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FW: Legislators to Governor: Declare Crab Disaster

Mon, Jan 25, 2016 at 2:53 PM

Please find the press release (below) and letter (attached) regarding the bi-partisan coalition of state legislators requesting a crab season federal fishery disaster declaration.

Subject: Legislators to Governor: Declare Crab Disaster



NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S SECOND SENATE DISTRICT

SENATOR MIKE MCGUIRE

M E D I A



R E L E A S E

For Immediate Release: January 25, 2016

Contact: Kerrie Lindecker, Kerrie.Lindecker@sen.ca.gov or (707) 319-3654

Coastal legislators request crab season disaster declaration

Letter urges Governor Brown to advance disaster declaration for California crab fishery and allied sectors

Sacramento, CA – Today, a bi-partisan coalition of state legislators requested that Governor Jerry Brown declare a fishery disaster due to the devastating impacts of the delayed California crab season.

“The delayed crab season is unprecedented in duration and magnitude and California crabbers need our help now more than ever. For the past three months, we have all been hopeful that we could kick off the harvest, but as the holidays came and went and acid levels remained too high, the statewide impact has been catastrophic,” said Senator Mike McGuire, Chairman of the Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture. **“Crabbers are experiencing devastating losses that can’t be recouped due to the collapse of the fall salmon season and the unprecedented delay in the crab harvest.”**

When levels of domoic acid in California crab were deemed unsafe for public consumption in early November, working collaboratively

with the multimillion dollar California crab industry, the Department of Fish and Wildlife and Department of Public Health took emergency action to delay the crab season opener. Many were hopeful the domoic acid levels would subside, but they have persisted and we have now missed the peak of the season: Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years and Chinese New Year. These holiday celebrations have historically represented the time when the most California crab is consumed and the thousands of crab feeds that take place across the Golden State throughout the winter are now sourcing their supply from the Northwest, repurposing their events or cancelling all together.

Assemblyman Jim Wood, Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture said, “The ongoing postponement of crab season is another huge blow in what has been an incredibly difficult year for the fishing industry from start to finish. Formally declaring a disaster allows us to go after federal resources that would help our fisherman keep their families financially afloat.”

In their letter to Governor Brown requesting the disaster declaration, the coastal legislators outlined the many severe impacts the closure has had on the industry, as well as on local fishing families.

“The continued delays have created unprecedented damage to the crab market, and irreparable harm to the thousands who depend on a healthy harvest for their living. We believe it’s time to declare a fishery disaster,” the letter stated.

To add insult to injury, California is coming off of a disastrous salmon season as well. Crabbers turn to salmon for their livelihood in the summer and fall months and having both the fall salmon season collapse due to the state’s historic drought and now this unprecedented crab season delay taking hold, families are in crisis. The California Dungeness and Rock crab fishery is in the top tier of California’s commercial fisheries. Values have exceeded \$95 million per year and long-term averages of nearly \$60 million.

“California’s crab fishers are in dire straits,” said Senator Jerry Hill (D-San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties). “It’s imperative that all levels of government come together to aid our coastal communities and local economies that depend on this industry. A disaster declaration by the governor would be a strong step toward getting our crab fishers aid.”

The unforeseen disaster has forced crab fishermen to sell equipment and assets, further mortgage their future and seek low wage employment to put food on the table. The delay has been devastating to crabbers, fishery-dependent businesses and the coastal economy.

“Families tied to our fishing industry are struggling and need help,” said Assemblymember Phil Ting (D-San Francisco). “They have weathered many tough seasons and are now stretched to the breaking point. Without them, there will be no crab to eat once ocean conditions improve.”

A copy of the letter to Governor Brown is attached. Video and Sound On Tape of Senator McGuire discussing the crab disaster is available.

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 **McGuire Crab Declaration Letter.pdf**
91K

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE

STATE CAPITOL
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA
95814

January 25, 2016

The Honorable Edmund G. Brown, Jr.
Governor of California
State Capitol, First Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Request for Declaration of Disaster for California Crab Fishery

Dear Governor Brown:

We are writing to encourage you to advance a disaster declaration to the United States Secretary of Commerce for the California crab fishery and allied sectors. As you know, the elevated levels of domoic acid in Dungeness and rock crab caused devastating closures during this current crab season. This record setting delay has had significant negative impacts on thousands of California residents, and their livelihoods are now at risk. The current situation is unprecedented in duration and magnitude.

We had hoped the fishery would commence in time to recover a significant portion of economic loss suffered during this record delay. Unfortunately, because the acid levels have persisted, we have now missed the peak of the season: Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years and Chinese New Year. These holiday celebrations have historically represented the time when the most California crab is consumed. And thousands of crab feeds that take place across the Golden State throughout the winter are now sourcing their supply from the Northwest, repurposing their events, or cancelling all together.

While we remain hopeful a limited season will commence in the next several weeks, and do not believe that disaster relief and a limited season are mutually exclusive, we are now beyond where any fishery expert thought we would be. The continued delays have created unprecedented damage to the crab market, and irreparable harm to the thousands who depend on a healthy harvest for their living. We believe it's time to declare a fishery disaster declaration.

