SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES GOAL

Blue Crab Abundance Outcome

2025 PROGRESS
ON COURSE

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.

PROGRESS AS OF 2021: The Blue Crab Abundance Outcome is on track. The status of the blue crab population is determined by the number of adult females present in the Bay. Ideally, the number of females would be at or above the target of 196 million, but could be as low as the threshold of 72.5 million and still be considered sustainable. Since 2014, adult female abundance has remained above the threshold, indicating that the population is sustainable and this outcome is being met.

BACKGROUND: The Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee (CBSAC) has met since 1997 to review the results of the Winter Dredge Survey (conducted since 1990) and to develop management advice. CBSAC is made up of fisheries managers, scientists and state and federal agency partners. The Blue Crab Abundance Outcome was derived from CBSAC's annual Blue Crab Advisory Report.

BASELINE: The 2011 blue crab benchmark stock assessment recommended using a female-specific abundance target and threshold. CBSAC developed a target of 215 million spawning-age (1+ years old) females—the number experts estimate is needed to sustain the crab population—and also set the threshold, or minimum number, at 70 million spawning-aged female crabs. In 2012, an abundance of 95 million blue crabs was measured in the Bay.

DATA SOURCE: Data for the Blue Crab Abundance Outcome is collected through the annual Winter Dredge Survey conducted by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and Virginia Institute of Marine Science. The survey randomly samples a total of 1,500 sites throughout the Chesapeake Bay that are deeper than five feet. All crabs collected during the survey are measured from spine to spine across the top shell and weighed. The sex of each crab is determined and female maturity is noted. The results are reported as crab density, or the average number of crabs found within a 1,000 meter by 1,000 meter area. These data are paired with annual harvest data provided by Maryland and Virginia.