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### **NOAA Announces Up to \$20 Million for Blue Crab Disaster in Chesapeake Bay**

NOAA's Fisheries Service today announced that the states of Maryland and Virginia will each be eligible for up to \$10 million to assist watermen who have been economically hurt by the commercial fishery failure in the soft shell and peeler blue crab fishery in Chesapeake Bay.

Blue crabs are harvested in three stages of their life cycle – as hard shell crabs; peeler crabs, just prior to molting; and soft shell crabs, immediately after molting.

“Watermen and their families have been hard hit by a 41 percent decline in the soft shell and peeler crab fishery since the late 1990s,” said Jim Balsiger, acting NOAA assistant administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. “We're pleased the governors said they would like to use federal aid to restore important blue crab habitat and to create more diverse economic opportunities for watermen, possibly in aquaculture.”

“We applaud their idea to use some aid to employ crab fishermen to retrieve lost or abandoned crab pots that continue to capture fish and crabs, doing long-term damage to the fishery,” he added.

The states will now submit plans to NOAA's Fisheries Service outlining how the funds will be used.

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