

October 28, 2005

Senator Bill Nelson
United States Senate
Hart Senate Office Building
Room 716
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Protecting Florida's oceans and fisheries

Dear Senator Nelson:

Residents and visitors across Florida are experiencing the impacts of fisheries declines caused by pollution, destructive fishing practices, and other factors. The importance of protecting the integrity of our oceans and Gulf should require no explanation, yet devastation continues.

The undersigned organizations represent hundreds of thousands of Floridians and visitors. Together, we would like to share with you our most pressing concerns about the health and well-being of the Gulf of Mexico, our oceans, and our fisheries. Marine ecosystems and resources are a vital part of Florida's economy and way of life, yet they face serious challenges to their long-term sustainability and productivity. Please do not exacerbate fisheries declines by supporting rollbacks to the existing protections provided under the Magnuson-Stevens Act Fishery Conservation and Management Act, specifically measures designed to end overfishing and rebuild depleted fish populations. Also, please ensure that management decisions are grounded in strong science and that current opportunities for public participation remain open.

Florida's world class beaches, coral reefs, and the ocean systems that stretch beyond our shores support a \$57 billion tourism industry and more than 900,000 jobs. According to the American Sportfishing Association, Florida's recreational fisheries alone generated over \$7 billion for our economy in 2003. With so much at stake, both financially and environmentally, to turn our backs on our fisheries and oceans is not an option. As D. T. Minich, executive director of the Lee County Visitor and Convention Bureau recently said, "We need to have healthy beaches and healthy water to be the kind of destination people expect."

Unfortunately, this has been a particularly difficult year for our fisheries and ocean ecosystems, due in large part to devastating red tides and the effects of hurricane Katrina. Nearly 1,000 people move to Florida every day, in many cases increasing the nutrients that pour into our rivers and streams exponentially. These nutrients feed into the Gulf of Mexico fueling noxious algal blooms known as red tides. Scientists say this year's red tide is the worst in 30 years and has created a 2,000-square mile underwater "dead zone" stretching from north of Clearwater to south of Sarasota, killing millions of fish and driving away tourists. This fall, declines in our fisheries

were further aggravated by hurricane Katrina. As recently as September 9th, U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez, on the advice of NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, announced that the fishery of the Gulf of Mexico had failed due to Katrina, from the Florida Keys and Pensacola out to Texas.

The long list of declining fish populations that are popular with Florida fisherman is well publicized and well known. As Floridians, we fish for pleasure, for nourishment, to spend time with our kids or grandparents. Our love of fish and the sport of catching them runs deep in our veins. Yet this love has often perversely manifested itself as intense pressure on government agencies and politicians to weaken the laws and regulations that are meant to protect fish and oceans ecosystems for future fishermen. We urge you to heed the call of the US Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission to take a new approach to our oceans. It is time to take action that will promote the long term sustainability and productivity of our fisheries and the economies and lifestyles they support. Do not rollback the conservation provisions contained in the Magnuson-Stevens Act designed to end overfishing and rebuild depleted fish populations in as short a time as possible, but not to exceed 10 years where biologically possible. Also, please maintain existing opportunities for public participation in decisions regarding this very public resource and ensure that management choices are grounded in strong science.

Our fisheries and our oceans sustain us today and will need to sustain us into the future. Their health is at extreme risk. Do not add a new challenge by weakening current law and allowing short-sighted pressures to drive management decisions rather than scientific data and analysis. Through your actions, we can ensure that our oceans and fisheries remain a centerpiece of Florida's economy and identity.

Warm regards,

Linda L. Young, Director
Clean Water Network of Florida, Inc.

45 additional groups signed on to this letter.