



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 25, 2008

CONTACT:

Sue Walitsky, Cardin (202-224-4524)

Melissa Schwartz, Mikulski (202-228-1122)

Bronwyn LanceChester, Warner (202-224-6290)

Kimberly Hunter, Webb (202-228-5258)

CHESAPEAKE SENATORS URGE COMMERCE SECRETARY TO DECLARE BLUE CRAB DISASTER

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Senators Benjamin L. Cardin and Barbara A. Mikulski (Both D-Md.), John Warner (R-Va.), and Jim Webb (D-Va.) joined today to urge Department of Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez to hasten his decision regarding the disaster declaration request made by Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley and Virginia Governor Tim Kaine for the Chesapeake Bay blue crab. A declaration will make Chesapeake Bay watermen eligible for emergency disaster funding to ease the economic burden placed on the crabbing industry as it faces a 34 percent reduction in the female crab harvest.

In addition to providing funding to provide alternative economic opportunities for watermen and the processing industry while state regulators work with the industry to rebuild stocks and restructure the fishery, a request approval will allow the industry to become eligible for additional federal help through Economic Development Administration (EDA) grants, Small Business Administration (SBA) and Farm Credit System loans and Department of Labor worker training programs.

“We need to save the watermen as well as the crabs, and this emergency funding will provide key support for both,” said **Senator Cardin**. “A quick decision will give us time to get a safety net in place for the blue crab fishery.”

“Maryland’s watermen are facing a very real disaster in the face of an already stressed economic market. It is time for us to team up to put the resources of the federal government behind the needs of our states,” said **Senator Mikulski**, Chairwoman of the Commerce, Justice and Science (CJS) Appropriations Subcommittee that funds the Department of Commerce. “I fought to put \$20 million in the federal checkbook to help our struggling industry, and I urge the Secretary to quickly declare a disaster so our communities get the help they need.”

“It is clear that the Chesapeake Bay’s blue crab population is in distress, and that many Bay communities are suffering from the decline of this valuable fishery. I am pleased to join my Senate colleagues in support of Maryland and Virginia’s request for a fishery resource disaster declaration from the Department of Commerce,” said **Senator Warner**.

“It is important for the Secretary of Commerce to address the pressing needs of Virginia’s watermen and designate blue crab fisheries for disaster relief,” said **Senator Webb**. “The Maryland and Virginia Congressional delegations are working hard to secure the necessary funds to help watermen affected by current fishing restrictions and a disaster designation is critical in getting these funds moving. I urge the Secretary of Commerce to move swiftly in this designation to help our watermen facing economic hardship.”

The text of the letter is below:

Dear Secretary Gutierrez:

On Monday June 16, the States of Maryland and Virginia submitted supplemental information to support their request for a disaster declaration for the Chesapeake Bay blue crab fishery. Now that the Department of Commerce has all the relevant information to make a determination, we write to you today to ask that you urgently review this request and make a speedy determination.

Chesapeake Bay blue crab stocks have declined by an estimated 70 percent since the early 1990s, imperiling the future of the Bay’s most valuable commercial fishery. A declaration of a disaster would be the most effective way to provide economic assistance to our watermen and their communities.

###