

WASHINGTON, DC - One day following the Federal government's declaration of the Chesapeake Bay blue crab fishery as a commercial fishery failure, Congressman Steny Hoyer (D-MD) praised House passage of legislation (Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance, and Continuing Appropriations Act - HR 2638) making \$75 million available for nationwide fishery disaster assistance.

In recent years, scientists have found that the Chesapeake Bay blue crab population has declined by more than 70 percent. In April, the governors of Maryland and Virginia announced their intention to implement management strategies to revive the blue crab fishery, including reduction of the female harvest of blue crabs by 34 percent. According to the State of Maryland, approximately 800 full-time watermen and 17 processing plants will face significant impact to annual income due to the restrictions. This includes 186 watermen in St. Mary's County.

Recognizing the impact of these restrictions on the watermen, processors, and local economies, the Maryland Congressional Delegation joined the two governors in calling on the Administration to declare a federal disaster for the Chesapeake Bay blue crab fishery.

"For centuries, the blue crab has been intrinsically linked with the State of Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay. Unfortunately, in recent years, the blue crab population has declined at an alarming rate," said Congressman Hoyer. "The economic and environmental impact in Maryland has been truly devastating. This new funding on the heels of yesterday's disaster declaration makes available significant resources to help maintain our commercial fishing infrastructure on the Chesapeake Bay while working to bolster the blue crab population."

On Tuesday, Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez issued the disaster declaration, which will enable impacted individuals and businesses to be eligible for Small Business Administration loans, Economic Development Administration grants, and Department of Labor worker training. With enactment of today's House-passed legislation, the State of Maryland will now be eligible for additional funding to help ease the economic burden on Maryland's crabbing industry while supporting efforts to revive the blue crab population.

The Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance, and Continuing Appropriations Act must now be passed by the Senate and signed by the President before it becomes law.

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