

CRAB ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

May 19, 2016

PRFC Office, Colonial Beach, VA

Members Present

Robert A. Boarman – Chairman, (MD)
Elgin H. Nininger – Vice Chair, (VA)
John B. Morris, Jr. – (MD)
Dean E. Bowie – (MD)
James B. Berthe – (MD)
Bruno Vasta – (MD)

Members Absent

Arthur L. Loving (VA)
Mark G. Hunter – (VA)
George W. Smith – (VA)

Press

None

PRFC Commissioners

William L. Rice, Sr.
Ida C. Hall

Support Staff Present

Dr. Tom Miller - CBL
Ofc. James Vanlandingham – VMRC Law Enf.
Ofc. Sean Hicksonbaugh – VMRC Law Enf.
Martin Gary – PRFC Executive Secretary

Others Present:

Sammy Dorough, Richard Richie, Rachael Richie, John Dean representing the St. Mary's County Watermen's Association, Michael Maddox, and Dottie Vasta.

Agenda

1. **Call to Order – 6:00 p.m.**
2. **Female Blue Crab Fecundity (Presentation by Dr. Tom Miller, UMCES)**
3. **What happened in 2012 (Presentation by Dr. Tom Miller, UMCES)**
4. **2015/2016 Winter Dredge Survey Results (Presentation by Dr. Tom Miller, UMCES)**
5. **2015 Crab Harvest Report - Discussion**
6. **Discussion of Possible 2016/2017 Crab Management Responses (Action Requested)**
7. **Electronic Reporting - Discussion**
8. **Baywide Jurisdictional Management - Discussion**
9. **Oyster leasing impacts to crabbing areas - Discussion**
10. **Transfer of Crabbing License to a family member – Discussion & Possible Action**
11. **Beneficiary language in regulations – Discussion & Possible Action**
12. **Senior Sport Crabbing License (Chuck Yost request) – Discussion & Possible Action**
13. **How/when to address crab pot ID tags/decals (John Morris request) – Discussion & Possible Action**
14. **New Business**

Summary:

Chairman Boarman called the meeting to order at 6:15 PM. Chairman Boarman acknowledged there was not a quorum, so the meeting was being held under terms of consensus. Dr. Thomas Miller provided three presentations. The first presentation related to the fecundity (reproductive potential) of female Blue Crabs. Dr. Miller explained that females mate with males upon attainment of their terminal molt. The females store sperm for the development of a potential of multiple egg masses depending upon how long the female survives. Two factors affect survivorship of females, natural mortality (predation, disease etc.) and fishing mortality. A graduated calculus of mortality was calculated beginning in June of the first year of a female's life, and continuing out. Based upon this analysis, females could potentially live for several years producing multiple egg masses, but because of fishing pressure, most females produce only 2 or 3 egg masses in their life cycle. This is still enough to provide adequate spawning potential as long as the stock has an adequate number of spawning females (hence the emphasis on female conservation and management) and sperm limitation is not an issue. Dr. Miller explained the calculus behind quantification of how much sperm is required for multiple broods of female crabs. UMCES analysis based upon sperm counts indicated that sperm limitation is not currently an issue in the Chesapeake Bay.

The next presentation Dr. Miller provided related to the mystery of what may have happened to the 2012 year class of Blue Crabs in Chesapeake Bay. Dr. Miller explained that the Winter Dredge Survey (WDS) indicated its highest ever recorded numbers for the winter of 2011/2012. These would have been Blue Crabs that were spawned in autumn of 2011. The WDS predicted an extremely high abundance of crabs that would be available in the latter part of 2012 as they grew and recruited to the minimum sizes in the Bay crab fisheries. Initial surveys showed them present in June of 2012, but as each successive month went by, fewer and fewer crabs were observed. In fact, the harvest and observed crab population was the opposite, one of the worst years for crab abundance. Dr. Miller and his colleagues identified and tested two categories of hypotheses. The first tested whether the data from the WDS that indicted the crab abundance was extremely high, was in fact flawed in some way. By either technique or the spatial manner of how the crabs were surveyed or by other means. The immense amount of data that is collected for the annual WDS was analyzed for the 2011/2012 survey, and the results of the analysis supported the notion that there was in fact an excellent reproductive event in the autumn of 2011, and that despite the WDS being limited to a specific sampling area of Chesapeake waters, there should have been a significant, discernable increase in the abundance of Blue Crabs in 2012. Unless, however, something else happened to them. Such as being eaten by predators. Dr. Miller then explained to the BCAC that there was a significant reproductive event in 2012 for Red Drum. This is something that the fishery managers would not have had an awareness of going into the 2012 crabbing season. So a spatial analysis based upon the longitudinal and latitudinal distribution of crabs was conducted. The trends did suggest mortality was above average in the northern portion of the Chesapeake (above the Chesapeake Bay Bridge/Kent Island), but more average compared over time in the middle portion of the Chesapeake and lower than average in the lower Chesapeake. This did not match up with juvenile Red Drum distribution. Dr. Miller concluded by stating that the significant year class for Blue Crabs was real, but the cause for the demise of that year class still remains a mystery.

