UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
The Secretary of Commerce
Washington, D.C. 20230

September 13, 2012

The Honorable Lincoln D. Chafee
Governor of Rhode Island
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Governor Chafee:

The Department of Commerce has received a number of requests and letters of support for a commercial fishery failure for the Northeast Multispecies Groundfish Fishery from various elected officials in the region. I have determined that a commercial fishery failure due to a fishery resource disaster will exist for the Northeast Multispecies Groundfish Fishery for the 2013 fishing year under Section 308(b) of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act of 1986 (IFA) and Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 (MSA).

After reviewing the information available on the potential catch limits for the 2013 fishing year, I am deeply concerned about the potential impacts to Northeast fishermen and fishing communities. The Department of Commerce and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) will continue to engage with the New England Fishery Management Council and the fishing industry in advance of the 2013 fishing year to explore all possible options to mitigate these impacts. However, it seems unlikely that all economic impacts can be mitigated solely through fisheries management measures.

Despite fishermen's adherence to catch limits over the past few years, recent data shows that several key fish stocks are not rebuilding. While the precise cause of these stock declines is unclear, "undetermined causes" is an allowable cause under the MSA. Low levels of these stocks are causing a significant loss of access to fishery resources with anticipated revenue declines that will greatly affect the commercial fishery. This determination provides a basis for Congress to appropriate disaster relief funding under the IFA and the MSA, and for NOAA to use these funds to provide assistance to affected communities. Should Congress appropriate funds for disaster assistance, the National Marine Fisheries Service will work with your state to develop an effective program for an economically robust and sustainable fishery.

If you have any questions, please contact Jim Stowers, Acting Assistant Secretary for Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs at (202) 482-3663.

Sincerely,

Rebecca M. Blank

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Acting Secretary of Commerce