

Fishermen Get Hurricane Florence Relief

By Donna Martinez

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North Carolina commercial fishermen hit hard by Hurricane Florence will soon get relief as part of \$11.6 million being distributed by the state Division of Marine Fisheries. The N.C. Department of Environmental Quality's Division of Marine Fisheries in Morehead City today mailed the first round of checks out under the Hurricane Florence Commercial Fishing Assistance Program. The program is designed to help make up for losses to the state's nearly billion-dollar commercial fishing industry due to the storm.

"Hurricane Florence dealt a serious blow to North Carolina's fishing industry last fall, disrupting fishing and destroying boats and gear for fishermen all along our coast," Gov. Roy Cooper said. "Getting these funds directly into the hands of commercial fisherman will be a big help as they and their families and communities work to recover."

Today, the state cut 644 checks totaling \$3,216,700 to help compensate commercial fishermen for income losses from September harvest reductions due to Hurricane Florence as documented by state harvest records. The state collects records of all marine fish and shellfish sold at North Carolina docks.

A handful of checks for September losses are still being processed due to missing information. These checks will be mailed as soon as possible.

The \$11.6 million program is part of a package of Hurricane Florence relief efforts Governor Cooper signed into law on December 3, 2018.

Distribution of the money is based on reported commercial fishing landings in September, October, and November 2018 as compared to the same months in 2015, 2016, 2017.

In December, the Division of Marine Fisheries sent certified letters to approximately 1,800 commercial fishermen to inform them that they were eligible for assistance and to invite them to participate in the program. About 850 commercial fishermen chose to participate. Those with estimated losses based on landings will receive a check.

In the coming weeks, the division will send certified letters to fishermen eligible to participate in the Hurricane Florence Commercial Fishing Assistance Program based on October and November landings.

The letters will be sent to fishermen who are residents of North Carolina and who held a valid,

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current Standard or Retired Standard Commercial Fishing License or a Shellfish License for N.C. Residents without a Standard Commercial Fishing License, and who suffered losses in fishing income during October and November 2018, as documented by state records.

Hurricane Florence severely disrupted North Carolina's commercial fishing industry throughout the fall of 2018. The storm's historic rainfall and powerful winds destroyed boats, gear and buildings critical to fishing businesses.

As a result of the storm, Gov. Cooper sought and also won a federal disaster declaration for the state's marine fishing industry. That designation can assist with additional relief for commercial fishing families struggling to make a living while repairing their businesses.

According to the state Division of Marine Fisheries, the North Carolina commercial fishing industry generated more than \$96 million in revenue in 2017.

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