Dr. Miller then proceeded to present the results of the 2015/2016 WDS. All metrics of the survey improved (Total abundance, Females, Males, Age 0, Age 1+). Female abundance is very near the management target.

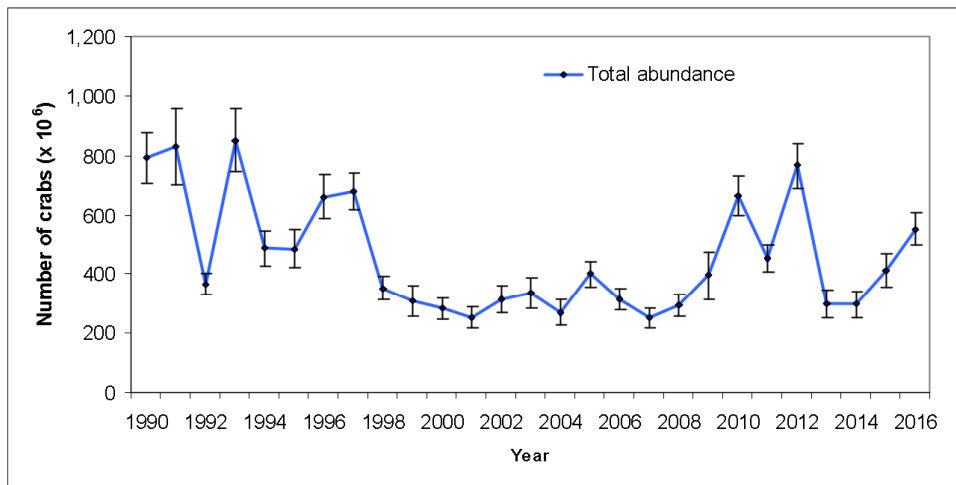


Figure 1. Winter dredge survey estimate of **total blue crab abundance (males and females)** 1990-2016. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

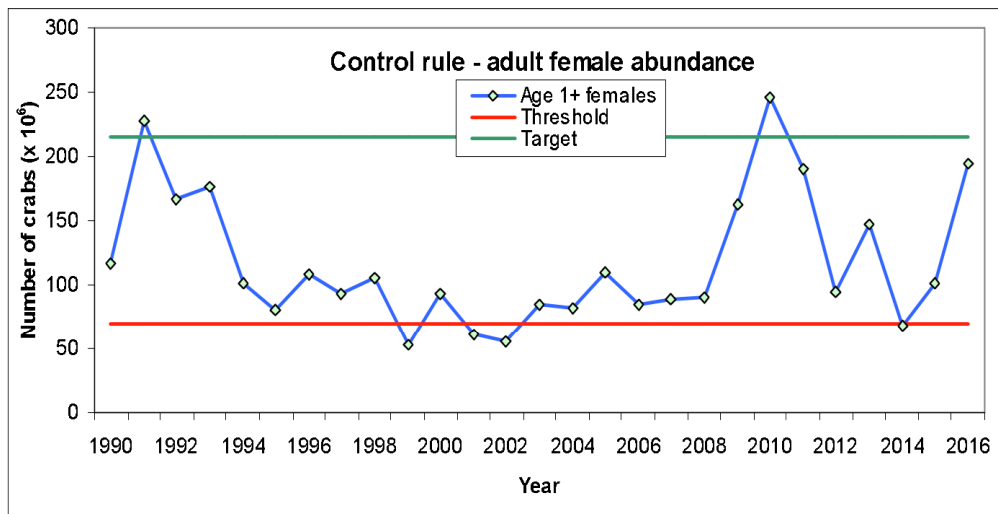


Figure 5. Winter dredge survey estimate of **abundance of age 1+ female blue crabs (≥ 60 mm carapace width)** 1990-2016 with female-specific reference points. These are female crabs considered the 'exploitable stock' that will spawn within the coming year.

Dr. Miller was asked by Chairman Boorman what he and his fellow scientist's opinions were of how management should respond to the new WDS results. Dr. Miller responded by stating, "It's an improvement, but we're not quite there."

