



MEDIA RELEASE

VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
5/22/2024

Chesapeake Bay's Blue Crab Population Holds Strong, Encouraging Managers to Maintain Harvest Levels

HAMPTON, VA. – The latest findings from the 2024 Bay-wide Blue Crab Winter Dredge Survey indicate that the Chesapeake Bay blue crab population remains stable. Managers from Virginia, Maryland, and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission are buoyed by these results and intend to sustain current harvest levels while eagerly anticipating the forthcoming benchmark stock assessment.

Conducted annually by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources since 1990, the Winter Dredge Survey utilizes traditional crab dredges to sample blue crabs at 1,500 sites throughout the Chesapeake Bay from December through March. The survey recorded a total estimated blue crab abundance of 317 million crabs in the winter of 2024, with adult female crabs continuing to surpass average levels for the second consecutive year.

Scientists and managers have long emphasized the importance of closely monitoring and managing the adult female population, as they play a crucial role in propagating each year's cohort of new crabs. The female Blue Crab population has been responding well to the management changes implemented following the 2008 Blue Crab Fishery Disaster declaration and the absence of overfishing among female crabs in 2024 marks a continued positive trend.

Jamie Green, Commissioner of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC), underscored the significance of Virginia's license-specific bushel limits in blue crab management: "One of the most influential management measures that has contributed to the long-term success in blue crab fisheries management has been the license-specific bushel limits implemented by Virginia in 2013. This provides Virginia the flexibility to reduce regulatory burdens that would economically benefit the industry while maintaining the long-term conservation goals of the joint Chesapeake Bay jurisdictions".

Despite the constraints imposed by harvest management efforts, the Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee (CBSAC) has cautioned that additional factors influencing blue crab abundance may not yet be fully understood. Recognizing this, a collaborative effort supported by Virginia, Maryland, and the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office is underway to conduct a comprehensive stock assessment over the next 2-3 years. The assessment will consider various factors such as habitat availability, water temperature and salinity, ocean dynamics, and predator abundance, with results expected to inform future management strategies.

CBSAC recently convened to review the results of the 2023-24 Winter Dredge Survey, which will be detailed in the forthcoming CBSAC Annual Report scheduled for release this June. In Virginia, stakeholders can learn more about the survey results during the Virginia Marine Resources Commission's Crab Management Advisory Committee on May 29 at 4 PM. Additional information about public meetings can be found at [MRC.Virginia.gov](https://www.mrc.virginia.gov).

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