05-00443

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
State House
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-1196
401-222-2080

Donald L. Carcieri
Governor

2005 NOV 30 PM 12:03

November 16, 2005

The Honorable Carlos Gutierrez
Secretary of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I write to request your authorization for fishery disaster assistance to compensate commercial shellfishermen and shellfish farmers in Rhode Island who suffered significant economic losses as a result of closures of shellfishing waters in the State due to unprecedented precipitation last month.

This request is submitted pursuant to section 308(d) of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act (IFA) (16 U.S.C. 4107), as amended, which enables you to provide assistance to commercial fishermen and others to alleviate harm incurred as a direct result of a fishery resource disaster arising from a hurricane or any other natural resource disaster.

Rhode Island received 15.38 inches of rain during October 2005, the highest monthly total since record keeping began more than one hundred years ago. The heavy rains severely impacted water quality in Narragansett Bay and Rhode Island's coastal waters due to a combination of combined sewer overflow discharges, wastewater treatment facility bypasses, and polluted stormwater runoff. Consequently, on October 15, the RI Department of Environmental Management was forced to close all of the State's major shellfishing waters. The closure, perhaps the most extensive in the State's history, had a major impact on shellfishermen – both diggers and farmers – who were unable to conduct any harvesting activities.

The quahog fishery in Narragansett Bay has historically been one of Rhode Island's most important, both in terms of employment and value. On average, about 300 full-time fishermen depend on the fishery at this time of year. During October 2004, shellfish dealers in Rhode Island traded shellfish valued at $460,369.

There are also 25 shellfish aquaculture operations in Rhode Island's marine waters, which collectively employ about 30 people and yield an average monthly economic value of $43,000. All of these operations lost their harvesting capabilities during the recent closures.

As a result of an extensive follow-up water quality monitoring program conducted by the RI Department of Environmental Management, the Department was able to slowly reopen portions of the State's marine waters during the last week of October, allowing some shellfishermen to resume limited harvesting operations. The Bay, and the shellfishing industry that depends on the Bay, did not fully recover, however, until November 2.

The economic harm incurred by those who depend of shellfish harvesting, based conservatively on the value of one full week of lost production, is estimated to be $113,750. Respectfully, I seek your approval for an assistance grant for use by the State to provide direct compensation to the fishermen and farmers who were affected by the extensive shellfish area closures over the past month.

Thank you for your timely consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Donald L. Carcieri
Governor