



For Immediate Release July 26, 2024 Contact: Daniel Eirst (202) 225-2536

Donalds Announces Broad-Based National Coalition To Expedite Disaster Relief For Fisheries

WASHINGTON – Today, Congressman Byron Donalds (R-FL) announced a broad-based national coalition of 107 members of the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate, and endorsing organizations, in support of H.R. 5103 – The FISHERS Act.

The Donalds FISHERS Act is bipartisan legislation to improve the federal regulatory process associated with the allocation of fishery disaster relief. Specifically, this commonsense and solutions-oriented bill seeks to expedite the distribution of federal disaster relief following official fishery disaster declarations—which the State of Florida has requested six times since 2012.

The FISHERS Act Coalition of Support includes House-lead, Rep. Byron Donalds (R-FL) and thirty-seven additional House cosponsors: Representatives Gus Bilirakis (R-FL), Salud Carbajal (D-CA), Jerry Carl (R-AL), Troy Carter (D-LA), Jim Costa (D-CA), Anthony D’Esposito (R-NY), Don Davis (D-NC), Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL), Neal Dunn (R-FL), Scott Franklin (R-FL), Russell Fry (R-SC), Jennifer Gonzalez-Colon (R-PR), Glenn Grothman (R-WI), Josh Harder (D-CA), Clay Higgins (R-LA), Jared Huffman (D-CA), Nick LaLota (R-NY), Anna Paulina Luna (R-FL), Nancy Mace (R-SC), Seth Magaziner (D-RI), Brian Mast (R-FL), Jared Moskowitz (D-FL), James Moynan (R-GU), Kevin Mullin (D-CA), Troy Nehls (R-TX), Jimmy Panetta (D-CA), Mary Peltola (R-AK), Stacey Plaskett (D-VI), Bill Posey (R-FL), Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen (R-AS), David Rouzer (R-NC), John Rutherford (R-FL), Maria Elvira Salazar (R-FL), Greg Steube (R-FL), Michael Waltz (R-FL), Randy Weber (R-TX), and Daniel Webster (R-FL).

“Following Hurricane Ian, Southwest Florida’s seafood industry incurred catastrophic devastation and its impact still persists,” said Congressman Byron Donalds (R-FL). “Waterways are the lifeblood of our economy and our community. It has always been my commitment to advocate for the vitality of water—which ultimately benefits countless families, businesses, and the overall development of Florida’s 19th Congressional District. I am proud to have introduced the bipartisan FISHERS Act in the U.S. House of Representatives, and I thank Senator Scott for introducing this critical piece of legislation in the U.S. Senate.”

The FISHERS Act Coalition of Support includes Senate-lead, Sen. Rick Scott (R-FL) and three additional Senate cosponsors: Senators Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Marco Rubio (R-FL), and Dan Sullivan (R-AK).

“When disaster strikes, families and small businesses can’t be left wondering whether the federal government is going to show up,” said Senator Rick Scott (R-FL). “Floridians know that better than anyone. The federal government must step up and get folks the help they need as fast as possible as they work to get back on their feet. As we head into hurricane season, now is the time to prepare and I ask Congress to pass this legislation as soon as possible to ensure our fishing industry in Florida and across the country have a reliable partner in Washington.”

“Arbitrary bureaucratic delays to Congressionally appropriated fishery disasters prevents businesses from getting back on their feet,” said Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL). “This bill will cut red tape so that these Florida businesses can receive disaster relief in a reasonable and prompt manner after a federal disaster, like a hurricane.”

“Alaska’s fisheries have faced challenges at every turn in recent years – and we will likely see more in the future,” said Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK). “From the Yukon River to Prince William Sound to the Bering Sea, nearly every fishery has relied on disaster relief funding to help them through these difficult times. Unfortunately, these fishermen often wait years to see that relief. This commonsense approach applies time limits on agency review so that Alaskans get the help they need, when they need it.”

“Alaska’s fishing industry has been through a very difficult few years, heightened by an unprecedented number of fishery disasters affecting all parts of our state,” said Senator Dan Sullivan (R-AK). “While relief dollars have been crucial to providing relief to our fishermen, in most instances, the relief has taken far too long to get approved and reach impacted Alaskans. Senator Scott and I are introducing legislation that will enact timelines on the executive branch’s approval process so that our fishing communities don’t have to wait years to see the federal relief that they are due and can continue to responsibly harvest the freshest, most sustainable seafood in the world.”

