

TEAM MARYLAND APPLAUDS EMERGENCY DECLARATION FOR WATERMEN

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Benjamin L. Cardin and Barbara A. Mikulski (both D-MD) today joined Team Maryland colleagues Congressmen Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.), Roscoe Bartlett (R-Md.), Elijah E. Cummings (D-Md.), C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger (D-Md.), Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), John Sarbanes (D-Md.) and Donna F. Edwards (D-Md.) to applaud today’s decision by Department of Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez in support of 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.

As congressional leaders finalize the continuing resolution, which will fund the government through March 2009, Team Maryland is fighting to include the funding necessary to support the declaration.

“The blue crab population has declined by 70 percent since the 1990s, seriously affecting the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem and undermining the economy of Maryland,” said Senator Cardin. “Today’s disaster declaration will provide needed resources to help Maryland watermen and seafood processors, and lead to improved management to help rejuvenate the blue crab population.”

“Maryland is eligible for federal assistance to help the state as officials, industry and communities work to restore our crab population. I am proud to have worked with Secretary Gutierrez to reach this declaration, and will continue to fight to put the money in the federal checkbook to support this decision,” said Senator Mikulski, Chairwoman of the Commerce, Justice and Science Appropriations Subcommittee that funds the Department of Commerce. “I will continue to lead Team Maryland in our efforts to protect the Bay and those whose livelihoods depend on it in the face of a struggling economy.”

“For centuries, the blue crab has been intrinsically linked with the State of Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay. Unfortunately, in recent years, the blue crab population has declined at an alarming rate,” said Congressman Hoyer. “Today’s declaration will give our watermen and others impacted by the recently implemented crabbing restrictions the tools to move forward while we all work to revive the health of the Bay and the blue crab fishery.”

“This disaster declaration will support watermen and seafood processing companies, a healthier Chesapeake Bay and strengthen Maryland’s economy,” said Congressman Bartlett.

“The Maryland Blue Crab is one of the greatest symbols of our State, and its survival is essential to our economy,” said Congressman Cummings. “Commercial crabbers have witnessed a dramatic decline of crabs in their harvests – more than 50 percent since 1990

– and with forecasts of an even smaller number of crabs this year, the industry is expected to suffer even more. As Marylanders continue to struggle through the consequences of Bush-McCain poor economic policies, it is critical that we provide federal assistance to the watermen and crab processors whose livelihood depends on this industry.”

“In these tough economic times with the Wall Street crisis, sky high gas prices, and the foreclosure mess, many Marylanders are hurting. Maryland watermen have been hit especially hard. We hope this move will give the watermen some much needed relief,” said Congressman Ruppertsberger, a Member of the Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee.

“This is great news for the Chesapeake Bay and the watermen whose livelihoods depend on it,” said Congressman Van Hollen. “The Bay’s blue crab population has been at a historic low. Today’s disaster declaration will provide much needed funding to help industry and state officials restore the crab population and protect the Bay’s ecosystem.”

“The blue crab has become synonymous with Maryland and the Bay,” said Congressman Sarbanes. “Waterman, more than any other group, have been impacted by their decline. I am very pleased that the Commerce Department has agreed to provide one of Maryland’s oldest and most important industries assistance in the face of new limits on the crab harvest.”

“The blue crab is a critical resource for Maryland, affecting the health of the Chesapeake Bay and the economy of the entire state,” said Congresswoman Edwards. “This disaster declaration is an important step forward on the road to recovery for both the blue crab population and all those who depend on it. I commend Senator Mikulski and Gov. O’Malley for their leadership on this important Maryland issue.”

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