Mr. Gary presented the 2015 calendar year crab harvest data. Overall, catch was up from the previous year, but not significantly. Mr. Gary mentioned that he had heard from some crabbers that they were planning to go catfishing instead of crabbing, and that may have suppressed harvest potential. Mr. Gary discussed female bushel limit performance against the caps that were implemented on October 1, 2015 (see tables below). Only 3 reports met the 14 bushel cap for the 285 pot license and only 6 reports met the 24 bushel limit for the 475 pot license.

Female Bushels caught 10/1/2015 thru 11/30/2015
Order #2015-13 effective 10/1/2015

No. of Pots 285 14 Bushel limit No. of crabbers reporting female harvest: 451

No. of Bushels harvested	No. of crabbers
14	3
13	2
12	2
11	4
10	5
9	7
8	7

No. of Pots 380 19 Bushel limit No. of crabbers reporting female harvest: 62

No. of Bushels harvested	No. of crabbers
17	1
16	1
15	2
14	2
13	2
12	2
10	3

No. of Pots 475 24 Bushel limit No. of crabbers reporting female harvest a: 465

No. of Bushels harvested	No. of crabbers
24	6
21	5
20	6
19	4
18	8

Chairman Boarman then asked Mr. Gary what the other jurisdictions were planning to do based upon the results of the WDS. Mr. Gary informed the committee that Virginia was discussing the possibility of extending their season ending and beginning dates, and may tweak their bushel limits. Mr. Gary reminded the committee that Virginia has mixed male/female bushel limits. Mr. Gary mentioned Maryland was contemplating extending their season end into December. He said there was a small contingent of crabbers on MD's lower eastern shore that were asking for a reduced minimum size to 5", but he thought that was mostly opposed within the commercial community. Chairman Boarman asked the Committee if they had any requests for changes to the

existing crabbing regulations. Mr. Gary reminded the Committee that any changes would be for the new management time frame of July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017. **After a brief discussion, which included a mention of consideration of a grace period for removing crab pots, Jim Berthe made a motion to extend the PRFC commercial crabbing season 10 days through December 10, 2016. The motion was seconded by Elgin Nininger. The motion passed unanimously.**

Mr. Gary then led a short discussion on electronic reporting. Mr. Gary explained that while PRFC and Virginia were currently reporting crab harvest via hard copy forms through the mail, MD has for a number of years been exploring electronic reporting options for its harvesters. Initially a pilot program for Blue Crab harvesters, and now all commercial harvesters can report their harvest electronically if they choose to do so. Mr. Gary explained their data can be transmitted from cell phones, tablets, computers or through a call in center over the phone. The system MD uses is voluntary, and requires a validation process known as “Hail in-Hail out”. This is to provide greater assurance of accountability. Mr. Gary explained that there are other systems of electronic reporting available. One called SAFIS through the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) is essentially the paper reports transmitted from harvester to agencies electronically. There are no accountability measures with SAFIS. Any system PRFC might consider would likely be rolled out as a pilot program on a voluntary basis. Mr. Gary asked the committee if there were any concerns with moving forward to explore an option for electronic reporting, and there were none.

Mr. Gary informed the committee of discussions at NOAA’s Chesapeake Bay Program’s Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team (SFGIT) related to Chesapeake Bay jurisdictional based crab management quotas, which have and continue to occur. Under a Bay crab quota management process, each jurisdiction, MD, VA and PRFC would receive their own quota based upon a historical reference period, and be responsible for managing it. The benefits of systems like these are flexibility in management. The drawbacks include a potential for overages and possible penalties. Mr. Gary explained one of the greatest concerns of implementing such a system would be determining the quota allocation to each jurisdiction. A time frame that might be advantageous to one jurisdiction might be to the detriment of another. Dr. Miller indicated that that is normally the most difficult part of such a process. He also mentioned the genesis for this conversation has been Non Governmental Organization’s (NGOs) that seek greater accountability for management of the resource while affording flexibility to harvesters. Commissioner Rice indicated that Maryland’s principal commercial advisory Commission, the MD DNR Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission will be writing a letter to NOAA’s SFGIT to say they are content with the current methodology of crab management and do not wish to see Chesapeake Bay jurisdictional quota management implemented at this time. The Committee asked Mr. Gary to do the same on behalf of the BCAC. Mr. Gary asked Commissioner’s Hall and Rice if it would be appropriate to write the letter, share it with the Commission and write it on behalf of the full Commission. They confirmed it would be appropriate. Mr. Gary indicated he would send such a letter in advance of the June 2&3 SFGIT meetings.

