

Coastal Conservation Association Maryland



NEWS

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**For further information contact:
Robert Glenn, 1-888-758-6580 (office)
410-279-1884 (cell)
Sherman Baynard, 410-758-1162**

CCA MD Supports Equitable Female Crab Closures for Recreational, Commercial Crabbers

ANNAPOLIS (MD)—The taking of female crabs should be closed for both recreational and commercial crabbers for a designated period of time to help restore Maryland's blue crab population, the Coastal Conservation Association Maryland (CCA MD) told Maryland's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) here tonight.

“Seasonal closures on the taking of female crabs for all crabbers at an appropriate time certain date would provide the greatest potential for protecting these biologically important spawners,” Sherman Baynard, chair, CCA MD fisheries committee, told DNR's Sport Fisheries & Tidal Fish Advisory Commissions during tonight's joint meeting.

“We have failed before; we can not afford to fail again,” charged Robert Glenn, executive director, CCA MD. “The blue crab started its recent decline 10 years ago, and we nibbled around the edges of the problem. If policy makers, recreational anglers, commercial interests, and concerned citizens do not come together and take bold action now, we run the risk of permanent damage to this valuable fishery. Today we must think about tomorrow's crabs.”

DNR announced its latest draft regulatory options for blue crabs during the public meeting. CCA MD, which represents more than 2,000 recreational anglers and conservation-minded citizens, called for a total allowable catch that will bring the crab season to a close when the quota is reached in a position statement adopted last month.

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“What is important is that we end overfishing by returning the fishery to the target removal rate of 46 percent,” Baynard testified. “If the scientists recommend achieving this by reducing the taking of females, we can support that, but it has to be done equitably.”

“When the Department makes its final regulatory proposals later this month, they must be easily enforceable and insure a high level of voluntary compliance,” Baynard continued. “The commercial regulatory options for a maximum size limit on female crabs and a sliding bushel limit for only female crabs are open for abuse by economically-stressed crabbers.”

The most effective and equitable way to gain enforceability and compliance is time closures on the taking of female crabs by all crabbers, according to CCA MD. DNR would make a mistake by placing inequitable regulations on recreational crabbers, one suggested approach, according to Glenn.

“The draft options for recreational crabbers are unacceptable,” said Glenn. “The proposal to prohibit citizen crabbers from taking any females is inequitable, and reducing creel limits and imposing later start times on recreational crabbers fails to address reducing fishing mortality on females, the stated goal of new regulations. Instead, it reallocates the resource.”

“We feel it is blatantly unfair to subject the citizen crabber to a total prohibition of the taking of female crabs, when the commercial sector will be allowed to continue removing large numbers of these spawners,” Baynard said. “If protecting the female crab is critical to the blue crab’s recovery, then we should consider a total moratorium on their harvest for all users.

CCA MD also testified in support of regulatory options to reduce the cap on limited crab catcher licenses and establishing a control date of Dec. 15, 2007 as a first step towards reducing latent effort in the commercial fishery that could jeopardize a recovery in the crab population.

Coastal Conservation Association is a national organization of 100,000 members in 17 state chapters from Texas to Maine and the Pacific Northwest. CCA’s mission is to advise and educate the public on conservation of marine resources. The objective of CCA is to conserve, promote and enhance the present and future availability of these coastal resources for the benefit and enjoyment of the general public.