

Statement by Senator Murray on Senate Commerce Committee Field Hearing on the Decline of West Coast Groundfish

First I would like to thank Senator Ron Wyden and the Commerce Committee for holding today's hearing on the West Coast Groundfish crisis. I hope the hearing will help generate new ideas and solutions to address the declines in this fishery. As you know, this crisis has had serious negative impacts on communities in Washington, Oregon and California. I greatly appreciate the leadership the Senator from Oregon has shown by calling for and hosting today's field hearing.

Last year we made some progress in addressing this crisis. I am pleased the fiscal year 2001 budget includes \$2.225 million for West Coast observers. Working together with Senators Wyden, Gordon Smith, Boxer and Feinstein, we secured \$5 million in emergency funding to assist families and communities dependent on the groundfish fishery. In addition, the fiscal year 2001 omnibus spending bill includes an exception for fixed-gear sablefish to the moratorium on individual fishing quotas. This will allow safer, more efficient fishing for this sector of the fishery.

At the same time, I am concerned these steps, while important, are not enough to address the crisis at hand. Many of the small, coastal communities with businesses and families dependent on the groundfish fishery have already been hard hit by downturns in other natural resource dependent industries, such as timber and the salmon fishery. I look forward to reviewing the testimony provided at today's hearing. As the 107th Congress progresses, I will maintain my high level of interest in this issue and my support for solutions to provide relief. I am also interested in longer term solutions on how to avoid such crises in the future. Thank you.