The FISHERS Act Coalition of Support includes sixty-five endorsing organizations: Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission; Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission; Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission; American Sportfishing Association; Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies; Bonefish and Tarpon Trust; Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation; FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; National Audubon Society; Captains for Clean Water; American Conservation Coalition Action; Angler Action Foundation; Marine Industries Association of SWFL and Tampa Bay; Florida Guides Association; National Association of Charterboat Operators; Southern Offshore Fishing Association; Coastal Conservation Association; Center for Sportfishing Policy; The Nature Conservancy; International Game and Fish Association; Reef Life Foundation; Resource Development Council for Alaska; National Fisheries Institute; Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen’s Association; BoatU.S.; Fish is America; Panama City Boatman’s Association; Association Marina Industries; Southeastern Fisheries Association; North Carolina Fisheries Association; Louisiana Shrimp Association; Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders’ Alliance; Southern Shrimp Alliance; South Carolina Shrimpers Association; Diving Equipment and Marketing Association; Pontchartrain Conservancy; Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association; Everglades Trust; Marine Retailers Association of the Americas; Organized Fishermen of Florida; North Florida Marine Association; Marine Industries Association of Palm Beach County; Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership; Marine Industries Association of the Treasure Coast; Charter Fishermans Association; Destin Charter Boat Association; Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council; Florida Stone Crab Association; Fishing Communities Coalition; Gulf Fisherman’s Association; Florida Commercial Watermen’s Conservation; Tampa Bay Beaches Chamber; Sanibel and Captiva Chamber of Commerce; United States Shrimpers Coalition; United Fishermen of Alaska; Maine Coast Fishermen’s Association; Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen’s Alliance; Alaska Longline Fishermen’s Association; Marine Industries Association of Florida; Golden State Salmon Association; Georgia Commercial Fisherman Association; National Marine Manufacturers Association; Audubon Florida; Ocean Conservancy; Conservancy of Southwest Florida

“Rep. Donalds legislation is extremely important for the State of Florida which has unfortunately had to request six different fishery disaster declarations in the last ten years,” said Roger Young, Executive Director, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. “Setting a deadline for OMB to approve fishery disaster spend plans is critical to provide timely financial support to the fishermen, processors, and our communities after being affected by a natural disaster.”

“Burdensome federal regulations exist in so many areas of environmental and energy policy, from our onerous energy permitting process to states’ ability to secure disaster relief funding,” said Morgan Brummund, American Conservation Coalition Action. “The American Conservation Coalition Action (ACC Action) applauds this bipartisan effort to cut red tape for a more prosperous, cleaner future.”

“On behalf of the National Association of Charterboat Operators, NACO, representing for-hire owners and operators across the U.S. and the Southern Offshore Fishing Association, SOFA, the Gulf of Mexico Commercial Grouper Fishermen, I wish to thank Representative Donalds for his work on the FISHERS ACT,” said Capt. Bob Zales II, President, NACO. “This legislation is long overdue. Fisheries Disasters, natural and man-made, seriously harm many small family fishing businesses and the coastal communities they work from. These small family fishing businesses provide fresh Gulf Seafood for consumers and recreational fishing opportunities to the public. Disasters take a serious toll on economic and social infrastructure, and disaster funding is needed quickly to help folks return to normal. The current disaster funding relief sometimes takes up to four years to be placed in the hands of those who need it. This bill will speed up the bureaucratic process and should help provide funding soon after a fisheries disaster declaration.”

“The Marine Industries Association of Southwest Florida & Tampa Bay happily pledges our support in favor of the FISHERS Act,” said Kyle Good, Marine Industries Association of Southwest Florida & Tampa Bay

“Disasters like hurricanes and oil spills can seriously damage our coasts,” said Remy Monerjelle, Marine Conservation Policy Manager, National Audubon Society. “This bill will help coastal communities get disaster assistance funding sooner to rebuild coastal habitats, so people and birds can recover more quickly after a disaster strikes.”

“The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) and its membership wishes to express their support for requiring the Director of the Office of Management and Budget to approve or deny spend plans within a certain amount of time and are appreciative of the Congressman’s effort to make the fishery disaster determination process more efficient and timelier,” said Dave Donaldson, Executive Director, Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

“The FISHERS Act will be instrumental in ensuring that our communities are able to rebuild swiftly and more resiliently after a natural disaster, and rest assured that funding relief is there to help rather than be a stumbling block on the road to recovery,” said James Evans, CEO, Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation.

“We thank Congressman Donalds for his work on the FISHERS Act, which is very much needed in our industry,” said Acy Cooper, President, Louisiana Shrimp Association, Director, United States Shrimpers Coalition. “We agree that disaster relief funding should be expedited to fishermen so that they may recover and remain in business.”

