



Blue Crab Briefing for The House Environmental Matters Committee

January 27, 2009



Update on Stock Status

- The abundance of spawning age crabs is the most important indicator of stock health, and will be the most precise measure of 2008 regulatory impacts on the stock.
- Abundance is measured via the bay-wide winter dredge survey which is currently underway.
- Results of the dredge survey are expected in early April 2009.



Update on Stock Status (cont.)

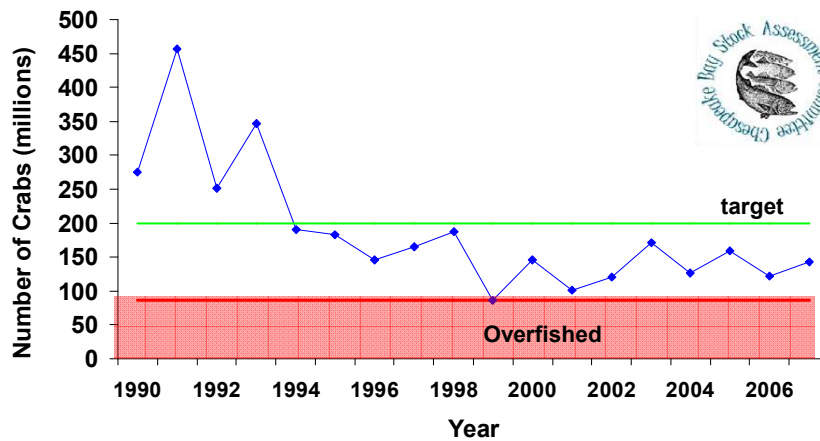
- The percentage of crabs removed from the population by the 2008 fisheries – relative to the 46% target - will not be known until bay wide landings are finalized in February.

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Maryland Department of Natural Resources

Management actions are designed to constrain the fishery removals to 46% of the population which will allow the abundance of spawning-age crabs to build. Abundance of spawning-age crab is the most important indicator of stock health.

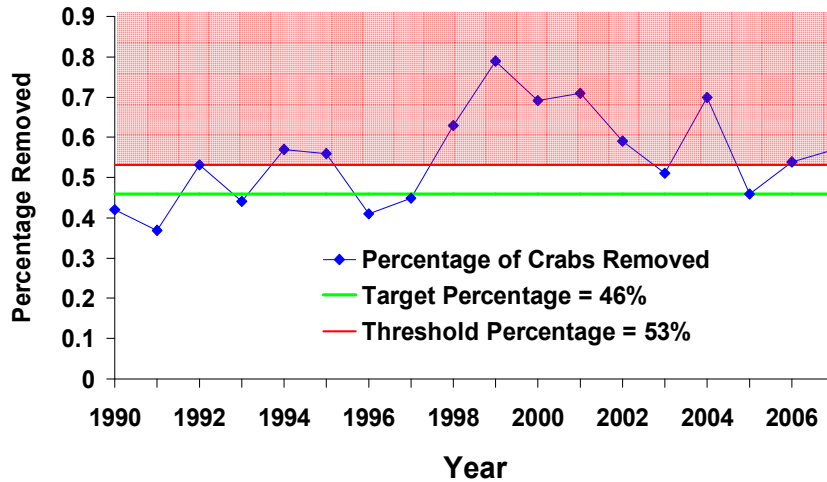


Year refers to the survey start-year. The 2007 value is the 2007 – 2008 result.

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Maryland Department of Natural Resources

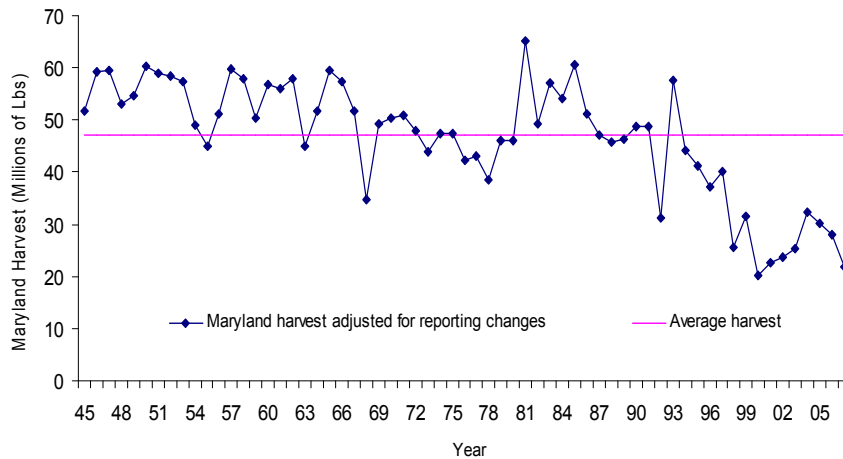
The percentage of crabs removed from the population by the fisheries has been well above the target for most years of the last decade. This value informs us of removals relative to population size. Constraining removals to the target level of 46% will allow the population to build.



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Maryland Department of Natural Resources

The Maryland Chesapeake Bay crab harvest has been on the decline since the late 1990's. The 2007 harvest of 23.6 million pounds was among the lowest since 1945. The 2008 harvest is projected to be higher than the 2007 harvest, but harvest estimates will not be finalized until mid-February.



