

March 17, 2023

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Chair
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce,
Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Chair
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
H-310, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Matt Cartwright
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
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Committee on Appropriations
H-310, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Shaheen, Ranking Member Moran, Chair Rogers, and Ranking Member Cartwright:

We write today to express the ongoing and critical need for providing the National Marine Fisheries Service (“NMFS”) with robust funding to address the impacts of offshore wind energy development (“OSW”) on federal fisheries surveys and to support cooperative research efforts led by NMFS that uses the expertise and skills of the commercial fishing industry to address the impacts of OSW.

We represent a diverse group of commercial fishermen, seafood processors, and shoreside support businesses who depend on access to healthy fish stocks and marine environment. While the species we target, gear we use, and vessel sizes may differ, we all firmly believe in robust federal investments to address the impacts of OSW on our ocean and fishery resources to ensure we can continue to both be a global leader in ocean sustainability and provide consumers with sustainable seafood.

To date, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (“BOEM”) has auctioned 33 federal OSW leases and published a proposed sale notice (PSN) for three additional leases. Construction is already underway for the first two major commercial wind energy facilities in the Northeast. Over 24.7 million acres of public trust resources on the Northeast Shelf and Central Atlantic, 9.9 million acres in the Gulf of Maine, over 300,000 acres in the Gulf of Mexico, and roughly two million acres off the West Coast are in various stages of planning for offshore wind energy development. The enormous size of these areas and their direct overlap with key grounds for seafood production and protected resource conservation underscore the critical need for funding to address the impacts of this burgeoning industry.

We appreciate the FY23 funding appropriated by Congress that provided a total of \$16,500,000 above the FY22 enacted level across NMFS to address consultation and permitting, stock assessment, management, and protected resources needs related to the expansion of offshore wind

energy projects. Of this \$16,500,000 no less than \$7,000,000 was directed to the NOAA Fisheries budget line item Fisheries Data Collections, Surveys, and Assessments to address impacts on federal fisheries surveys.

While the investments made last fiscal year are a good start, we continue to have serious concerns that these investments will not adequately fund the activities and personnel (FTEs) necessary to avoid, minimize, and mitigate the environmental and economic impacts of OSW across the nation. Specifically, we are concerned that the dollar amount provided for the Scientific Survey Mitigation work is far too low given the rapid pace of OSW leasing and the number of scientific surveys that will be impacted. There are 31 surveys that will be impacted across the country and NMFS representatives have identified a \$2 million cost per survey per year to address OSW impacts. Without this funding, Congress will hamstring the agency's ability to develop and test new survey methodologies, calibrate previous decades' survey data with new survey methods, implement new survey methodologies, and communicate these changes with Councils and fishery stakeholders.

Furthermore, we request the Committee to consider appropriating additional funding specifically for cooperative research projects aimed at evaluating and mitigating the impacts of OSW. NMFS representatives identified a need of \$10 million for each of the six Fishery Science Centers to expand cooperative research efforts in order to give the commercial fishing industry opportunities to address the significant data gaps in fisheries surveys and data collection that will arise due to OSW.

NMFS Scientific Survey Mitigation

We respectfully request no less than \$62 million for NMFS Scientific Survey Mitigation to address the impacts of OSW on our federal fisheries surveys.

Fisheries data collection, surveys, and assessments are crucial to our understanding of our ocean and fishery resources. Specifically, the data collected through annual federal scientific surveys is an integral piece of the stock assessment and catch limit setting process, foundational pillars of our nation's sustainable fisheries management. Additionally, these surveys are critical to understanding the impacts of climate change on living marine resources, marine ecosystems, and the human communities that rely on these resources and systems. Currently, NMFS conducts more than 50 such long-term standardized surveys, many of which have been ongoing for more than 30 years. These surveys provide a long-term time series data set, essentially a time lapse of the status of fish stocks; their scientific value lies in their *consistency over time*.

NMFS has made it clear that impacts to scientific surveys will occur and will need to be mitigated due to preclusion, statistical design, habitat alteration, and loss of sampling efficiency. NMFS must also mitigate the impacts on fisheries dependent data, which supplement and improve survey data for many major U.S. fisheries. This mitigation work is a significant undertaking for a single scientific survey and yet we are now looking at no fewer than 31 known surveys across the Atlantic and Pacific coasts that will be disrupted by OSW. At \$2 million per affected survey *per year* to adjust scientific methodologies and calibrations in the face of large-scale OSW installations, this request is both reasonable and necessary.

