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ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Commerce Secretary Determines Red Tide Disaster in Maine

December 22, 2010

U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke today determined that the economic effects of closing shellfish fisheries in Maine in 2009 due to a harmful algal bloom, commonly referred to as red tide, caused a commercial fishery failure.

"The natural disaster, which forced the closing of shellfish beds to protect human health, hurt Maine's commercial shell fishermen and their families," said Locke. "Should Congress appropriate funds for disaster assistance, the Department of Commerce and NOAA will work with Maine to develop an effective program to provide assistance to the fishery."

In October 2009, Maine Governor John Baldacci requested the disaster determination in a letter to the Department of Commerce and provided information detailing how the disaster affected the softshell clam, blue mussel and mahogany quahog fisheries.

The closures due to the harmful algal bloom began in April of 2009 and resulted in closures of 97 percent of the fisheries at the peak. Some areas of the Maine coast were closed to shellfishing until late September. After reviewing this information, the Department of Commerce determined the natural resource disaster met the requirements of a commercial fishery failure under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

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