

FACT SHEET

9/22/99

COMMERCE SECRETARY DETERMINES FISHERY DISASTER OF \$5.8 MILLION FOR FLORIDA LOBSTER AND CRAB FISHERMEN

Commerce Secretary William M. Daley has determined that the spiny lobster and stone crab fisheries in Florida experienced a commercial fishery failure valued at \$5.8 million by the State of Florida due to damage to the coastal environment caused by Hurricanes Georges and Mitch in 1998. The determination clears the way for Congress to appropriate funds to help Florida fishermen.

The State of Florida was directly impacted by the two strong hurricanes in September and November 1998. The hurricanes caused the loss or destruction of commercial traps used in the spiny lobster and stone crab commercial fisheries as well as indirect losses.

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act authorizes financial aid if the Secretary of Commerce at his discretion, or at the request of a governor, determines a commercial fishery failure has occurred due to a fishery resource disaster. If the Congress appropriates aid for Florida, the Act requires a 25 percent match by the state.

According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, approximately 190,000 traps were lost due to Hurricanes Georges and Mitch. The gear (trap) losses were uninsurable and fishermen incurred replacement costs estimated at \$4.75 million. Fishermen were also indirectly affected by lost fishing effort. This has been estimated as \$375,000 for the spiny lobster fishery and \$700,000 for the stone crab fishery. Most of the economic impact was incurred over an approximately two-month period, which exacerbated its severity.

Due to overcapitalization in the two fisheries, if funds are made available to assist the State of Florida, expenditures must be consistent with the state's plan of gradual trap reduction in both fisheries.

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