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**NOAA Approves \$10 Million Blue Crab Disaster Assistance Grant  
for Virginia Watermen**

*Virginia and Maryland Eligible for \$9.9 Million More in 2009*

NOAA has awarded \$10 million in disaster assistance to the Commonwealth of Virginia to assist watermen economically hurt by the commercial fishery failure in the soft shell and peeler blue crab fishery in the Chesapeake Bay. The fishery has experienced a 41% decline in baywide value since the late 1990s. Maryland has already received \$10 million for assisting fishermen hurt by the same fishery failure.

Virginia officials intend to use \$7.5 million of the monies awarded for derelict pot gear removal, a crab license buyback program, an update to the blue crab stock assessment and administrative costs associated with distributing and tracking the funds.

The remaining \$2.5 million for oyster aquaculture, research to reduce terrapin and finfish bycatch in crab pots, and industry diversification through a collaborative industry grants program, administered in conjunction with the Commonwealth's "Waterman Fund," will be held until Virginia supplies needed information so a full environmental review of these activities' impacts can be completed.

Both Virginia and Maryland are also eligible for about \$4.9 million each in additional blue crab disaster assistance monies which were made available through the Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009. The states must submit spending plans to the agency for review by June 1 before these funds will be distributed.

On September 23, 2009, then-Secretary of Commerce Carlos M. Gutierrez determined that a decline in the harvest of soft-shell and peeler blue crabs in the Chesapeake Bay was significant enough to warrant a commercial fishery failure declaration, an important step in making watermen and their communities eligible for this economic assistance.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.

On the Web: NOAA's Fisheries Service: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>