



BLUE CRAB ABUNDANCE OUTCOME

SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES GIT/CHESAPEAKE BAY STOCK ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

2014 WATERSHED AGREEMENT: GOAL & OUTCOME LANGUAGE

OUTCOME:

Maintain a sustainable blue crab population based on the current 2012 target of 215 million adult females. Refine population targets through 2025 based on best available science.

SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES GOAL:

Protect, restore and enhance finfish, shellfish and other living resources, their habitats and ecological relationships to sustain all fisheries and provide for a balanced ecosystem in the watershed and Bay

OUTCOME DISPOSITION ADVICE TO MANAGEMENT BOARD: UPDATE

2. Consider if the Outcome is SMART, and specifically, whether the current outcome meets the definition of an outcome, as described in the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement (“Agreement”), or if that outcome is an output or indicator.

Yes, it meets SMART criteria and key elements of the secret sauce. There are jurisdictional leads, a science based evaluation process and resources available to assess the population each year as well as adapt as needed.

3. Consider aspects of “what makes a good Outcome”.

This is a “good outcome” as it has a clear objective, is measurable, has a monitoring program that supports the outcome, has strong partner commitment, as well as being centered on a living resource with ecological and economic importance.

4. Consider the challenges to and opportunities for achieving the outcome.

Blue crabs are short lived and subject to drastic population changes from year to year due to environmental changes within and external to the Bay. Management of blue crabs aims to control harvest levels so as to maintain a sustainable population and build some resilience into the population to buffer the environmental impacts. However, fishery managers do not have control over all the factors that affect blue crab populations, which means we may not always meet the population targets set by the outcome but have procedures in place to discuss options when population numbers are near or below the threshold. There is an opportunity to address specific questions about what environmental drivers are impacting blue crab habitat. Specifically, to understand changes in habitat needs for blue crabs as a result of climate change. Climate change could pose a challenge to achieving the blue crab abundance outcome, as there are substantial knowledge gaps in how climate change could affect the population and habitat of blue crabs in the Chesapeake Bay.

5. Consider how the outcome relates or could relate to the Bay Agreement mission, vision, and themes/pillars.

It should remain under the Abundant Life theme and Sustainable fisheries goal.

6. Consider the timescale for completing the outcome (5, 10, 15 years). Determine if achieving the outcome is an incremental step or is it a final outcome.

The outcome would be ongoing as we “sustain” the blue crab population. There will be a set timeframe for the stock assessment. The stock assessment will be updated each year, and a more formal update to assess whether or not we are meeting the outcome to sustain the blue crab population will be conducted every 5 years.

7. Consider resource needs and availability (high, medium, low).

High/medium resource needs. Continued funding for winter dredge surveys and stock assessments are needed, as well as additional funding for research looking into the environmental drivers impacting blue crab recruitment as well as impacts of changing climate and habitat conditions on abundance.

8. Consider the risk or unintended consequences of removing the Outcome.

Removing this outcome could result in less coordination and accountability across jurisdictions. Removing this outcome could also risk upsetting the public, who value this species as a resource and as a symbol of cultural identity.

9. What value is added by having the Chesapeake Bay Program work on the outcome?

Higher visibility across the Chesapeake region. Increased funding opportunities. Increased transparency.

10. Consider how the Outcome, as written, benefits the public. Does the outcome reflect public input already received and have the potential to galvanize public support/engagement?

This outcome, which supports a healthy blue crab population, goes hand in hand with having a healthy ecosystem, which ultimately benefits the public. Blue crab is also a culturally important species in the bay, as it is ingrained within the local diet, symbols, and traditions of MD and VA. People and the media are actively looking out for updated information on the status of the blue crab stock assessment. This outcome will continue to maintain public support/engagement and provide the information needed to sustain the population of blue crabs for the general public and local economy.