Mr. Gary then informed the committee that MD DNR has issued an oyster nursery permit in PRFC jurisdictional waters, and that it has the legal authority to do so. He wanted to bring this to their attention and also to let them know that the next strategic planning process for oyster management in the Potomac will be discussed and launched at the upcoming June meeting of the Commission. Aquaculture would likely be part of the discussions of the planning group. Given potential spatial impacts to crabbers, he asked if the Committee might be interested in attending

those meetings and even having a representative on the planning committee. Chairman Boarman asked the group if they would be interested, and he volunteered to represent the BCAC. The group nodded in confirmation. Mr. Gary indicated he would make the Commission aware of the BCAC's interest and Mr. Boarman's offer to volunteer to serve. There was a brief discussion of past Commission discussions related to aquaculture, and Mr. Gary told the committee that MD previously documented their legal authority for administering aquaculture in the Potomac in those deliberations. Commissioner Rice suggested to the BCAC that the Commission would be better to get on board and steer the process rather than try to fight it.

Chairman Boarman introduced a discussion of transferring a license to a family member and beneficiaries. Mr. Gary indicated the two topics are entwined with one another, and that we should discuss them in tandem. He indicated the current PRFC regulatory language is vague regarding the transfer of licenses upon death, and that currently any transfers default to a 300 pot license. It was indicated that the purpose of this discussion was to determine if the BCAC would be supportive of moving a regulation forward that exempt a 400 or 500 pot license to a family member from the 300 pot license down grade default. The question was asked as to who a family member might be, and Mr. Gary indicated that Sam Dorrough provided a list from the MD Motor Vehicle Administration (see below) that they use. A short discussion ensued and Commissioner Rice suggested the committee defer the determination of who a family member might be to the full Commission. Chairman Boarman asked Mr. Gary to do so.

Sec. 1(e) Death of Licensee or Surrender of License

Upon the death of the licensee, a limited entry license or a fixed fishing device license and all rights pertaining thereto shall pass to those lawfully entitled thereto. If any licensee desires to surrender his or her limited entry or fixed device license, he or she may do so by delivering same to the Commission office at any time together with a statement of intent to that effect. The Commission may thereupon issue another limited entry or fixed device license for the surrendered license to any other applicant who has made timely application therefore.



Motor Vehicle Administration
6601 Ritchie Highway, N.E.
Glen Burnie, Maryland 21062

VR-103 (06-13)

Application for Maryland Gift Certification See reverse side for important information

If you are not a member of the immediate family as noted below, this form **cannot** be used. If the vehicle transfer qualifies as a bona fide gift, this form must be completed and submitted with the properly assigned Maryland title.

Spouse	Father	Son	Daughter	Sister	Grandmother
Mother	Stepfather	Adopted son	Adopted Daughter	Half Sister	Grandchild
Stepmother	Father-in-law	Stepson	Stepdaughter	Brother	*Uncle
Mother-in-law	Grandfather	Son-in-law	Daughter-in-law	Half Brother	*Aunt

*For more information please see other side of page.

If last names are not the same, proof of relationship must be submitted.

Chairman Boarman asked Mr. Gary about the agenda item for a senior sport crabbing license. Mr. Gary explained that Mr. Chuck Yost has made multiple inquiries into the possibility of creating a \$5 senior sport crabbing license. Mr. Gary explained that this license is a boat license. He also explained to the committee that all current senior licenses are set up to “phase out” based upon date of birth. Furthermore, the commission has and continues to exhibit flat revenues, and creation of discounted licenses are contrary to remediation for the revenue concerns. Chairman Boarman asked if any committee members were in favor of advancing such a license. No support was offered.

Chairman Boarman asked Mr. Gary to explain the issue involving the issuance of crab pot ID decals. Mr. Gary explained that PRFC uses the Jessup, MD correcitonal facility to produce crab pot ID decals. Between the operational protocols of the institution and the short window of time after the license renewal period, getting the decals in a desirable time frame for crabbers who wish to start their season on April 1st can in some years be tenuous. This year was one of them. Mr. Gary indicated that Mr. Morris raised a good point, and that he has discussed possible options with staff. Two options have emerged. One would be to place two separate orders based upon the timing of a crabber’s renewal. If a crabber renewed on or before the end of December, they would be included in an early order of decals. All others that renew up until the January deadline would be part of a later order. The alternative plan to this would be seeking a private sector vendor, who could be contracted to guarantee a specific delivery date, but might also be more costly. After a short deliberation, the BCAC indicated by consensus to go forward with staff’s recommendation to implement the two step order process for the next cycle of decal issuance. Mr. Sam Dorough suggested PRFC eliminate decals altogether. Mr. Gary relayed that discussion might be better served to occur at another time. Chairman Boarman asked if there was any new business, hearing none he adjourned the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert A. Boarman, Chairman