

May 8, 2020

The Honorable Ron DeSantis  
Governor, State of Florida  
400 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Dear Governor DeSantis,

On behalf of the undersigned companies and organizations, we thank you for your prudent leadership in keeping Floridians safe during these unprecedented times. As you look to re-open the state economy and properly balance economic and health needs, I hope you will consider the following interests of the recreational marine and fishing industries.

Florida leads the nation as the top boating and fishing state in the country. Not only is boating and fishing important for the mental and physical wellbeing of Floridians, but the role it plays in the state's economy is significant. In the state of Florida, recreational boating contributes \$23.3 billion in economic impact, and recreational angling contributes \$11.5 billion to the state economy and supports over 106,000 jobs. From manufacturing to dealerships to retail to consumer and trade shows, the entire ecosystem of the boating and fishing industry sustains a thriving economy throughout every county.

As you look to safely re-open the Florida state economy, we hope you will consider the following needs of our industries:

1. **Business operations.** Our industry represents an array of business interests including, manufacturing, dealerships, retail outlets, marinas, boat yards, bait and tackle shops, charter operations, clubs, and repair shops. Each of these segments have been categorized differently based on essential business operations and your stay-at-home order. Our industries stand ready to support the safe return of business operations, in a phased-in approach, that ensures the economic viability of the business itself and the utmost safety of its employees and customers. While we understand the segmented return of businesses, we hope you will consider the following:
  - a. Our members have taken advantage of the unique capability of manufacturing facilities to restructure their floor plans, allowing for proper social distancing while focusing on safe work practices in order to limit any potential COVID-19 exposures. NMMA has published the following guidance, specific to manufacturing operations, that we feel responsibly balances operational and safety needs. [CLICK HERE](#)
  - b. Marinas and boat yards provide important access points for boaters to maintain their personal property, access fuel, and conduct maintenance on their vessel. We encourage the continued operability of marinas, while understanding retail and food service limitation as important interim health measures.
  - c. The vast majority of marine dealerships, bait and tackle shops, and retail outlets are small, family owned enterprises that have experienced significant economic hardship during this pandemic. We hope you will consider operational adaptations to allow these small businesses to begin to recoup revenue, including allowing for concierge-style deliveries, provide vessel repair services, and ultimately open the front doors with important safeguards to limit shop overcrowding and ensure social distancing inside the store. The Marine Retailers Association of the Americas has provided the following helpful guidance to allow for safe retail operations: [CLICK HERE](#)

2. **Business Relief.** Small and medium sized businesses throughout the country have been severely impacted by forced closures resulting in significant financial loss and unintended workforce reductions. While we understand these measures were appropriately taken to ensure the health and welfare of all citizens, we hope you will consider the financial impact and needed relief to ensure these businesses are sustained. We have worked closely with the federal government to connect these businesses with funding through the Small Business Administration. As you consider the role of your state in supporting local businesses please consider the following:
  - a. **Business Interruption Insurance.** Business Interruption Insurance (BII) plans are designed to help replace lost income and pay for extra expenses when businesses face interruption of business operations. However, BII coverage not required to cover disease, which prevents businesses from receiving assistance through existing BII plans. While it is not necessary to open up coverage to all diseases, businesses should be able to utilize their existing coverage to help recoup these significant losses. In response to the SARS outbreak in 2002-2003, similar measures were taken to temporarily allow for disease coverage. We encourage the federal and state government to jointly tackle insurance coverage as a means to further support the return of business operations and needed cash flow.
  - b. **Short term compensation.** The CARES Act included a provision to temporarily fund state STC programs to protect businesses and keep employees on the payroll. Through the end of the year, the federal government will pay 100 percent of the costs incurred by states which already have such programs in place and 50 percent of the costs incurred by states which create such a program, in addition to \$100 million in grants for states to implement and administer these programs. We hope your state will consider using these funds and making them readily available to local businesses.
3. **Boating and Fishing Access.** Resuming outdoor recreation, including boat ramp access and private marina operation, provides a safe outlet for American's to obtain mental and physical health benefits while ensuring safe social distancing. In addition to the individual benefits, recreational boating and fishing are important drivers to your state's economy and can continue to support local businesses on the other side of the pandemic. We understand that safeguards are needed to ensure the safety of Americans on the water. We support the following considerations for safe boat operation and fishing access:
  - a. Place capacity restrictions, based on boat length, to ensure social distancing while onboard.
  - b. Prohibit rafting of vessels or beaching at local sandbars to avoid overpopulation of confined areas.
  - c. Open public boat ramps as much as possible. In locations with a high risk of overcrowding, consider a balanced approach of boater demand and health protections such as limiting individuals from congregating while the vessel is trailered, increase sanitation at public restrooms, limit fish cleaning stations to one person per time, and ensure only one vessel is being launch at a time.
  - d. Ensure consistent access across state and locally run access points and among both private and public ramps and marinas. Allow for fishing charter and boat rental operations to resume with provisions for social distancing and appropriate sanitation measures. Americans take to the water in a variety of ways and we should encourage safe and responsible access regardless of vessel ownership or location type.
4. **Promoting Outdoor Recreation.** Our organizations have enjoyed a longstanding relationship with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, the Office of Boating and Waterways, and the Department of Environmental Protection. These agencies provide important resource protection, law enforcement,

and regulatory enforcement of boating and fishing laws. As we look to reinvigorate the state economy, collaborative support from the private and public sector to encourage responsible recreation is needed. The Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund is a critical source of funding for the state of Florida in its resource and water protection. Our community proudly contributes to this fund through motorboat fuel and excise taxes annually. One of the most effective ways we can responsibly encourage boating and fishing are through communication efforts like those utilized through the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, a grant recipient of the Trust Fund. Collaboration between RBFF and the aforementioned state agencies will ensure the continued prosperity of boating and fishing in Florida and only further increase our economic impact. RBFF estimates for every \$1 spent on marketing boating and fishing, \$4 is returned to the state. This conversion and efforts to support boating and fishing should be prioritized, even as state budgets look to cutbacks.