Scientific survey mitigation has resulted in, and will continue to cause, increased demand for staff time and resources from NMFS Science Centers, Regional Offices, and Office of Protected

Resources. We appreciate the funding appropriated in fiscal year 2023 (“FY23”) to support the start of this work. However, significant additional funding is necessary to address the impacts of OSW across the country. It is important that survey mitigation resulting from new offshore wind development is funded immediately in order to allow the Fishery Science Centers to design and test new survey designs against current surveys that will be impacted to ensure robust calibration. Without this overlap in old and new survey design, it will be extremely difficult for scientists to, with a high degree of certainty, calibrate the data sets.

As current and historical users of the marine environment whose livelihoods will be impacted by disruptions to surveys and fishing grounds, this funding will be critical to ensuring the agency can begin to address survey impacts so that we understand and secure our future fishing opportunities.

To execute NMFS’ statutory mandate to manage, conserve, and protect living marine resources using the best available science, and to protect the billions of dollars worth of investments in our fisheries management, science, and fishing business operations, it is paramount that Congress increase scientific investments aimed at understanding the impacts of OSW, deliver critical scientific data, and ensure that domestic sustainable seafood production is supported in the process.

NMFS Cooperative Research

We respectfully request no less than \$60 million for NMFS Cooperative Research projects specific to addressing the impacts of OSW, equivalent to \$10 million per Fisheries Science Center.

NMFS Cooperative Research efforts give commercial fishermen and processors a role in building the industry’s resilience to climate change while building trust in management outcomes and decisions. Additionally, cooperative research helps address existing and emerging data gaps, rebuilds trust between managers and the seafood industry, helps incorporate local and traditional knowledge in science, and encourages buy-in to management decisions.

As OSW continues at a rapid pace, commercial fishing industry involvement in research and data collection has become increasingly important. Cooperative research allows fishermen and processors to participate in improving our collective understanding of impacts and how best to sustain the viability of both industries. Fishermen develop important hypotheses based on observed environmental changes and collect data that improve understanding of local conditions and inform climate and fisheries sciences. More cooperative research would assist in understanding fisheries behavior and operational needs in relation to OSW. Cooperative research projects specific to OSW may also provide an alternative source of income for those fishermen who are displaced from their fishing grounds and present an opportunity for fishermen to assist NMFS in collecting data in/around OSW arrays where larger NOAA research vessels may not be able to access.

Currently, there is a gross disparity in federal research funding available to OSW proponents, with extraordinarily little available to those without a financial interest in its deployment. Yet, despite the vast importance of cooperative research toward achieving equitable participation in ocean planning, we are concerned that its funding is often the first item on the chopping block when cuts are necessary. Providing support for a significant increase in cooperative research efforts will allow the commercial fishing industry to help fill the data gaps emerging due to OSW. We strongly urge the

Committee to invest in Cooperative Research, particularly as we face significant hurdles with respect to addressing the impacts of OSW.

Conclusion

The scale of OSW proposed in the U.S. is staggering. So too, are the financial resources already invested and required to develop effective strategies for its deployment. Notably, one lease alone sold for over \$1 billion in the New York Bight. Other federal agencies have received billions of dollars to support OSW permitting and transmission needs; we feel the development of appropriate environmental impact mitigation strategies are equally important, if not more so. Additionally, given the pace of OSW and the lack of consideration of development on fisheries impacts, this funding is important now; securing funding after surveys are impacted will be too late.

While we acknowledge the need to take action on climate change, our government must ensure that it does everything in its power to avoid, minimize, and mitigate the impacts of OSW on our marine environment, fishing businesses, and fishing communities. Adequately funding Scientific Survey Mitigation and additional Cooperative Research is a productive place to start and we implore you to take seriously our requests outlined above.

We appreciate the commitment by Congress last year to begin to address this significant funding issue across NOAA. We strongly urge significant additional funding in FY24 to support addressing the impacts of offshore wind development on our critically important federal fisheries surveys and cooperative research efforts.

We appreciate your consideration of these requests. Please don't hesitate to reach out to Leigh Habegger (leigh@seafoodharvesters.org) or Annie Hawkins (annie@rodafisheries.org).

Respectfully,

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