



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

L. Preston Bryant, Jr.
Secretary of Natural Resources

Marine Resources Commission
2600 Washington Avenue
Third Floor
Newport News, Virginia 23607

Steven G. Bowman
Commissioner

For immediate release
April 10, 2009

Contact: John M.R. Bull
757-247-2269 (office)
757-509-0969 (cell)

VMRC Delays New Crab Regulations until May

NEWPORT NEWS, VA. – The Virginia Marine Resources Commission has decided to postpone action on proposed 2009 crab regulations until May.

A series of commercial crab regulations scheduled for a public hearing on April 28 will be delayed for a month as fishery managers prepare additional regulatory options for consideration by the nine-member Commission.

One of the additional regulations to be considered will be whether to again prohibit the winter dredging of crabs, as was the case last year.

The commercial crabbing industry sued to overturn the ban but Norfolk Judge John R. Doyle III on April 3 upheld the Commission and ruled such seasonal closures must be done annually, with a public hearing and a vote.

The Commission closed the 100-year-old winter crab dredge season last year in response to a scientifically proven assessment of the Bay-wide blue crab population that revealed an alarming 70 percent decline in crabs since 1993 and a dire need to protect spawning female crabs in particular.

The findings prompted a multi-year agreement between Virginia and Maryland to reduce the annual harvest of female crabs by 34 percent, in order to rebuild the crab population to an interim target of 200 million spawning animals and to enact measures that would maintain the harvest at sustainable levels.

(MORE)

The latest results of the Bay-wide crab population assessment are expected to be released by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science and Maryland Department of Natural Resources next week, and may indicate whether the bi-state crab rebuilding program is succeeding.

That assessment also will help the Commission determine how stringent its 2009 regulations must be to continue the population rebuilding efforts.

The VMRC is legally required to advertise potential fishing regulation changes for 15 days before voting on them.

So in order to consider major 2009 crab conservation measures at the same time, the proposed measures that were scheduled for public hearings and a vote this month will be delayed until the Commission's May 26 meeting.

At that time, the Commission will consider whether to:

- Close the winter crab dredge season and again prohibit a practice in which commercial crabbers dig up hibernating, pregnant female crabs, from December to March.
- Relax a currently required 30 percent reduction in crab pots per license (based on 2007 license limits) to a less stringent 15-20 percent reduction.
- Enact daily bushel limits at different times of the season or to adjust season closing dates.
- Hold a commercial crabber responsible if his authorized agent who works those crab pots is convicted of repeated crab conservation violations in a 12-month period. The proposal calls for a Commission license revocation hearing for the license holder and for the agent to be barred from serving as an agent for a year.
- Reinstate a five-pot recreational crab license that was suspended last year as part of the agency's crab population rebuilding program.

One crab regulation change that was advertised for an April public hearing and vote will remain on the Commission's agenda for this month: Whether to close a loophole in the VMRC's crab sanctuary regulations that inadvertently allowed a portion of the lower Chesapeake Bay to be open for crabbing last spring as crabs were spawning.

Closing dates for that portion of the sanctuary were established by the General Assembly many years ago. At the request of the VMRC, the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 1111, which allows the Commission to establish a uniform closing date for the entire crab sanctuary. Gov. Timothy M. Kaine signed that measure into law last month.

-- 30--

An Agency of the Natural Resources Secretariat

Web Address: www.mrc.virginia.gov

Telephone (757) 247-2200 (757) 247-2292 V/TDD Information and Emergency Hotline 1-800-541-4646 V/TDD