

Fisheries GIT Tasking CBSAC to Develop New Blue Crab Abundance Targets

Background:

In 2008, the Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee (CBSAC) recommended an interim abundance target (200 million age 1+ adults). The target level of 200 million was intended as an initial rebuilding goal (seen as something achievable in the short term). This target has been exceeded for three consecutive years.

In 2010, the Executive Order (EO) 13508 Strategy for Protecting and Restoring the Chesapeake Bay was released and established a Blue Crab Outcome. The outcome is to “Maintain sustainable blue crab interim rebuilding target of 200 million adult (1+ years old) in 2011 and develop a new population target for 2012 through 2025.” The EO outcome was drafted based on a decision among NOAA and the jurisdictional management agencies (VMRC, PRFC, MD DNR) that any discussion and revision to the interim blue crab abundance target should be informed by the updated benchmark stock assessment slated for completion in 2011. The thinking was that coming up with a new blue crab target at the time of the EO strategy development would be putting policy ahead of science and that we should wait until a more informed discussion could occur before making any changes.

On August 9, 2011 a detailed 2011 Blue Crab Stock Assessment on the status of blue crabs in the Chesapeake Bay will be publically released. The Fisheries Goal Implementation Team (GIT) is hereby tasking CBSAC to fulfill the EO Outcome by revising the current “interim rebuilding target” based on the 2011 Stock Assessment results which may include a shift from the current total adult abundance target to a female based abundance target.

Recommendations:

CBSAC, under guidance from the Fisheries GIT, should review and provide recommendations for revised reference points based upon the 2011 Blue Crab Stock Assessment. The Fisheries GIT requests CBSAC to include those recommendations in a report to be completed by October, 2011. This report should:

Near-Term (October, 2011)

- 1) Provide guidance for the management agencies on:
 - a. Implementation of the biological reference points developed within the 2011 assessment
 - b. Methods for determining appropriate reference points for the male component of the population.
- 2) Provide a description of how the reference points recommended/proposed under task 1 differ from the current reference points.
- 3) Prioritize research needs and science gaps – as identified in the 2011 assessment and Center for Independent Experts (CIE) review.

Long-Term (June 2012)

- 1) Recommend decision rules to be implemented to address abundances that fall outside recommended thresholds.
- 2) Begin developing a means to attribute ecological parameters affecting blue crab abundance and attempt to quantify their impacts on targets and thresholds.

CBSAC Members:

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The Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team (GIT) is focused on facilitating fisheries management that encourages sustainable Chesapeake Bay fish populations, supports viable recreational and commercial fisheries, and promotes natural ecosystem function. The Fisheries GIT provides the forum to discuss fishery management issues that cross state and other jurisdictional boundaries. The Fisheries GIT is also working to better connect science to management decisions and create a framework/mechanism for implementing ecosystem-based approaches to fisheries management.