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STATE OF NEW YORK
EXECUTIVE CHAMBER
ALBANY 12224

DAVID A. PATERSON
GOVERNOR

October 3, 2008

Honorable Carlos M. Gutierrez
Secretary
United States Department of Commerce
1410 Constitution Ave., NW - Room 5854
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Gutierrez:

I am writing to request that you determine, under section 312(a) of the Magnusen-Stevens Act and section 308(b) of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act, that there has been a commercial fishery failure, and serious disruption affecting future production, in the hard-clam fishery in the Great South Bay of Long Island, New York, due to a fishery resource disaster arising from causes that support relief under those acts.

New York State has long been proud of its bountiful fisheries resources, including a vast array of commercially and recreationally important species which have thrived along our Atlantic shores. These species, which are critical to local economies, as well as the State, suffer when their habitats, such as tidal wetlands and shallow-water estuarine areas, are impaired as a result of water quality degradation, harmful algae blooms and development pressures. I am writing to you today to seek your assistance in funding efforts to ensure that these fisheries remain viable, particularly the hard clam industry of Long Island's Great South Bay.

I am requesting that the federal government immediately provide $1 million for research into the causes of the damaging algae blooms and $2 million for restoration projects. More money will be needed over time, but this will help ensure an important first step in addressing this problem.

As the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) recognizes, Long Island was once the most productive hard clam fishery in the United States. In the mid-1970's, the harvest of hard clams in Great South Bay was about 700,000 bushels - almost 70% of the hard clams harvest on the east coast. In 2007, hard clam harvest from Great South Bay was less than 10,000 bushels. This species depends upon the productive inshore bays, harbors and coastal wetlands for its food supply. It is likely that harmful algae blooms and lack of sufficient spawning stock are two factors affecting the ability of the hard clam population in Great South Bay to rebound.

Recognizing the historical importance of the hard clam industry to New York's environmental and economic health, Senator Schumer recently wrote to you to seek your assistance in funding efforts to help New York and Long Island communities to restore this important resource to benefit the health of the estuary and to support a strong commercial and recreational fishery in the future. I applaud our Senator's strong advocacy on the State's behalf, and urge you to work with Senator Schumer and me on proactive efforts that will implement management strategies necessary to rehabilitate depleted hard clam spawning stocks, allowing for the long-term restoration of this important species.

I would like to note the support which NOAA has provided in the past for the hard clam fishery of the Great South Bay. Partnering with The Nature Conservancy, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and local governments, in 2002 NOAA provided Community-Based Restoration funds for a three-year program intended to establish hard clam spawner sanctuaries as an effective means of shellfish restoration and potentially as a means to improve water quality and eventually reduce harmful algal blooms such as brown tide in the Peconic and South Shore estuaries. More recently, NOAA has recognized that vegetated tidal wetlands are continuing to disappear on a national basis – a trend unfortunately echoed in New York – and that areas subject to development pressures appear to be at greater risk for accelerated loss of estuarine habitats.

Because developmental pressures generally are so high along Long Island's South Shore, and because the U.S. Commerce Department has recognized that coastal areas such as wetlands and estuaries are so essential to the nation's economy and environmental quality, I concur with Senator Schumer's view that targeted federal assistance is urgently needed.

I look forward to a beneficial state and federal partnership on this important issue.

Very truly yours,

David A. Paterson

David A. Paterson
Governor

cc: Senator Charles E. Schumer
Senator Hillary R. Clinton
Congressman Timothy Bishop
Congressman Steve Israel