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February 29, 2008

The Honorable Carlos M. Gutierrez
United States Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Gutierrez:

On behalf of Florida's commercial shark fishing industry, I respectfully request that you approve federal fisheries disaster relief for the many fishermen and processors engaged in this endeavor in Florida. I believe this request is warranted and meets the requirements established in Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 2006. Sharks were considered underutilized in the 1970's by federal fishery managers and regulations in 1983 had the effect of encouraging fishing for sharks. As the industry was fostered by managers, the economics and profitability of the fishery helped it to grow and it became a significant industry to Florida. More than half of the federal shark permits issued for the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico are now held by Florida fishermen and the current dockside value of sharks harvested in Florida is estimated at around \$3.5 million dollars.

Fishing pressure and the inability of federal managers to closely monitor and control harvest levels have reduced the shark industry in Florida to a point where its continued economic viability is in doubt. In 2007 federal commercial fishing quotas were reduced 65% in the Gulf of Mexico to adjust for harvest "overages" in 2006. The Atlantic quota was reduced to zero. Federal managers shut down the 2007 season in September. Because of the imprecise mechanisms for managing quotas in a timely way, federal managers have now closed all commercial harvest of large coastal sharks (the primary commercial species in Florida) for the first 8 months of 2008, and new regulations under consideration will almost certainly result in continued, long-term closures. While all concerned in this issue recognize that restrictions in harvest have been necessary to protect or rebuild various shark species for the long term, the quota system in place for the commercial fishery has resulted in severe economic hardship.

By making this request we recognize that important details need to be addressed, including the amount of aid needed, how it would be administered and whether federal aid would be contingent on state matching dollars. However because of the immediate impact occurring to Florida's commercial shark industry, we believe an important first

Carlos M. Gutierrez
February 29, 2008
Page Two

step is to make a determination that this industry qualifies for federal fishery disaster relief. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charlie Crist". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Charlie Crist

CC/fwc/mr