The Honorable Edmund G. Brown Jr.
January 25, 2016
Page 2

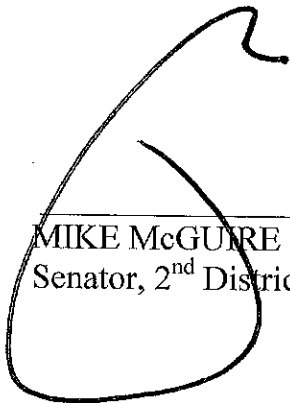
The annual crab landings in California average \$60 million with the peak season exceeding \$95 million in direct revenue in 2011. While domoic acid test results have recently started trending in a positive direction, the current season is unlikely to open until mid-February or later.

To add insult to injury, we are coming off of one of the worst salmon seasons we've had. Crabbers turn to salmon for their livelihood in the summer and fall months and having both the fall salmon season collapse, due to the state's historic drought, and now this unprecedented crab season delay taking hold, families are in crisis.

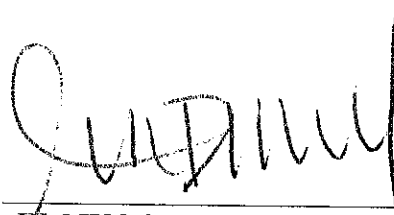
Crabbers throughout the Golden State have made large investments that cannot be recouped. This unforeseen disaster has forced individuals to sell equipment and assets, further mortgage their future and seek low wage employment to put food on the table during holiday seasons when the crab market is typically robust. Without immediate assistance, we may see thousands of hard working families with no choice but to leave the crab fishing sector causing damage to our economy for years to come.

We urge you to move forward with a request to the Secretary of Commerce for a fishery disaster as soon as possible. Time is of the essence. We greatly appreciate your consideration of this request and for all of your support of the California Fishing and Aquaculture industries.

Warmest Regards,



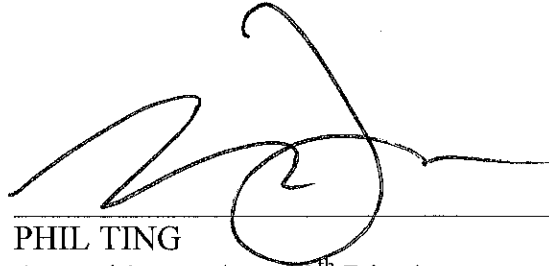
MIKE McGUIRE
Senator, 2nd District



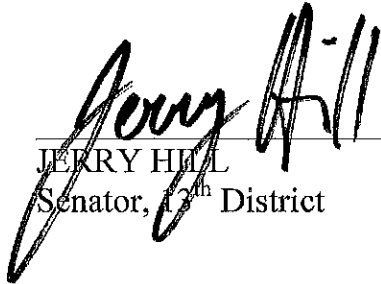
JIM WOOD
Assemblymember, 2nd District



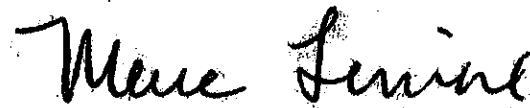
BILL MONNING
Senator, 17th District



PHIL TING
Assemblymember, 19th District



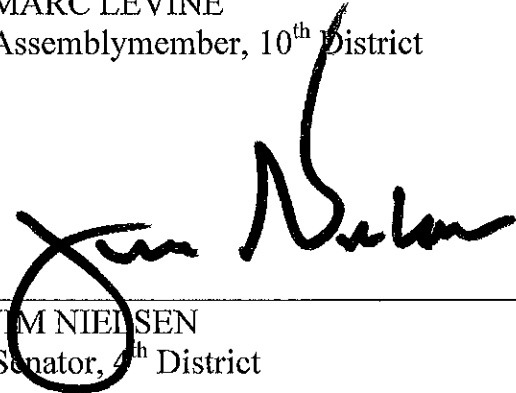
JERRY HILL
Senator, 13th District



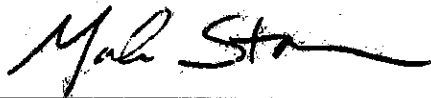
MARC LEVINE
Assemblymember, 10th District



FRAN PAVLEY
Senator, 27th District



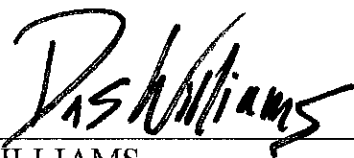
JIM NIELSEN
Senator, 4th District



MARK STONE
Assemblymember, 29th District



KATCHO ACHADJIAN
Assemblymember, 35th District



DAS WILLIAMS
Assemblymember, 37th District

The Honorable Edmund G. Brown Jr.
January 25, 2016
Page 4

PS: Please let us know if we can be of assistance and pass on our sincere thanks to Fish and Wildlife Director, Chuck Bonham, for all of his efforts during this closure.