



**National Marine Fisheries Service
Alaska Region
NEWS RELEASE**

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**COMMERCE SECRETARY ACTS TO HELP FISHERMEN
HURT BY COLLAPSE OF ALASKA SNOW CRAB FISHERY**

Commerce Secretary William M. Daley today determined that the Alaska snow crab fishery has suffered a commercial fisheries failure due to natural and environmental factors. The determination by Secretary Daley opens the way for Congress to appropriate funds to help snow crab fishermen.

"The snow crab fishery failure has caused significant economic hardship for crab fishermen and fishing communities that rely on revenue from this fishery," Secretary Daley said. "It is very difficult to anticipate shifts in the environmental regime and the impacts on living marine resources. Therefore, it's important for Congress and the administration to work together to help the fishing industry when these situations arise."

If funds are approved by the Congress, the Secretary would provide financial assistance to the State of Alaska "to assist the affected communities and to improve fisheries research, management, and coordination to help restore the fisheries and prevent similar failures in the future."

The Secretary made the fishery resource disaster determination at the request of the state under section 312 (a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act so assistance could be provided to the adversely impacted communities and fishermen. The Secretary can determine a commercial fishery failure under section 312 (a) if a fishery resource disaster results from natural causes, man-made causes beyond the control of fishery managers, or undetermined causes.

Recent survey information showed the size of the snow crab resource was approximately 40 percent lower than the minimum established size for this resource

by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. Harvest levels had to be reduced by 85 percent in 2000 from harvest levels the year before. The council, in cooperation with the State of Alaska, is preparing a rebuilding plan for this resource.

The total value of the snow crab fishery averaged \$141 million between 1989-1999. Based on the 1999 average ex-vessel price of \$0.88/pound, the 2000 guideline harvest level of 28.5 million pounds may have a total value of \$25 million. Officials also believe that the Alaska snow crab fishery may not open in 2001 due to rebuilding efforts by the fishery management council.

According to state officials, the affected communities receive a large portion (between 10 percent and 85 percent) of their income from snow crab through fish tax, revenue and employment from crab processors, and secondary income from things like harbor usage, sale of goods and services, transportation, and fuel tax. This money is used for basic services like electricity, operating budgets, education, and health care.

During 1997 and 1998, similar determinations were made and economic assistance was granted to the State of Alaska due to commercial salmon fishery failures in western Alaska. Congress appropriated \$57 million to help salmon fishermen and communities.

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