

# Blue Crab Management Outcome: Evaluation of Allocation-based Management Framework

## Update to Chesapeake Bay Program

*Submitted by Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Potomac River Fisheries Commission, Virginia Marine Resources Commission*

### Introduction

#### Blue Crab Management Outcome (2014 Watershed Agreement)

Manage for a stable and productive crab fishery including working with the industry, recreational crabbers and other stakeholders to improve commercial and recreational harvest accountability. By 2018, evaluate the establishment of a Bay-wide, allocation-based management framework with annual levels set by the jurisdictions for the purpose of accounting for and adjusting harvest by each jurisdiction.

#### Description from Chesapeake Bay Program Management Strategy

The jurisdictions with stakeholder input will evaluate the application of an allocation-based management framework, which refers to the development of one or more methods to allocate an annual total allowable catch (TAC) of female and male crabs for the Chesapeake Bay blue crab fishery among the three management jurisdictions—Maryland, Virginia, and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission. A TAC is the total number/pounds of crabs that can be harvested by recreational and commercial fisheries in the Chesapeake Bay each year. The jurisdictions could then develop an agreed upon jurisdictional allocation, which is the percentage of the TAC assigned to each of the Bay management jurisdictions that can be modified by jurisdictional agreements. Stakeholders will be consulted for input throughout the process.

If the evaluation leads to the application of an allocation-based management framework in the future, each management jurisdiction would be responsible for regulating and implementing management actions to ensure their jurisdictional allocation would not be exceeded. If the evaluation results recommend not implementing an allocation-based framework, the jurisdictions would continue with the current management approach or an agreed upon alternate approach.

### Progress

#### Chesapeake Bay Program 2016-17 Workplan: First Step-Stakeholder Engagement

- Action: Engage stakeholders and the public to identify concerns and/or support for exploring a potential Baywide TAC. Use their comments to help guide the evaluation of the TAC.

**STATUS:** As part of the process to evaluate the establishment and allocation of a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for recreational and commercial blue crab fisheries the jurisdictions worked with constituent groups to educate them as to the process and to obtain their feedback. In mid-late 2016, the Sustainable Fisheries Goal Team received feedback in mid-late 2016 from the Maryland Tidal Fisheries

Advisory Commission, Potomac River Fisheries Commission membership, and members of the Virginia Crab Management Advisory Committee.

Summary of Stakeholder Feedback

Stakeholders across all three jurisdictions expressed concern about moving forward with an allocation-based management framework and Baywide Total Allowable Catch (TAC). The stakeholders who submitted feedback recommend that the jurisdictions not pursue and allocated TAC at this time. Their concerns about an allocation-based management framework are summarized below and full feedback can be found at the links below:

*Maryland Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission (Link to [Maryland letter](#))*

- Lack of support by the majority of the blue crab industry.
- Time-consuming analysis with little benefit for management.
- Lack of necessary harvest data to support the practical allocation of a TAC.
- Not time-critical since the blue crab stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring.

*Potomac River Fisheries Commission (Link to [PRFC letter](#))*

- Potential impacts of using historical time frames and harvest data to determine jurisdictional allocation.
- Changing harvester reporting behavior.

*Virginia Crab Management Advisory Committee (Link to [Virginia feedback](#))*

- Potential burdening of the recreational fishery under such a scheme.
- Difficulty in implementation and enforcement.
- Negative impacts on Virginia crabbing industry.
- Overregulation of the fishery.

Summary of Agency Perspectives

The management agencies have identified specific issues (below) that make consideration of an allocation-based management framework difficult at this time.

*Maryland Department of Natural Resources*

- The female-specific reference points ensure adequate protection of female crabs and the current management strategy appears to be successful in maintaining a sustainable population and thriving fishery.
- Allocating a quota to specific jurisdictions can have far-reaching unintended consequences. This has been demonstrated repeatedly for species managed under the Mid Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. Unintended consequences can become especially severe if harvest data are incomplete or of poor quality.
- Chesapeake Bay recreational blue crab harvest is not well quantified, and data quality issues - though improving - exist in Maryland.

*Potomac River Fisheries Commission*

- See letter above from the Potomac River Fisheries Commission.

- Not time-critical since the blue crab stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring.

#### *Virginia Marine Resources Commission*

- Already have a limited entry system for the fishery.
- Law enforcement and monitoring of crab harvest would be extremely difficult and unrealistic with the large number of crab potters and the many different landing locations.
- Difficult to determine how annual adjustments would be made under an allocation-based management framework in response to the Winter Dredge Survey Results.

### **Conclusions and Next Steps**

Based on the feedback from stakeholder industry groups and current perspectives from the jurisdictions, Maryland, Virginia, and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission have decided not to continue with establishing a Baywide, allocation-based management framework for blue crabs at this time.

The management jurisdictions are continuing to operate under the current science-based management framework using Baywide female-specific biological reference points and a conservation trigger for male crabs based on the history of male exploitation. Management agencies have regulations (bushel limits, season dates, etc.) in place that can be used to respond to changes in the blue crab stock if necessary.

The management agencies, industry stakeholders, and scientists continue to work together to better understand the blue crab population and fishery. Improving estimates of recreational harvest and other sources of mortality is an ongoing priority. The management jurisdictions also have ongoing efforts to improve the quality of catch and fishing effort information submitted by commercial and recreational harvesters.