



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

5724 N. Route 9, New Gretna, NJ 08224

P: 888-564-6732 F: 609-294-3812

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Contact: Jim Hutchinson, Jr.

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888 564-6732

SENATE ATTEMPTS TO THROW ANGLERS OFF FISCAL CLIFF RFA Urges Recreational Industry To Gather Data Now During Federal Debate

December 21, 2012 - If you are a New York recreational fishing industry professional who was impacted by Superstorm Sandy, [click here](#).

If you are a New Jersey recreational fishing industry professional, [click here](#).

Despite what appears to be additional partisan gridlock in Washington, the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) says efforts are underway at least in New York and New Jersey to ‘unbreak’ a fractured Congress in order for you to qualify for financial aid following Sandy.

According to the RFA, as Congress continues to bicker over ‘fiscal cliff’ negotiations, bipartisan members of both the House of Representatives and Senate have also been fighting to support federal fisheries disaster funding in a supplemental appropriations bill now being considered in response to Sandy. Regrettably, some Senate republicans in particular seem completely misinformed about what a federal fisheries disaster actually means.

“The supplemental appropriations bill is supported by many republicans and democrats alike, both in the U.S. Senate and the House,” said RFA executive director Jim Donofrio. “The handful of legislators who are trying to strip away funding that’s included in this bill for New England’s groundfishery or Alaska’s salmon fishery are actually doing more harm than good for those fishing related businesses affected by Sandy.”

Ironically, the particular section (315) of the Magnuson Stevens Act which deals with disaster relief was incorporated by the 109th Congress under a republican controlled House and Senate where not one member of the GOP stood up in opposition to the federal government providing federal assistance during fisheries disasters. Donofrio noted that there have been [several fisheries disasters](#) declared by the Secretary of Commerce in 2012, and said the catastrophic loss experienced by the fishing industry following Sandy should not be mired in political grandstanding now, particularly given the glaring lack of Congressional commitment towards fisheries in recent years.

“Congress knows about our fisheries issues, we’ve had countless meetings on Capitol Hill, public rallies next to the Capitol, and several headline generating disaster declarations, yet they continue to stall based on lack of understanding of our federal fisheries law,” Donofrio said. “Both the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act and the Magnuson-Stevens Act give Congress very clear direction on what must be done in terms of appropriating funding for a federal fisheries disaster, yet the partisan bickering continues.”

Democrats had proposed a \$60.4 billion package to provide emergency funds for mid-Atlantic communities hit hard by Sandy as well as for other disaster-related projects, but Senate Republicans countered Wednesday with a \$24 billion package that they claim provides immediate disaster relief to storm-affected areas while giving Congress extra time to vet the other projects. Two of those republican proposals would strip away \$150 million for fisheries declared as federal disasters.

According to the federal government’s own socioeconomic data collection, the combined New York and New Jersey commercial and recreational fisheries are conservatively estimated to be a least \$3 billion, generating hundreds of millions of federal taxes every year. Although a small portion of the \$60 billion appropriations bill, the \$150 million for fisheries has sparked considerable debate this week in Washington. The money would provide emergency assistance to fishermen affected by Sandy in New York and New Jersey, but also separate disasters: groundfish in the Northeast, Chinook fishing in Alaska and oyster and blue crab fishing in Mississippi. Fisheries disaster declarations open the door for Congress to appropriate money towards alleviating the financial hardship caused by the disaster.

Donofrio said Congress has had plenty of time to ‘vet’ the other disaster projects given that each of the other fisheries disasters had been declared earlier in 2012, but said they have simply waited until the nation had reached a ‘fiscal cliff’ before doing anything about it. “It’s like doing your homework on the bus in to school,” Donofrio added.

“Here we have a holiday break looming, and Congress is ready to kick the can down the road yet again. Sadly, many of our tackle shops, marinas and for-hire captains aren’t getting any breaks this Christmas given the fact that business has been shut down since Halloween,” he said.

RFA and local stakeholders have been actively working to gather pertinent fisheries disaster information on the ground in New York and New Jersey alike. Donofrio said while Congress continues its rhetorical debate before the holidays, it’s important for business owners to begin compiling the information necessary to fight for future relief funding.

“As you can see by the way Congress is responding to this critical emergency, we’ve got an uphill battle on our hands,” said RFA managing director Jim Hutchinson. “But if you’re a for-hire captain or tackle shop owner negatively affected by Sandy in the New York or New Jersey marine region, you need to get your information together quickly so that we have something to fight for.”

In New Jersey, the state Division of Fish and Wildlife is working in tandem with New Jersey Sea Grant to gather information related to both physical and professional loss within the recreational fishing community. Visit their fisheries disaster information page at www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/news/2012/sandy_disaster_info.htm, and be sure to download the following forms to return.

In New York, industry stakeholders are now working with New York Sea Grant to help confidentially gather pertinent business information following the storm. This information is available online at www.seagrantsunysb.edu/articles/t/super-storm-sandy-economic-injury-loss-questionnaire-worksheet-marine-fisheries-resource-center-news.

“It’s critical for business leaders to take the time to gather this information to submit to New York Sea Grant no later than January 10, 2013,” Hutchinson said.

(NOTE: On December 30th, the 51 democrats and 12 republicans in the U.S. senate approved the [\\$60.4 billion Hurricane Sandy emergency aid package](#). On Wednesday, January 2, 2013, House Speaker John Boehner tabled the legislation until a new Congress gets sworn in after January 3, to the ire of House members in the Northeast. Click the link below for details: usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/01/02/16304049-shame-on-you-congress-republicans-in-sandy-hit-areas-blast-house-gop-for-delay-on-relief?lite)

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The Recreational Fishing Alliance is a national, grassroots political action organization representing recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on marine fisheries issues. RFA’s Mission is to safeguard the rights of saltwater anglers, protect marine, boat and tackle industry jobs, and ensure the long-term sustainability of our Nation’s saltwater fisheries. For more information, call 888-JOIN-RFA or visit www.joinrfa.org.