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The 2008 regulatory strategy commercial fishery -

- Beginning September 1, 2008 crabbers were placed on daily bushel limits that were calculated based on their 2004-2007 harvest history, as reported to the Department.
- Crabbers with no history of harvesting females during September and October of 2004-2007 were not permitted to harvest females in September and October of 2008.
- The crabbing season was closed to female harvest on October 23, 2008



Objective of the 2009 blue crab regulatory proposal -

- Maintain the target fishing removal level of 46% of the population.
- Conserve female crabs in order to build the spawning population.
- Distribute the impact of the commercial regulations over the crabbing season rather than focusing regulations in September and October as was done in 2008.
- Begin addressing the large number of unused crab licenses (latent effort) that have the potential to re-enter the fishery.
- Develop a sample frame so that recreational harvest of blue crabs, which is largely unknown, can be estimated.



Extent of 2009 blue crab regulatory proposal -

- The proposed 2009 regulations are designed to achieve the same level of reduction as 2008 which was 34%.
- This level of reduction is based on crab abundance measured in the 2007-2008 dredge survey.
- Mechanisms for adjusting regulation based on upcoming results of the 2008-2009 survey are shown on page 16.



Process for the Development of 2009 blue crab regulatory proposal

- Beginning in September 2008, the Department held several meetings with industry members to develop regulation.
- Three meetings were held – one per month in September, October and November.
- Throughout this process, there was continued close coordination with Virginia and with the Potomac River Fisheries Commission.



Primary differences between 2008 and 2009 regulations are as follows -

- The early season closure to crabbing is supplemented with short (15 and 9 day) closures in June and September respectively.
- Crabs spawn throughout the summer – from May through September. The closure in June is intended to allow the females that mature early to exit Maryland waters and enter the Virginia spawning sanctuary.
- Crabbers are placed on daily bushel limits for female crabs for the entire season.
- Crabbers are given bushel limits based on their license type rather than on their catch history – so crabbers with no reported harvest history may harvest females.



2009 Proposed Regulations Commercial:

- The harvest of mature female crabs will be controlled by two closed periods and an early season closure to mature female harvest. Closures are designed around spawning periods.
- Bushel limits are assigned by license category.
- Not more than license quotas are allowed per boat – this will act to limit impact of unused commercial crabbing licenses by preventing crabbers from 'stacking' licenses on a vessel.
- The season will close on November 10 (5 weeks early) to the harvest of female crabs.



Proposed 2009 commercial bushel limits and closures. Limits are daily, per boat and apply to mature female crabs.

Closures:	
Season closed to sook harvest	November 10 – last day
Period closed to sook harvest	June 1 – June 15 inclusive
Period closed to sook harvest	Sept 26 - Oct. 4 inclusive
Bushel Limits:	LCC, TFL/CB3, TFL/CB6, TFL/CB9
April 1 - May 31	2 10 15 20
June 16 - August 31	2 6 10 15
Sept 1 - Nov 10 (except Sept closure)	10 25 35 45



Reducing unused commercial licenses (latent effort)

- The 2005 blue crab stock assessment (NOAA) recommended reducing latent effort because it is a potential threat to a recovering stock.
- DNR is proposing to freeze LCC (limited crab catcher) licenses that have not been used in any year between 2004 and 2008.
- The exact number of licenses to be frozen will not be known until all 2008 harvest reports have been returned by the due date of January 15, 2009.
- However, it is likely that 700-1,000 licenses will be frozen.
- This represents approximately two thirds of the unused commercial licenses.





DNR does have flexibility to adjust the proposed 2009 regulations if the results of the 2008-2009 dredge survey are significantly different than the 2007-2008 results – upon which the regulations are based.

The Bushel limits are not defined in regulation. Both bushel limits and closure periods can altered by the Department via public notice. This will provide the flexibility to allow harvest to shrink or expand with dredge abundance.



2009 Proposed Regulations Recreational:

- Prohibition of female crab harvest – with the exception of soft crabs.
- Implementation of a free, but required, recreational crabbing registration.



Update on Maryland capital fund and the Federal Fisheries Disaster assistance.



Maryland Capital Funds

- Currently \$2.5 million is supporting oyster bar rehabilitation and land restoration projects. The remaining \$500,000 is set aside by MD DNR for aquaculture based projects in 2009.
- All licensed commercial crabbers (approximately 6,000 individuals) were offered the opportunity to participate.
- 722 watermen applied and all were accepted – except 53 individuals whose acceptance is pending while the following issues are resolved:
 - Oyster or crab violations
 - Incomplete or missing data
 - Late applications



Maryland Capital Funds (cont.)

- 2008 Fall Projects:
 - 100 acres of oyster reef rehabilitated
 - 91 watermen worked for 5 days

- 2009 Land Projects
 - Projects are taking place in Cambridge, Snow Hill, La Plata, and at an aquaculture facility in Western Maryland.
 - Projects will run January through April.
 - 35 watermen have signed up for these projects.

- 2009 Spring Projects
 - Approximately 900 acres of oyster reef will be rehabilitated.
 - Projects will run between February and June 2009.
 - 539 watermen are currently signed on for these projects.



Federal Fisheries Disaster Award -

10 million dollars available in March 2009.

Major items within spending plan:

- Restructure fishery including license buybacks.
- Creation of economic and diversification opportunities for watermen (aquaculture, environmental tourism)
- Capital assistance and training for watermen on the implementation and business of aquaculture.
- Enforcement
- Derelict crab pot removal programs
- Oyster habitat rehabilitation work