



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental
Affairs
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114-2119

Deval L. Patrick
GOVERNOR

Timothy P. Murray
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Ian A. Bowles
SECRETARY

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Tel: (617) 626-1000
Fax: (617) 626-1181
<http://www.mass.gov/envir>

Contact: Lisa Capone
(617) 626-1119

Patrick Administration Distributes \$1.9 million in Federal Aid to Shellfishermen
Funds Provide Relief for Lost Wages Caused by 2005 Red Tide Outbreak

BOSTON – The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries will distribute \$1.9 million in federal disaster assistance to 382 commercial shellfishermen at the end of this week, Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Ian Bowles announced today. The money is partial compensation for lost revenue resulting from the red tide outbreak in 2005.

“This federal money will not cover the shellfish industry for the full extent of the economic disaster in 2005, but it does bring a measure of relief to this important area of our coastal economy,” said Secretary Bowles. “We are grateful to our Congressional delegation who worked hard to secure this funding.”

Red Tide – a naturally occurring biotoxin that at certain levels makes shellfish unsafe to eat – set all-time records in 2005, both geographically and in the length of time shellfish beds were closed. In all, 1.35 million acres – over 77 percent of the Commonwealth’s marine waters – were closed to shellfishing.

Both Massachusetts and Maine received roughly \$2 million from Congress in 2006 under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries based the relief awards on several factors, including each shellfisherman’s species annual catch reports from 2004 and 2005, the community or fishery where the applicant fished in 2005, and the red tide-related closure in that community or fishery in 2005. Fishermen are expected to begin receiving relief checks on Friday, July 13th. The average payment is \$4,800 – with payments ranging from \$27,000 to \$1,750.

Communities with commercial shellfisheries affected by red tide in 2005 were: Newbury, Rowley, Ipswich, Essex, Gloucester, Cohasset, Scituate, Marshfield, Duxbury, Kingston, Plymouth, Bourne, Sandwich, Barnstable, Yarmouth, Dennis, Brewster, Orleans, Eastham, Wellfleet, Truro, Provincetown, Chatham, Harwich, Nantucket, Edgartown, Tisbury, Chilmark, Aquinah, and Wareham.

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Species prohibited from harvest in 2005 included quahogs, ocean quahogs, surf clams, conch, razor clams, blue mussels, soft-shelled clams, oysters, and whole (shell on) sea scallops and carnivorous snails.

“I’m pleased that the funding we included in the federal budget to assist those affected by the 2005 outbreak of red tide will soon reach Massachusetts shellfishermen. I applaud Director Paul Diodati and the Division of Marine Fisheries for their hard work to get these funds out to those in need,” Senator Edward M. Kennedy said.

Congressman Bill Delahunt added, “While the amount of money is significantly less than what the delegation originally asked for, the establishment of a new program like this sets an important precedent for future relief efforts.”

“The fishing industry is the backbone of many Massachusetts coastal communities, and this money comes at an important time to help our fishermen get back on their feet, and continue to contribute to our state’s economy,” Senator John Kerry said.

Congressman John F. Tierney said, “I am pleased this important funding will finally reach the hands of the local fishermen who were most affected by the 2005 red tide. As the North Shore continues to experience these unpredictable algae blooms into the 2007 shellfish season, we will continue to monitor the effects on the industry.”

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