

DECLARATION OF FISHERY RESOURCE DISASTERS

Section 308(d) of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act, 16 U.S.C. 4107(d), authorized an appropriation of \$65 million to the Department of Commerce "to enable the Secretary to award grants to persons engaged in commercial fisheries, for uninsured losses determined by the Secretary to have been suffered as a direct result of a fishery resource disaster." The eligible fishermen must have less than \$2 million in annual gross revenues and the grants are limited to 75 percent of their uninsured losses, not to exceed \$100,000.

I used this legislative authority in 1994 to respond to unprecedented low abundance of Pacific salmon stocks and, by this action, I will use it again in 1995. Additionally, I will extend the reach of these programs to small fishing businesses in New England and in the Gulf of Mexico who may have suffered heavy uninsured losses because of the collapse of important groundfish stocks and a dramatically increased level of effort necessary to reduce bycatch of sea turtles.

In all of these areas, the condition of the fishery resources has been damaged by a combination of factors beyond the control of individual fishermen. A vast amount of Pacific salmon habitat has been destroyed by dams, forestry and land management practices that have weakened the stocks capacity to survive normal climatic fluctuations. Non point source nutrients and debris entering the Gulf of Mexico as a result of Mississippi river floods in 1993 and 1994 have had adverse impacts on the marine environment and commercial fishing operations. Nutrients from the floods have contributed to the formation of a massive area of oxygen depletion in the Gulf of Mexico which threatens marine life and coastal resources. Debris carried by these floods have created underwater hazards for commercial fishermen who suffer damaged or lost gear for which compensation is appropriate. Off New England, the periodic strong year classes that had long sustained a healthy commercial fishery have disappeared. Fishery management actions have not been sufficient to prevent stock collapse as hoped for strong year classes have failed to appear. Fishermen can no longer adjust their fishing strategies to target strong stocks and avoid the weak stocks.

All of these situations involve serious harm to the fishery resource which has caused substantial loss to small fishing businesses and dependent coastal communities. All three of the situations involve our inability to anticipate the full effect of our actions on the fishery resource and the fishing industry. The Pacific El Niño climatic events, the fluctuations in turtle strandings, and the absence of strong year classes have occurred from time to time and no doubt will occur. In making the determination that a fishery resource

occurred, I have chosen to focus on the magnitude of the disaster in economic and social terms, and not the particular forces of Nature that may have caused it. In and of themselves, hurricanes are quite normal events, but the three hurricanes given as examples in the legislation were extraordinary in terms of the damage that they inflicted on local economies and human lives. The conditions of the fishery resources off the coasts of the Northeast, the Gulf of Mexico, and the States of Washington, Oregon and Northern California have produced comparable levels of economic damage and social disruption.

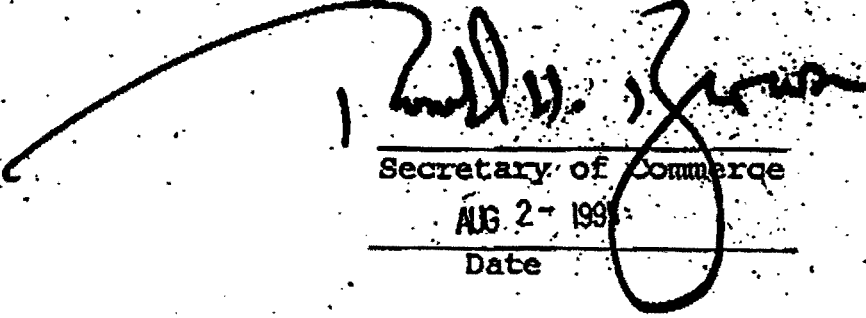
Therefore, I hereby determine that fishery resource disasters exist in 1995 for the following three areas of the United States:

The Northeast, from the Gulf of Maine to Cape Hatteras;

The entire Gulf of Mexico; and,

The Pacific states of California, north of San Francisco, Oregon and Washington, excluding Puget Sound.

Under section 308(d) of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act, commercial fishermen who have suffered uninsured losses will be eligible for grants under programs to be developed in cooperation with their State government agencies.


Secretary of Commerce

AUG 2 - 1995

Date