“Commercial fishing communities – critical to the economies and culture of coastal states – are particularly vulnerable to damage from hurricanes and other natural disasters,” said the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders’ Alliance. “Despite this fact, federal disaster relief arrives more slowly for the commercial fishing industry than other comparable industries such as agriculture, leaving the commercial fishing businesses that make up these communities high and dry in their time of greatest need. This is particularly harmful as federal disaster relief is often the only significant form of relief available to Gulf of Mexico fishing businesses given the region’s lack of financing institutions willing to provide capital to the industry. The Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders’ Alliance – the Gulf of Mexico’s leading commercial reef fish fishermen’s association – strongly supports the FISHERS Act’s efforts to hasten the federal disaster relief process.”

“NFI is supportive of this legislative effort that will help get fishery disaster relief funds out the door in a more expedited fashion,” said the National Fisheries Institute. “Too often, the funds from a fishery disaster come too late to help those affected. The FISHERS Act will help those in the seafood industry get back to providing American families healthy, delicious, and sustainable seafood without lengthy delays.”

“Audubon Florida supports the FISHERS Act because our working waterfronts are critical to Florida’s coastal economy,” said Julie Wraithmell, VP and Executive Director Audubon Florida. “This commonsense legislation will expedite relief and restoration funding for coastal communities impacted by disasters like hurricanes and harmful algal blooms, while we work to improve water quality and protect marine ecosystems in the longer term. The bipartisan support for this bill is a commitment to healthy coasts and economies.”

“Especially when it comes to federal emergency relief, bureaucracy and red tape must not thwart the effective management and timely disbursement of relief funds that help affected parties rebuild, revitalize and survive following a disaster,” said Karen Kerrigan, President & CEO, Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council. “The bipartisan FISHERS Act makes practical and needed changes such as establishing a reasonable deadline for OMB approval, where one does not currently exist – to ensure that the many types of small businesses affected by fishery disasters are not threatened with potential closure due to lengthy wait periods for funds. Modernizing and improving the regulatory process, which would set a 30-day deadline for OMB action following NOAA approval, is an important provision for the many small businesses whose livelihoods are tied to the fishery sector. SBE Council strongly supports the FISHERS Act and appreciates the leadership of Congressman Byron Donalds and the bipartisan spirit that is working to move this important bill forward.”

“The Georgia Commercial Fishermans Association applauds the efforts of Congressman Byron Donalds and wholeheartedly support this important piece of legislation,” said Paige Morrison, President, Georgia Commercial Fishermans Association, Director, U.S. Shrimpers Coalition. “The 2024 FISHERS Act is a common-sense solution that protects both our fisheries and the communities that depend on them. By ensuring timely access to relief funds, this act empowers fishermen to rebuild their livelihoods and fosters the long-term sustainability of our vital marine resources.”

“The California salmon fishery is in its second year of closure and that means fishing families have lost most of their income. The impacts are personal, as well as economic, and they are desperately waiting for disaster relief funding that can often take more than a year to receive,” said Sean Aris, Executive Director, Golden State Salmon Association. “The FISHERS Act is a critical lifeline for fishing businesses and will ensure much needed funding is quickly distributed to thousands of families who struggle to put food on the table, make mortgage payments, and keep their boats from being repossessed during fishery disasters.”—Golden State Salmon Association

“In Southwest Florida, the environment is the economy, and our local fisheries are an integral part of the ecological and economic foundation that is so key to our quality of life,” said Nicole Johnson, Director of Environmental Policy, Conservancy of SWFL. “Improving the federal regulatory process associated with fishery disaster relief funding is important on a number of levels, including the ability for communities to address fisheries health post-emergency with regard to water quality. Good water quality is absolutely critical to Floridians. A recent study done on behalf of the Conservancy, Captains for Clean Water and Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation found that in Southwest Florida, harmful algal blooms result in an annual economic loss of \$460 million to the commercial and recreational fishing industries.”

MORE:

- See full text of the Donalds FISHERS Act HERE.
• See Congress.gov bill profile of the Donalds FISHERS Act HERE.
• See Congress.gov bill profile of the Scott Senate companion HERE.
• See Donalds-Scott Joint Op-Ed in Support of FISHERS Act HERE.
• See bill summary graphic of the Donalds FISHERS Act below:

BILL SUMMARY SEeks to IMPROVE FEDERAL REGULATORY PROCESSES ASSOCIATED WITH DISASTER RELIEF FUNDING AT FISHERIES ENSURING SUPPORT FOR FISHERIES IN TIMES OF NEED STREAMLINING FEDERAL DISASTER RELIEF FUNDING SLASHING RED TAPE FOR EXPEDITED ALLOCATION

###



Office Locations:

Table with 3 columns: Washington DC Office, Collier County Office, Lee County Office