

June 1, 2016

Mr. Peyton Robertson, Chair  
Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team  
NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office  
410 Severn Avenue #207  
Annapolis, Maryland 21403

RE: Blue Crab Management

Dear Mr. Robertson,

I am unable to attend the June 2-3, 2016 GIT meeting; however, I would like for my comments to be shared with the team. First, I would like to give some background of my involvement in the crab fishery of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. I have personally been crabbing for about 50 years. For the last 35 years, I've been directly involved in the resource management of crabs, fish, oysters and clams of the Bay. I have witnessed many changes in the crab fishery during this time. When I first began and throughout my early years, crabbing was somewhat a fill-in fishery between oystering in the fall and finfishing in the winter. Crabs were abundant and generally sale prices were low. The mindset by many at that time, was focused on catching as many crabs as possible before moving onto the next fishery. Consumers didn't ask any questions other than getting a good price for the product. Over time, for various reasons, including the decline of the oyster industry, tighter regulations placed on Striped Bass, and a growing population of consumers, crabbing has evolved into a #1 fishery for the Chesapeake Bay.

Markets have changed, consumer mindsets have changed, and the abundance of crabs in the Bay has changed; therefore, the way in which the resource is managed must reflect those changes. Markets have evolved away from picking houses, to which there are very few left in the area, to more of a basket trade. Crab abundance now has to be monitored closely, and today's consumers not only demand local food, but sustainable food as well, and are willing to pay a higher price for these products.

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Taking the above into consideration, I believe that having a uniform size limit of 5 ¼" for male crabs in all Bay jurisdictions would be a good starting point for sustainability, accountability, marketability and profitability of the crab fishery in the Chesapeake Bay.

Sustainability - More male crabs available for a longer period of time in the water to mate with spawning females.

Accountability & Enforcement – the 5 ¼" size limit would allow for resource managers to more accurately manage the male crab fishery and law enforcement would not have to consider the issues with jurisdictional size limit differences.

Marketability & Profitability - The 5 ¼" size limit would allow male crabs to grow to a larger, more marketable size. Less crabs in a basket at a higher price for a good quality product. Crabs sold to picking houses would yield more meat at the 5 ¼" size limit, bringing higher prices to the harvester and less waste of the product.

Managing a resource that has such a short life-span as the Chesapeake Bay Blue Crab, that is as socially and economically important to Maryland, requires knowledge, experience, science and a strong will to work together. The three (3) Bay jurisdictions are doing a good job at keeping the harvest under the threshold; therefore, I don't see any advantage of jurisdictional quotas at this time. Bringing the jurisdictions together with a uniform size limit would move us in the right direction for the betterment of the resource and those that derive a living from it.

Respectfully,

William L. Rice Sr.