



THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
GOVERNMENT HOUSE

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340-774-0001**

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Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.
Regional Administrator
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Association
Southeast Regional Office
263 13th Ave South
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

Dear Dr. Crabtree:

I am writing as a follow up to my remarks at the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council ("CFMC") meeting in St. Croix. At that meeting I expressed my position that the local fishing industry represents an integral part of the Virgin Islands economy, as well as a major element of the Virgin Islands cultural heritage. As the CFMC considers the regulations to meet the requirements of Magnusan-Stevens Reauthorization Act it is important that their input be seriously considered and incorporated.

As you could certainly witness by the vast number of Territorial fishermen that attended the March meeting there are significant concerns with the measures being proposed that will have serious impacts on the industry, and upon the communities and businesses that depend upon them. I must note that such feelings have continued to grow and that the cooperation and collaboration that I mentioned as key to achieving your desired ends is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve.

I was most disappointed to see that no aspect of the Virgin Islands' approach to setting Allowable Catch Limits, which were directly authorized by me and presented by the St. Thomas Fishermen's Association, was included in the "Scoping Document" you presented at the CFMC meeting. Additionally, it appears that the National Marine Fisheries Service is bypassing the CFMC who, in fact, has responsibility for establishing these regulations. This strategy also ignores the efforts of Territorial fishermen who are taking steps to reduce effort levels, have undertaken studies which will lead to a reduction in bycatch and who have been working to develop a collaborative approach to management of our fishery resources.

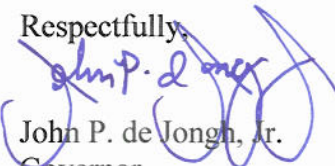
Local fishermen have expressed to me that their voices are not being heard, and based on recent actions I must agree with them. Thus, I am asking for a strategic change in the way NMFS is approaching development of the Magnusan-Stevens requirements. Specifically, I am requesting that, instead of utilizing unwieldy large meetings which include Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, NMFS should work directly in smaller formats which involve CFMC and local fishermen supported by NMFS staff.

I would also like to request that, instead of attempting to predetermine the outcome of such meetings, NMFS should enter into the effort with a receptivity and should include consideration of changes which might have taken place since the 2005 SFA amendment as well as actions underway by local fishermen's groups to address effort management and other aspects of the local fisheries.

I recognize that there is limited time available to meet the MSRA deadlines and so I recommend that such activities begin immediately and that you lend your support to seeing that they do.

There is still time to meet the Magnusan-Stevens deadlines in a collaborative manner. I ask that you direct the appropriate parties to convene such an effort before more time is lost by the current non-collaborative strategy.

Respectfully,



John P. de Jongh, Jr.
Governor