Dear Secretary Raimondo:

I write to request that you initiate the process to implement a federal fisheries disaster declaration for the shrimp and oyster fisheries of the State of Mississippi for calendar year 2020 as outlined in Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act ("MSA").

Due to historical flooding in the lower Mississippi River Valley in 2019, which ultimately led to the Bonnet Carré Spillway being operational for an unprecedented 123 days, a Catastrophic Regional Fisheries Disaster was declared by the United States Secretary of Commerce on September 25, 2019 for Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama. Mississippi’s fisheries were allocated recovery funds based on 2019 impacts; however, the State’s commercial shrimp and oyster fisheries continue to experience long-term impacts from this disaster.

In 2019, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources ("MDMR") observed 96.9% oyster mortality across all size classes and nearly 100% mortality of market-size oysters on the major public reefs located in the western Mississippi Sound. Because of these issues, the MDMR anticipates that, provided no additional environmental stressors occur, oyster harvest likely will not resume until at least 2023 due to a nearly complete loss of previous resources, associated reduction in spawning, and the time needed for new oysters to reach market size. Based on reef assessments conducted prior to and after the 2019 disaster, the MDMR estimates 2020 commercial losses to be 176,714 sacks with an ex-vessel value of $7,952,151, representing a 100% loss in revenue.

Additionally, sustained decreases in brown shrimp production in the Mississippi Sound have been documented through fishery independent data and commercial landings. Fisheries scientists with the MDMR conduct annual trawl surveys prior to the spring shrimp season, and in
2019, the data showed an 85.4% reduction in brown shrimp abundance across the entire Mississippi Sound with that trend continuing into 2020 with 82.5% decrease in brown shrimp abundance. The corresponding 2020 commercial brown shrimp landings were 2,376,917 pounds with an ex-vessel value of $3,671,822 which is $3,809,288 (50.92%) below the previous 5-year average of $7,481,110.

Accordingly, because these Mississippi fisheries continue to suffer significant population and economic damages as a result of the 2019 freshwater disaster, I request that you initiate the process to implement a federal fisheries disaster declaration for the shrimp and oyster fisheries of the State of Mississippi for calendar year 2020 pursuant to the MSA. The declaration of a federal fisheries disaster for Mississippi will begin the process of acquiring financial assistance for all negatively impacted ecosystems, fishermen and related businesses in a timely manner.

Thank you for your consideration and this request.

Sincerely,

Tate Reeves

cc: Brigadier General Joe Spraggins, Executive Director of MDMR