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TTY USERS CALL VIA MD RELAY

May 2, 2008

VIA FACSIMILE: (202) 482-2741

The Honorable Carlos M. Gutierrez
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
Herbert Clark Hoover Building
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington DC 20230

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to seek declaration of a commercial fishery failure and a fisheries resource disaster affecting the Maryland commercial blue crab fishery. Emergency regulatory action is necessary to retain and rejuvenate the spawning potential of the Chesapeake Bay blue crab stock by reducing fishing rates to protect a stock that has substantially depleted due to a variety of environmental factors. Chesapeake Bay blue crab stocks have declined by an estimated 70 percent since the early 1990's, imperiling the future of the Bay's most valuable commercial fishery. This request is made pursuant to Sections 312 and 315 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C §§ 1861a; 1864); and Section 308 of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act (16 U.S.C. § 4107).

Emergency regulation to protect and rebuild blue crab stocks will have severe impacts in parts of our state that depend heavily on economic activity derived from commercial fishing and related industries. In particular, management actions necessary to significantly constrain the harvest of mature female crabs will disproportionately affect lower eastern shore communities with a concentration of fishermen and processing plants. I would also like to point out that these management actions have been developed in close coordination with Virginia to ensure that we achieve Bay-wide restoration of blue crab stocks.

Declaration of a commercial fishery disaster would be the most efficient and expedient measure available to provide adequate economic assistance to the aforementioned communities; therefore, this request is necessary. Preliminary economic impacts on harvesters and the processing industry are estimated at \$15 million over the three year period necessary to rebuild stocks and restructure the fishery. This estimate is based upon losses viewed in light of recent catch and processing industry histories.

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The dramatic decline in blue crab abundance in the Bay is attributable to many factors. Recent trends in harvest pressure have been brought about or exacerbated, in part, by many factors, including but not limited to poor water quality, loss of key habitat such as submerged aquatic vegetation and oyster reefs, increased predation loss, and changing climatic conditions that potentially limit the ability of young crabs to return to the Chesapeake Bay after developing in the waters of the near-shore Atlantic. Emergency action to restrict fishing rates is the only short term option to protect and restore the fishery while broader habitat and water quality issues are pursued.

Please consider this initial urgent request while we continue to work with local representatives, experts, and stakeholders over the next few weeks to complete the documentation as to the nature and extent of the economic disaster affecting Maryland fishermen and related industries and take the necessary steps to mitigate economic loss and rebuild a sustainable fishery. We will submit documentation to substantiate this request for a disaster declaration based on the economic losses suffered by Maryland's fishing communities as a result of necessary emergency regulatory actions.

I respectfully request that you: (1) declare a commercial fishery failure and a fisheries resource disaster based on the evidence we compile from biological data, current and historical landings data and other sources, and (2) make disaster relief funds available to help the Maryland blue crab industry and local communities that depend upon these fisheries to survive this period of substantial loss.

We look forward to working with you and your staff to provide the documentation necessary to facilitate your evaluation. I appreciate, in advance, your willingness to consider this request and hope that by working together we can provide needed economic relief to our commercial fishing communities.

Sincerely,



Governor

cc: The Maryland Congressional Delegation