March 31, 2023

The Honorable Kay Granger  
Chair, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies  
House Committee on Appropriations  
H-310 United States Capitol Washington, DC  
20515

The Honorable Matt Cartwright  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies  
House Committee on Appropriations  
1036 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Granger and Ranking Member Cartwright:

Thank you for your committee’s continued support for North Atlantic right whale conservation and management in recent appropriations cycles. As you consider priorities for the Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, the undersigned members firmly request that you support $10 million in additional funding over FY23 levels for North Atlantic right whale conservation. We also recommend that funds authorized in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 be fully funded moving forward. Specifically, we ask that the committee prioritize innovative fishing gear technologies, including “ropeless” or on-demand gear, in order to reduce entanglement risk by making whale-safe gear commercially achievable and opening the door to coexistence between this highly endangered whale and a variety of ocean activities. With vessel strikes also posing a dire threat, we further recommend prioritizing of funding for the enforcement of current and upcoming rules on North Atlantic right whale slow zones to minimize risk from vessel collisions.

With only around 340 whales left, the North Atlantic right whale faces an uphill battle to recovery. Their habitat and migration path often overlaps with commercial fishing grounds and areas of high vessel traffic, which leaves the whales vulnerable to vessel collisions and fishing gear entanglements. These are the two leading the two leading causes of injury and death to the species. The whales that do survive these dangers are stunted in growth by the long-term impact of entanglements. Recent scientific research has estimated suggest that more than 85 percent of North Atlantic right whales have been entangled at least once, and around 60 percent have become entangled in fishing gear multiple times. Because of preventable, human-caused threats, North Atlantic right whale deaths still exceed new calves at a ratio of three to two. Federal scientists predict that even one death per year for the species puts the species in jeopardy of complete collapse. This is the lowest population assessment in decades and illustrates the ongoing urgency of providing adequate conservation and management funding for this species.

We commend the committee’s excellent work in boosting funding for North Atlantic right whales in last year’s Consolidated Appropriations Act, and urge the committee to continue to
commit to protecting this critically endangered species by facilitating a transition to gear, technology, and robust management that enables the long-term coexistence of this endangered species with key sectors of our economy including shipping and commercial fishing.

In particular, we ask that the following increase within the Marine Mammals, Sea Turtles, and Other Species line item continuing the essential funding of this committee last year in protecting North Atlantic right whales:

- No less than $6,000,000 for the development, administration, and acquisition of shore-based, aerial, and on-the-water enforcement capabilities for the United States Coast Guard and National Marine Fisheries Service; and the support of the voluntary acquisition of automatic identifications systems by vessel owners affected by the enforcement of current and forthcoming vessel speed restrictions.
- $3,000,000 for surveys and monitoring, including but not limited to underwater acoustic detection technologies, of North Atlantic right whales in Atlantic coastal waters;
- $1,000,000 for disentanglement, stranding response, and necropsy activities;
- 5% cap on the amount of funds NOAA can use internally.
- The 2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act set aside $73 million in total funding for North Atlantic right whale conservation, $20 million of which was for the grant program for fiscal years 2023 through 2032 for reducing impacts to North Atlantic right whale from fishing gear entanglements and vessel collisions and $27 million was direct to NOAA. Depending on funding availability, we recommend that funding towards on-demand fishing gear be prioritized in addition to the continued, steady funding for a variety of North Atlantic right whale conservation activities.

Funding these programs is essential to ensuring that the North Atlantic right whale avoids extinction. Thank you for considering this request, and we hope to work with you to prioritize sufficient funding for these activities in FY24.

Sincerely,

Seth Moulton
Member of Congress

William R. Keating
Member of Congress
Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Chris Pappas
Member of Congress

Joe Courtney
Member of Congress

Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
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Lisa Blunt Rochester
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Jason Crow
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Frank Pallone, Jr.  
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