial waters has not been estimated. However, nearly three (3) million tourists visit each year and a significant portion participates in recreational fishing activities. These estimates do not include the economic benefits resulting from those initial inputs, and how they reverberate throughout the economy.

Although damage assessments have not been completed due to the substantial impact to our communication and transportation infrastructure, it is expected that economic and social impacts will be significant. Impacts to this industry include but will not be limited to lost income resulting from loss and damage to gear and vessels (initial reports suggest that more than 90% of traps have been lost); fisher displacement; destruction of support facilities such as docks, fish houses, and market facilities; lack of access due to compromised transportation; and direct impacts to the coastal ecosystem upon which the fishing economy depends. A thorough assessment of the damages and resultant costs will be conducted, but this will take time and we need assistance now to get our fishing economy back in working order. We request your assistance in this endeavor, for which citizens throughout the United States will undoubtedly benefit.

We will be happy to provide any additional information you may need to evaluate this request. Please do not hesitate to contact Dawn L. Henry, Esq., the Commissioner of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources at dawn.henry@dpnr.vi.gov, (340) 344-0834 or (340) 514-5250.

Sincerely,



Kenneth E. Mapp
Governor

cc: Dawn L. Henry, Esq.
Commissioner DPNR