



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TEAM MARYLAND URGES COMMERCE SECRETARY TO PROVIDE EMERGENCY AID TO MARYLAND WATERMEN

WASHINGTON -- Maryland delegation members **U.S. Senators Benjamin L. Cardin and Barbara A. Mikulski (both D-MD)**, and **U.S. Congressmen Steny H. Hoyer (D), Wayne T. Gilchrest (R), Albert Wynn (D), Elijah E. Cummings (D), C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger (D), Chris Van Hollen (D) and John Sarbanes (D)** today sent a joint letter to **Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez** in support of **Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley's** request for a disaster declaration for the Chesapeake Bay blue crab. A declaration will make Maryland's 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.

Governor O' Malley's request, which was announced on May 2, notes that preliminary economic impacts on watermen, harvesters and the processing industry are estimated at \$15 million over the next three years. Funds would be used 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. If the Commerce Secretary approves the request, the industry will also 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.

The delegation's letter to Secretary Gutierrez is below:

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to you today to express our shared support for the State of Maryland's request for the declaration of a commercial fishery failure and a fishery resource disaster for the Maryland commercial blue crab fishery. We respectfully request that you urgently review and approve Governor O'Malley's request on the blue crab fishery so we can provide the funding needed in this year's appropriations bill.

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. As a result the State has recently announced emergency regulations to protect and rebuild blue crab stocks. This action, done in close coordination with Virginia, will help ensure that we achieve a Bay-wide restoration of blue crab stocks.

In the meantime, these regulations will have severe economic impacts on our Bay communities. Preliminary economic impacts on the 10,000 watermen and the processing industry are estimated at \$15 million over the three year period to rebuild stocks and restructure the fishery. At a time with rising fuel costs, lost income will put our crab industry in jeopardy. A declaration of a disaster would be the most effective way to provide economic assistance to our watermen and their communities.

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