

December 2, 2020

The Honorable Wilbur L. Ross Jr.
Secretary of Commerce
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20230

Chris Oliver
Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries
U.S. Department of Commerce
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Springs, MD 20910
chris.w.oliver@noaa.gov

Re: Petition to the National Marine Fisheries Service to Take Emergency Action under the Marine Mammal Protection Act to Protect Critically Endangered North Atlantic Right Whales from Death and Serious Injury in Commercial Fishing Gear

Dear Secretary Ross and Mr. Oliver,

We write to express our support for the petition filed today by Center for Biological Diversity, Conservation Law Foundation, Defenders of Wildlife, and the Humane Society of the United States seeking immediate emergency protections for critically endangered North Atlantic right whales.

Recently released population estimates from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the New England Aquarium have revised population estimates downward, to 356 animals alive at the end of 2019. New population estimates as well as newly reported entanglements demand urgent action to reduce the serious injuries and mortalities in those commercial fisheries that are having, or are likely to have, an immediate and significant adverse impact on the species.

Taking the actions requested in this petition would provide meaningful protections from one of the most significant threats to the North Atlantic right whale and aid in ensuring the continued survival and eventual recovery of this highly imperiled species.

Sincerely,



Francine Kershaw, Ph.D.
Staff Scientist, Marine Mammal Protection & Oceans
Natural Resources Defense Council



Keisha Sedlacek
Director of Regulatory Affairs, Federal Affairs
Humane Society Legislative Fund



Susan Millward
Director, Marine Animal Program
Animal Welfare Institute



Vikki Spruill
President and CEO
New England Aquarium



Gib Brogan
Fisheries Campaign Manager
Oceana, Inc.



David Kaplan, Esq.
President, Cetacean Society International

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alistair Dove', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Alistair D.M. Dove, Ph.D
Vice President of Science and Education
Georgia Aquarium