October 11, 2017

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  The Honorable Don Young
United States Senate United States House of Representatives
522 Hart Senate Office Building 2314 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510 Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Dan Sullivan
United States Senate
702 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

**RE: Support for H.R. 2079 and S.1323 - Young Fishermen’s Development Act**

Dear Senators Murkowski and Sullivan, and Congressman Young,

United Fishermen of Alaska (UFA) is the statewide commercial fishing trade association, representing 34 commercial fishing organizations participating in fisheries throughout the state and the federal waters off Alaska’s coast.

The United Fisherman of Alaska strongly supports the Young Fishermen’s Development Act (YFDA) introduced by prime sponsors Congressman Young (HR 2079) and Senator Sullivan (S. 1323). We applaud the Alaska’s Congressional delegation’s leadership in introducing and advocating for this important bill. These bills will establish the first national program to support young men and women entering the commercial fishing industry. The bipartisan, bicoastal bill, which would provide grants of up to $200,000 (totaling $2 million annually) through NOAA’s Sea Grant Program, will provide support for essential training and education of the next generation of America’s fishermen.

In 2015, the average age of Alaska fishery permit holders was 50 years, up nearly ten years since 1980. Aging trends are marked by a lack of young people entering the industry today. As the bulk of Alaska permit holders approach retirement age and rural fishing communities struggle to retain access to local fisheries, the lack of young people entering the fisheries has become a pressing concern for the state of Alaska and our coastal communities.

UFA member groups recognize the need to make sure we have a strong fleet of young fishermen ready to take over the important roles both on deck and in their communities. This includes providing them with the training and resources necessary to make smart business plans and to fish safely and sustainably.
Right now, our country lacks a coordinated, national effort to prepare and support young fishermen for a successful future. There are varying efforts in regions around the country that address the increasing challenges young fishermen face, but no cohesive effort at the federal level. It is in the best interests of the U.S. to continue sustainable domestic fisheries and to do so will require enabling new fishermen to take the reins of seafood harvesting operations.

This program is modeled after the Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Program, housed within USDA. Because wild harvest fishermen cannot access those grant funds for training, we heartily support the YFDA to address that gap.

UFA looks forward to working with Alaska Congressional delegation to advance the Young Fishermen Development Act.

Thank you,

Jerry McCune      Mark Vinsel
President      Executive Administrator