

Summary

7/9/2014

Blue Crab Industry Advisory Committee Meeting

The committee discussed blue crab harvest reduction options for the fall of 2014 and spring of 2015. The following reduction options were agreed upon:

- From September 1st through November 10, 2014, a 12% limit reduction for vessels that harvest with two licenses on board. This was originally discussed at the 5/22/14 meeting.
- Reduce April 2015 bushel limits to match May bushel limits, **and** apply the 12% bushel limit reduction for vessels that harvest with two licenses. April bushel limits are still at the 2012 level because bushel limit reductions that were placed in 2013 didn't go into effect until May.

PENDING DECISIONS: There was no agreement on the 2 options for peeler harvest reduction which are intended to increase protection for incoming 2015 spawning crabs. These options are:

- Increase the minimum peeler size from 3 ¼" to 3 ½" from April 1st to July 15th, resulting in a year-long 3 ½" minimum peeler size.
- Prohibit the harvest of peelers from 9/16/14 to 4/30/15.

Both of these options were controversial within the group. The committee presented two options and requested that the Department evaluate these options as alternatives to the peeler options shown above. The Department will evaluate the following options suggested by the Committee in lieu of the peeler conservation options:

- Close the crabbing season 11/11/14 for both males and females, reducing the crabbing season for males by 34 days.
- Require cull rings in peeler pots.
- The Department also presented the options of closing the season for male crabs 11/30/14 shorting the season by 15 days. This option would match Maryland closing date with that of Virginia and Potomac River. The committee will wait on the evaluation of the 11/11/14 close date before considering this option.

If an additional meeting is needed it will be held the 1st week of August.

The Department also recognizes and appreciates the alternative plan presented by industry that would focus crab protection efforts on habitat and predation issues. While this plan should be considered for the long term and could potentially be discussed within the Fisheries Habitat Workgroup, the immediate priority is to offer increased protection for female crabs that will spawn in 2015 to increase the odds of a quick rebound of the crab population. While the issues outlined in the industry plan are of great importance, they cannot work to increase 2015 spawning abundance.