

VICENTE GONZALEZ
34TH DISTRICT, TEXAS

COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CAPITAL MARKETS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY,
ILLCIT FINANCE, AND INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL
INSTITUTIONS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4315

WASHINGTON OFFICE
154 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515
(202) 225-2531

BROWNSVILLE OFFICE
835 E. LEVEE ST., 6TH FLOOR
BROWNSVILLE, TX 78520
(956) 682-5545

gonzalez.house.gov

September 29, 2023

The Honorable Gina M. Raimondo
U.S. Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Janet L. Coit
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries
National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Room 5128
Washington, DC 20239

Dear Secretary Raimondo and Assistant Administrator Coit:

I write with grave concern regarding the state of the Texas Gulf Coast shrimping industry. Despite antidumping regulations, imports remain high and continue to undermine our domestic producers. That is why I urge a review into the matter and ask for a fishery resource disaster determination for fisheries along the Gulf of Mexico so that shrimpers may access disaster relief assistance.

As you know, the U.S. shrimp industry is a vital part of Gulf Coast communities where domestic shrimp are harvested and processed. The industry accounts for over 14,000 domestic jobs, which generate roughly \$850 million in economic value across the state each year. However, due to increased foreign shrimp imports into the United States markets, which usually do not meet our domestic health standards, our shrimpers are unable to compete.

According to data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Texas shrimpers harvested 6.8 million pounds of shrimp in the first five months of this year in comparison to the 800 million pounds of shrimp that were imported into the U.S. in the first half of this year. Imported shrimp tends to sell under a dollar a pound forcing domestic shrimpers to decrease their prices to try and compete.

Counties all over the Gulf, including Cameron County and the City of Port Isabel, once known as the shrimping capital of the world, have issued disaster declarations. Record low shrimp prices coupled with historically high fuel prices and inflation leave shrimpers unable to cover the costs of fishing, which averages tens of thousands for a trawler to go out to sea. Additionally, labor shortages coupled with immigration regulations have contributed to even more hardship. Local shrimp boat owners are struggling to find American workers willing to go out to sea for days to weeks at a time, which is why shrimpers often rely on experienced workers from Mexico and

Central America to complete their crews. However, non-agricultural visas, H-2B, are not being issued to Mexican or Nicaraguan citizens right now. Instead, these visas are currently reserved for other nationals who are often do not have experience working with seafood and cause thousands of dollars in lost revenue per day if the vessel must return a worker to dock. As a result, many South Texas shrimpers have been forced to remain docked or sell their trawlers as they are unable to compete with foreign shrimp imports.

This is not a new issue. In 2005, the International Trade Commission determined that the U.S. is materially injured by reason of imports from Brazil, China, Ecuador, India, Thailand, and Vietnam that are sold in the U.S. at less than fair value. Yet, foreign countries continue to export exorbitant amounts of shrimp into U.S. markets. Despite antidumping regulations, imports remain high and continue to undermine our domestic shrimp producers.

The federal government must do more to protect the shrimping industry. Our domestic shrimpers are on the verge of a major collapse which threatens many small family-owned businesses and coastal communities in my district and all over the Gulf Coast. That is why I urge you to initiate a review and make a fishery resource disaster determination as authorized by Congress through the *Fishery Resources Disasters Improvement Act*. Congress changed the statutory authorization for NOAA's Fishery Disaster Assistance program to allow the U.S. Secretary of Commerce to act when a fishery is hit by a man-made cause beyond the control of fishery managers to mitigate through conservation and management measures. I am confident that this issue qualifies as a "man-made cause."

I urge you to make a fishery resource disaster determination for fisheries along the Gulf of Mexico. We must ensure our domestic shrimping industry stays afloat. Our shrimpers cannot wait any longer. They need a lifeline now or this critical South Texas industry will disappear.

Thank you for your attention to this matter of critical importance, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress

CC:

The Honorable Katherine Tai, Ambassador, U.S. Trade Representative
The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture
The Honorable Julie Su, Acting Secretary of Labor, U.S. Department of Labor
The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of Homeland Security