



**Chesapeake Bay Program**

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# News Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Annual Analysis of Blue Crab Population Voices Caution**

*Female numbers slip just under desired numbers;*

*“risk-averse” approach recommended*

The newly released [2014 Chesapeake Bay Blue Crab Advisory Report](#) encourages fishery managers around the Chesapeake Bay to take a risk-averse approach to blue crab management this year, due primarily to a decrease in the number of female crabs in the Bay. This advice is one of several scientifically developed suggestions in this annual assessment, developed by the [Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee \(CBSAC\)](#), a fisheries management group that includes scientists and representatives from federal and state government as well as academic institutions.

Among other recommendations, CBSAC’s 2014 report suggests that:

- Agencies managing blue crabs in the Chesapeake Bay should minimize the risks to crab populations, focusing on protecting juvenile female blue crabs as they consider any changes to regulation. This will rebuild the numbers of females and ensure that the juveniles can contribute to a more robust overall population.
- Jurisdictions should consider establishing sanctuaries—based on where females spend their time and blue crab biology—in different parts of the Bay over the course of the year in order to further protect female blue crabs.
- Accountability and reporting be improved for both commercial and recreational crabbing so managers can better track harvest levels throughout the season. The report discusses several ways to achieve this.
- Estimates of overwintering mortality need to be more precise and further investigation of whether sperm limitation may affect reproductive capability is needed. This would improve management through better data and analysis, including evaluation of gear efficiency estimates.
- Managers consider moving to an annual July-to-July cycle for reviewing regulations thereby enabling timelier use of the Winter Dredge Survey and the Blue Crab Advisory Report results.

“The poor performance of the Bay’s 2013 blue crab fishery—the lowest reported harvest in the last 25 years—combined with the winter dredge survey results that indicate a depleted female population, warrants management actions to conserve both females and juveniles,” said Joe Grist, current chair of the Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee. “The cold winter and other environmental factors affected the crab population, and we expect that conservative regulations will help females and juveniles—the future of the blue crab population—rebound.”

“We want to protect the crab population in ways that will create a sustainable future for this publicly and commercially valuable fishery so we can maintain the harvesting traditions and enjoy eating crabs today—and for years to come,” said Peyton Robertson, director of the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office and chair of the

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Chesapeake Bay Program’s Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team. “Science is helping us more fully understand factors affecting the crab population, including overwinter mortality, cannibalism, and changes in ocean circulation.”

The [Chesapeake Executive Council](#) recently signed a new [Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement](#) that outlines a number of goals for Chesapeake Bay Program partners. Work under way by the Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team and the Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee—like the development of the Blue Crab Advisory Report—supports work toward the Sustainable Fisheries goal, using science to maintain a stable and productive blue crab fishery.

The 2014 Blue Crab Advisory Report is based on data collected in the Bay-wide winter dredge survey (a cooperative effort between Maryland, Virginia, and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission) and on annual estimates of blue crab harvest. [Results of the Winter Dredge Survey](#) were released earlier in the spring; CBSAC scientists then analyzed the data to produce the Blue Crab Advisory Report. It was formally approved by the jurisdictional managers who serve on the Executive Committee of the Chesapeake Bay Program’s [Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team](#). This team provides a forum for discussion of fishery management issues across state and other jurisdictional boundaries, better connecting sound science to management decision making.

*The Chesapeake Bay Program is a regional partnership that has coordinated and conducted the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay since its creation in 1983. Members of the Chesapeake Executive Council include the governors of Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia; the mayor of the District of Columbia; the chair of the Chesapeake Bay Commission; and the administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on behalf of the federal government. This group is responsible for setting the Chesapeake Bay Program’s policy agenda. To learn more, visit [www.chesapeakebay.net](http://www.chesapeakebay.net).*

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