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THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
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MITT ROMNEY
GOVERNOR

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OS EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT
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June 10, 2005

The Honorable Carlos M. Gutierrez
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW, Room 5516
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Gutierrez:

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is experiencing a failure of the commercial shellfish fishery due to an extensive algal bloom (Red Tide). I am requesting disaster assistance under Section 312(a) of the Sustainable Fisheries Act amendment to the Magnuson-Stevenson Act.

Paralytic Shellfish Poison (PSP) is causing an extensive algal bloom (Red Tide), which is critically impacting Massachusetts. Red Tide is not fatal to shellfish, but is harmful and potentially fatal to humans if consumed. While Red Tide has occurred in Massachusetts Coastal areas in the past, it has never reached this extent. Toxicity levels for this bloom are the highest ever recorded in New England. The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries has ordered the harvesting of all shellfish closed for the past 3 weeks on the Massachusetts coast from the New Hampshire Border to Martha's Vineyard (with the sole exception of Boston Harbor). This closure is expected to last for at least eight more weeks, possibly longer.

The direct economic impact on 1,700 shellfish fisherman, 241 shellfish aquaculture growers and 40 boat based shellfish fisherman is estimated to be \$600,000 per week. Using the conservative economic multiplier of 4.5, this represents a potential loss of \$2,700,000 per week to the local economy. If the closures continue for ten weeks, the total economic impact could equal \$27,000,000.

This is causing extreme economic impact on the shellfish industry, threatening a failure of the industry, and heavily impacting associated business (buyers, processors, restaurants, etc.). Forty-one coastal communities are directly involved, and the impact will ripple out to surrounding areas. Market prices are rising due to demand and shortages, causing the import of shellfish from other states to meet demand. However, this will cause a market flood when Massachusetts shellfish eventually are available for consumption, creating further economic injury.

State and Federal agencies including the Division of Marine Fisheries, Department of Public Health, Coastal Zone Management, Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, State Department of Agriculture and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are closely monitoring the situation. There is concern that Red Tide may expand further, requiring the closing of the entire Massachusetts coast, and potential for extension beyond the eight to ten week period.

I have determined that this incident is of such severity and magnitude, that it is beyond the capabilities of the State to respond. Disaster assistance is needed to delineate the economic and social impact on communities and the shellfish industry from the commercial fishery failure and to provide direct assistance to the industry and the affected communities. This disaster assistance is requested to help sustain shellfish fishing and aquaculture, and prevent a collapse of the industry. It is essential these industries and businesses be sustained through this disaster and able to return as part of a viable industry.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Massachusetts will continue to gather more data and is ready to provide your staff with any additional information that would assist you in making a determination regarding a fishery failure and a fishery resource disaster. I have designated Cristine McCombs, Director of the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, as the State Coordinating Officer for this event to act on my behalf regarding this request. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts looks forward to working with you to explore potential management options and to provide relief to the shellfish industry and their communities.

Sincerely,



Mitt Romney

Cc: Cristine McCombs, Director, Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency
Edward A. Flynn, Secretary, Executive Office of Public Safety