5. **Labor and employer liability.** Employers throughout our industry stand ready to ensure the health and safety of their workforce. As businesses come back online, we commit to following all CDC, OSHA, and state guidance to protect workers, ensuring health, safety, and require social distancing measures. While the ongoing impact of COVID-19 is unclear, employers face additional risk should their workforce contract the illness. We encourage robust testing and tracing efforts to maintain the health and safety of their employees and prevent unnecessary spread. State efforts to expand worker compensation liability for COVID-19 cases should be avoided and unscrupulous litigation efforts prevented. In order to get the economy back up and running, both workers and employees need assurances that will not unduly put the business operations or health of employees at risk.
6. **Trade and consumer shows.** While we understand the ability to ensure the safety of Americans at large public gatherings will be a challenging endeavor, we stand ready to support efforts to responsibly bring the community together. Our non-profit organizations produce some of the most iconic events in the state, including:
  - Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show (November, owned by Marine Industries Association of South Florida)
  - ICAST (July, Orlando, owned by American Sportfishing Association)
  - Miami International Boat Show (February, owned by National Marine Manufacturers Association)
  - Palm Beach International Boat Show (March, owned by Marine Industries Association of Palm Beach)
  - Tampa Boat Show (September, owned by National Marine Manufacturers Association)
  - IBEX, International BoatBuilders Exhibition and Conference (October, Tampa, co-owned by National Marine Manufacturers Association and RAI Amsterdam)

These consumer and trade shows attract visitors from throughout the world and provide immense economic value to the local communities, particularly hotels, restaurants, and retail outlets. In total we estimate these boat shows to sustain hundreds of thousands of visitors to the state and contribute nearly \$7 billion in economic value. ICAST, an Orlando-based fishing trade shows, brings 15,000 visitors to the Orange County Convention Center and is estimated to contribute \$25 million to the economy.

Consumer shows in the boating and fishing industries provide an important platform for customers to survey a wide variety of inventory and allow both manufacturers and dealers to directly sell their

product. Sales from boat shows, both new and used, contribute upwards of 50-75% of overall business sales, sustaining company operations for the majority of the year. Trade shows, like ICAST and IBEX support the distribution and supply chain of our industries and attract buyers from all over the world to predominately Florida-based businesses. Orders from these shows are the lifeblood of small suppliers. These events and exhibitions are an important lifeline for local economies and small businesses throughout the state, and we hope you will consider the following measures to support their safe return:

- a. Discounts in state and locally imposed costs on the show. While we understand the state budget is financially strapped, the ability of show producers to provide a safe and economically viable event is being severely hamstrung. We commit to working collaboratively with the state to produce world-class shows that support \$23.3 billion in economic impact for the state. For every dollar invested in our shows a multiplier impact is felt throughout the state's economy. We ask you consider alleviating some show costs such as: facility charges, permit fees, sovereign submerged lands leases, licensing, and operational taxes. Resources that your administration can invest into shows and similar events today will return more value to the state and local economy over time. Relief from state costs will help ensure continued viability for this critical component to the Florida economy.
- b. Financial support to ensure health and safety checks among attendees as well as increased sanitation of the facility space. Our industry stands ready to ensure the safety of attendees at our shows. We are committed to working collaboratively with the Florida Department of Health to establish safeguards for show attendees, including health screenings and additional sanitation measures. We anticipate, however, these additional measures will incur substantial costs on the show production and we ask for state support to properly execute. Your financial assistance will ensure the viability of these show efforts and the subsequent economic impact to surrounding localities. We encourage you to deploy a state health infrastructure system to support large public gatherings. Your presence, both onsite and with state-owned materials, will give needed reassurances to attendees and ensure the viability of the event. We are concerned about potential shortages in supplies such as thermometers, hand sanitation, masks, and cleaning products. Efforts to provide these needed health and safety items to facilities will ensure the well being of visitors while not overburdening show producers.
- c. Show Liability. As mentioned above, businesses of all stripes are concerned about the potential spread of this virus, and the same can be applied to producers of large public gatherings like boat and angling shows. We remain committed to providing world class shows and encourage rigorous tracing and testing for COVID-19. Show operators will follow all federal and state guidance for health and safety but cannot risk additional liability should attendees claim contraction of the virus at the event.
- d. Support distressed and severely impacted industries. As considerations are being made for tourism and hospitality distressed industries, please consider the impact COVID-19 is also having on our show operations. Boat shows provide not only direct economic value to local exhibitors through sales, but also attract visitation from across the country and globe with a cascading impact on local hotels, restaurants and stores. We seek to work collaboratively with tourism and hospitality partners and ask you include the fishing and boating community in these distressed industry relief efforts.

The U.S. marine and fishing industry stands ready to assist you in re-opening the Florida economy and we look forward to working collaboratively to ensure the continued success of our \$23.3 billion economic impact.

Sincerely,

Larry Berryman  
Vice President, Southern Shows  
National Marine Manufacturers Association

Anne Dunbar  
Show Director  
IBEX

Chris Edmonston  
President  
BoatU.S. Foundation

George Gentile  
Board President  
Marine Industries Association of Palm Beach

Matt Gruhn  
President  
Marine Retailers Association of the Americas

Glenn Hughes  
President  
American Sportfishing Association

Phil Purcell  
President/CEO  
Marine Industries of South Florida

Andrew Doole  
President | U.S. Boat Shows  
Informa Markets