



Commonwealth of Virginia
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**Governors Bob McDonnell and Martin O'Malley
Announce Chesapeake Bay Blue Crab Population
Reaches Near 20 Year High**

*~ Stock Hits Highest Level since 1993; 66% Increase Above 2011
Numbers~*

RICHMOND, Va. and ANNAPOLIS, Md. – Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell and Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley announced today the Chesapeake Bay's blue crab population is booming, fueled by an extraordinary explosion in juvenile crab abundance.

The results of the 2012 Blue Crab Winter Dredge Survey determined the total population of blue crabs in the Chesapeake Bay has reached 764 million, due to four years of a bay-wide stock rebuilding program.

This is a 66 percent increase above the 2011 abundance level of 460 million crabs, and is the highest level recorded since 1993. In fact, the bay-wide blue crab stock abundance is now more than triple the record low of 249 million, set in 2007, the year before the stock rebuilding program began.

“This is fantastic news,” said Governor McDonnell. “The crab population is the highest it has been in the past 20 years, and to see this record production of juveniles is truly remarkable. Those crabs will grow over the summer and many will reach market size in the fall. Those that aren’t harvested and brought to the dinner table will become the building blocks for future generations of crabs.”

“This shows exciting progress for the stock rebuilding program with our Maryland partners, and is great news for our crabbers and everyone who enjoys genuine Chesapeake Bay crab cakes and she-crab soup, which I recommend be paired with a nice Virginia white wine. I want to applaud all those who have worked to make this incredible progress possible, including my predecessor Governor Tim Kaine and his Administration, and Governor O’Malley and his Administration in Annapolis. This is a bipartisan success story,” he said.

“Just a few short years ago, the future did not look bright for our blue crab population,” said Governor O’Malley. “Our female crabs were being overfished, and our fishery was at risk of complete collapse. We teamed up with our neighbors in Virginia and at the Potomac River Fisheries Commission to make the tough choices, guided by science, to reverse that population decline.

“Today’s announcement marks four years in a row of progress to restore the blue crab. The kind of progress we’re making today really only happens when we work together. None of us can restore the blue crab alone – we’re all in this together, and it will take all of us working together to achieve a better future for our crabs, our industry, recreational crabbers and crab-lovers across our State,” he said.

The new survey shows this year’s crab abundance increase is the result of a massive bay-wide baby boom – an almost tripling of the number of juvenile crabs from 207 million last year to 587 million. Juvenile crab abundance has never been recorded at such high levels and the new record obliterated the old record of 512 million juveniles established in 1993.

Bay-wide, the crab harvest has increased substantially since 2008, from 43 million pounds to a preliminary estimate of 67.3 million pounds during 2011.

The winter dredge survey results sounded one important cautionary note. The number of spawning age females recorded by the survey dropped by roughly 50 percent from 2011 levels, down to 97 million. However, that level remains above the healthy-species threshold, and these

types of fluctuations are neither unprecedented nor unexpected in the winter dredge survey. Spawning age females are the cornerstone of the joint Virginia-Maryland stock rebuilding program. The recorded number of spawning age females is a warning signal that requires a risk-averse, prudent management strategy to avert another stock decline. Crab abundance had declined by 70 percent before the bay-wide stock rebuilding program began four years ago.

Historical crab population data is available here:
www.governor.virginia.gov/News/crabtable.cfm