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Commerce Secretary Gary Locke Announces Fishery Failure Determination for Florida

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Commerce Secretary Gary Locke Announces Fishery Failure Determination for Florida

U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke today determined there has been a fishery disaster in the Gulf of Mexico due to the economic impact on commercial and recreational fisheries from the ongoing Deepwater Horizon oil spill. The affected area adds Florida to the earlier determination announced on May 24 for the states of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

"Today I signed a fishery disaster declaration for Florida for the same reasons I declared a fishery disaster in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. All four of these Gulf Coast states have the potential to suffer significant economic hardship as a result of the BP oil spill," Locke said. "Today's disaster determination will help ensure that the Federal government is in a position to mobilize the full range of assistance that Florida fishermen and fishing communities may need."

Locke made the Florida determination under Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The declaration was made in response to requests from Florida Governor Charlie Crist and U.S. Senator Bill Nelson based on the loss of access to many commercial fisheries and the existing and anticipated environmental damage from this unprecedented event.

Since May 2, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has closed portions of federal waters affected by the spill to commercial and recreational fishing. This closure area, which is based on actual observations and the scientific trajectory of the spill, now includes 36.6 percent of federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico, largely between Louisiana at the mouth of the Mississippi and the waters off Florida's Pensacola Bay. The southern boundary of this closure runs southward to Cuban waters.

"We stand with America's fishermen, their families and businesses in impacted coastal communities during this challenging time," Locke said. "Commercial and recreational fishing provides vital jobs to the region and is essential to the Gulf Coast's unique culture and heritage."

Commercial fishermen in the Gulf harvested more than one billion pounds of fish and shellfish in 2008. In addition, there are approximately 5.7 million recreational fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico region who took 25 million fishing trips in 2008.

The administration has requested \$15 million of supplemental funding as a backstop to address this disaster, as well as \$5 million of economic development assistance through the Economic Development Administration. In addition, the administration is requesting unemployment coverage for this disaster, and the Small Business Administration is offering economic injury disaster loans, which can help fishermen and other affected businesses. However, the administration expects that BP and any other responsible parties will cover the full costs of economic damages to and restoration of these fisheries.



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