

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

September 18, 2008

The Honorable Jim Nussle, Director
Office of Management and Budget
Washington, DC. 20503

Dear Director Nussle:

We write with increasing concern regarding full disbursement of the \$170 million appropriated by Congress to compensate fishers for the unprecedented closure of the West Coast salmon fishery.

On September 17, NOAA Fisheries (NOAA) indicated that it would be dispersing \$100 million of the \$170 million appropriated by Congress to provide aid to affected fishers. NOAA further indicated that the remaining \$70 million may be disbursed if further need was demonstrated, and “if Congress did not act to rescind the funds.” We have been informed that NOAA is not dispersing the full amount now because OMB has not yet released the funds. We find this unconscionable.

First, as we expressed to you in June, it is unacceptable that the Administration has proposed – and now seems to be trying to implement – a plan to take disaster aid from the fishing communities of California, Oregon and Washington to pay for cost overruns associated with this Administration’s questionable contract with the Harris Corporation to complete the 2010 census. Indeed, the reason why Congress had to step up to provide this emergency aid to fishers in our states is because of this Administration’s unlawful and shortsighted policies regarding the Pacific Northwest’s rivers.

Second, we have received no satisfactory explanation for why OMB can legally withhold funds that Congress has appropriated for a specific purpose such as this. The states of Oregon, Washington, and California have followed the process set out in the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which provides for emergency assistance. Now that NOAA has accepted the application from Pacific Fishery Management Council, and has approved the \$170 million grant to the states, OMB is legally obligated to release the funds so that affected fishers may receive the aid they desperately need. The law provides for no further “assessment of need,” and we are aware of no precedent for OMB’s alleged “phased” disbursement of these funds.

To us, the fact that OMB is withholding \$70 million, when it proposed in June to reprogram this exact same amount to pay for the Administration’s mistakes with its census contract, smacks of political gamesmanship. Playing games with the livelihood of

fishers across the Pacific Northwest is yet another sign that the Bush Administration has no commitment to protect our valuable river systems, and no interest in helping the fishing communities and economies that rely on them. It is also completely unacceptable. We insist that you comply with congressional intent and immediately release the full \$170 million in federal disaster aid for Pacific Northwest fishers.

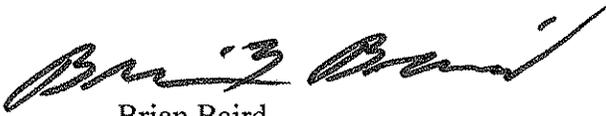
Sincerely,



Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress



Mike Thompson
Member of Congress



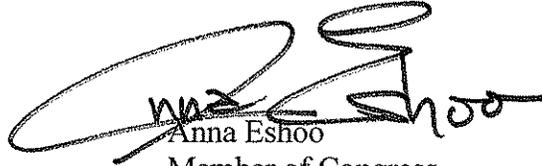
Brian Baird
Member of Congress



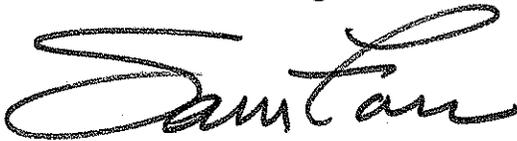
Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



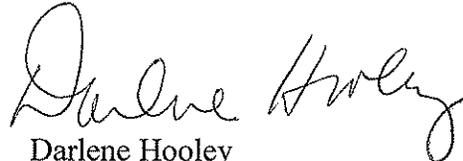
Lois Capps
Member of Congress



Anna Eshoo
Member of Congress



Sam Farr
Member of Congress



Darlene Hooley
Member of Congress



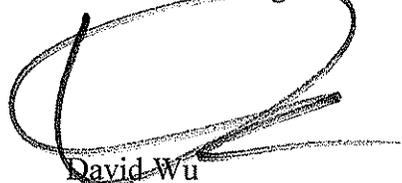
Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



George Miller
Member of Congress



Lynn Woolsey
Member of Congress



David Wu
Member of Congress