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Fishermen, processors, and support businesses across nation urge Congress to act on Vessel Discharge Bills

November 25, 2014 -- The following was released by the West Coast Seafood Processors Association:

Just before the U.S. Senate took its Thanksgiving holiday recess, two bills were introduced to extend the exemption for commercial and sport-charter fishing vessels from incidental vessel discharge rules that is about to expire. By the end of the day today, 50 individuals and groups from around the country had come together to urge the Senate to take whatever action it could before Congress adjourns for the year.

In a letter to the 17 sponsors of the two bills (S. 2943 and S. 2963), a diverse group of fishermen, processors, and fisheries support businesses urged the Senators to "operate in a bi-partisan, cooperative spirit to resolve a problem that faces vessel owners and operators throughout the nation" and pass whichever bill can get through the end-of-session Congressional morass and be signed into law.

"We wanted to make the point that this is an urgent problem that transcends party politics, regional differences, and allocation battles," said Rod Moore, Executive Director of the West Coast Seafood Processors Association. "We have sport groups and commercial groups, trawlers and trollers, gillnetters and long-liners, fishermen and processors, big boats and small boats, all coming together in support of a common cause. We appreciate that there are different strategies being attempted in the Senate to meet our concerns and we are grateful for the attention being given to us. But the bottom line is that the issue needs to be addressed in the next couple of weeks."

Earlier this year, the U.S. House passed a permanent exemption by a bi-partisan vote as part of the U.S. Coast Guard authorization bill. Senate action has been stymied by issues unrelated to the fishing vessel exemption.

The following letter was sent to the 17 sponsors of the two bills (S. 2943 and S. 2963):

Honorable Barbara Boxer
Honorable Mark Begich
Honorable Maria Cantwell

Honorable Susan Collins
Honorable Edward Markley
Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Honorable Bill Nelson
Honorable David Vitter
Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
Honorable Marco Rubio
Honorable Cory Booker
Honorable Benjamin Cardin
Honorable James Inhofe
Honorable Jeff Merkley
Honorable Patty Murray
Honorable Jack Reed
Honorable Elizabeth Warren

U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators:

As members of the commercial and sport-charter fishing industries, many of us have been on record for several years seeking an exemption from Environmental Protection Agency regulations governing incidental discharges due to normal operations of commercial fishing vessels, regardless of the size of the vessel. Those regulations, which are scheduled to go into effect on December 19, 2014, can impose a significant burden on men and women working in U.S. waters.

We appreciate your introducing S. 2943 and S. 2963, bills which would exempt our vessels for an additional one year period (S. 2943) or permanently (S. 2963). Obviously, we would prefer a permanent exemption but knowing the difficulties inherent in passing legislation in the waning days of a Congressional session we would accept a one year exemption if that is the only option available.

At this point, we ask only that you operate in a bi-partisan, cooperative spirit to resolve a problem that faces vessel owners and operators throughout the nation and, if a simple extension is all that is feasible, that you not forget the importance of addressing this issue early on in the 114th Congress.

Sincerely,

Rod Moore, West Coast Seafood Processors Association
Kurt Englund, Englund Marine
Russell H. Hudson, Directed Sustainable Fisheries, Inc.
Dale Beasley, Columbia River Crab Fishermen's Association
Bob Jones, Southeastern Fisheries Association
Pete Leipzig, Fishermen's Marketing Association
Al Carter, Ocean Companies / Ocean Gold Seafood
Butch Smith, Ilwaco Charter Association
Mike Cornman, Westport Seafood Inc.
Mark Cedergreen, Westport Charterboat Association

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Wayne Heikkila, Western Fishboat Owners Association
American Fishermen's Research Foundation
Kevin Dunn, F/V IRON LADY
Mike McCorkle, Southern California Trawlers Association
Travis Hunter, Hunters Offshore Enterprises
Jerry Schill, North Carolina Fisheries Association
Heather Mann, Midwater Trawlers Cooperative
Marion J. Larkin, Ocean Hunter Enterprises
Jim Gilmore, At-sea Processors Association
Hobe Kytr, Salmon For All
Kent & Irene Martin, F/V FLOOZIE
Brent Paine, United Catcher Boats
Diane Pleschner-Steele, California Wetfish Producers Association
Brian E. Allison, Puget Sound Crab Association
Joe Dazey, Washington Trollers Association
Brian Sheldon, Willapa-Grays Harbor Oyster Growers Association
Dan Waldeck, Pacific Whiting Conservation Cooperative
Rex Leach, F/V MS. JULIE
Sean Martin, Hawaii Longline Association
Paul Kujala, F/V CAPE WINDY
Natalie Webster, American Albacore Fishing Association
Bonnie Brady, Long Island Commercial Fishing Association
Brad Pettinger, Oregon Trawl Commission
Dennis Phelan, Pacific Seafood Processors Association
Nils Stolpe, Garden State Seafood Association
Point Conception Groundfishermen's Association
South Bay Cable Fisheries Liaison Committee
Commercial Fishermen of Santa Barbara
Terri Beideman, Blue Water Fishermen's Association
Mark Worley & Lisa Newland, F/V GOLDEN CHALICE
Mark Gleason, Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers
John Connelly, National Fisheries Institute
Giuseppe Pennisi, F/V PIONEER
Jerry Sansom, Organized Fishermen of Florida
Bill Kelly, Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association
Ray Toste, Washington Dungeness Crab Fishermen's Association
Bob Alverson, Fishing Vessel Owners Association
Scott McMullen, Bandon Submarine Cable Council
Ken Franke, Sportfishing Association of California
Chad See, Freezer Longline Coalition

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