

**BYRON DONALDS**  
19TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

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COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024

Honorable Janet Coit  
Assistant Administrator  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)  
1315 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Administrator Coit:

I write today to express my concerns about your agency's lack of action in terms of approving and allocating federal fishery disaster relief in response to Hurricane Ian—which made landfall in Southwest Florida on September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Hurricane Ian was a Category 5 storm that produced windspeeds of over 155 miles per hour and generated a storm surge that exceeded 10 feet, which ultimately caused widespread devastation to my constituents and small businesses throughout the Southwest Florida community. Many months after the storm, the effects of Hurricane Ian are still being felt in SWFL—and I want to emphasize that this federal relief is vital for my constituents. Time is of the essence as my community continues to rebuild, but in my view, the untimeliness of this process is unacceptable.

As you know, Southwest Florida was home to a vibrant fishing industry prior to Hurricane Ian. Specifically, fisheries in SWFL were some of the most active and economically productive in the Sunshine State, in addition to being a popular destination for tourists and Floridians alike wishing to experience Florida's abundant natural resources. However, Hurricane Ian caused severe damage to both the commercial and recreational fishing industry in SWFL, and my community still feels the devastating impacts of Hurricane Ian to this day.

Following Hurricane Ian, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis submitted a federal fishery disaster determination request, and NOAA responded with a request for additional, specific information. On April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) sent NOAA additional information, as requested. FWC concluded that based on the information provided, Hurricane Ian meets the threshold for federal fishery disaster relief with more than \$19 million in qualifying fishery losses. In that regard, I urge NOAA to move faster and finally declare a federal fishery disaster so that meaningful relief can be allocated to my constituents in Southwest Florida.

In sum, I encourage you to immediately review the data submitted by FWC and quickly approve the federal fishery disaster request so that the Southwest Florida community can get back on its feet. To emphasize, expediting the allocation of federal fishery disaster relief is one of my top priorities, and I challenge NOAA to minimize the red tape and move faster—the livelihoods of many of my constituents depend on it. Thank you for taking my thoughts into consideration.

Sincerely,



Byron Donalds  
Member of Congress (FL-19)