

Horseshoe Crab Advisory Panel Conference Call

Summary of Addendum III Discussion

Date: December 1, 2003

Participants: Bob Munson (*AP Chair*, commercial gillnetter)
Jay Harrington (commercial handpicker/raker)
Brad Spear (*ASMFC Staff*)

****Rick Robins (processor/dealer) and Michael Dawson (biomedical manufacturer) submitted comments after the call for inclusion in summary.**

Harvest Level Threshold

Of the Options presented in Addendum III, participants on the call supported Option 1 for Harvest Level Threshold. However, above that one participant preferred an Option 3, which would raise quotas in NJ, DE, and MD to the levels before ASMFC management.

One participant made reference to the Commission's Vision statement, specifically, "*Healthy, self-sustaining populations for all Atlantic coast fish species...*" He pointed out that that concept includes, "*the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and anadromous species.*" He offered that the Board has paid little attention to the effect of horseshoe crabs as predators on shellfish and benthic invertebrates. He argued that horseshoe crabs deplete a large variety of invertebrates that are essential to the diet of humans, shorebirds, and the community of bottom feeding fish and crustaceans. Further discussion and support for this argument is found in letters to the Board as Appendices A and B.

One AP member contested the grounds for the recommendations and peer review report of the Shorebird Technical Committee. He argued that the 75% reduction from RPL recommended in the peer review report was based on the lower control of the horseshoe crab population estimate from the VT benthic trawl survey. He believed that this is too conservative of an approach.

Another alternative mentioned was the idea of a sunset clause. This was suggested in order to prevent a continual ratcheting down of quota before the effects of management had been studied.

Closed Season

Both participants favored no closed season (Option 1). It was noted that NJ already has regulations in place to prohibit hand harvesting from beaches. Therefore, crabs will be on the beaches at the time (March 1-June 7) most important to shorebirds and offshore harvesting should be allowed.

Biomedical Exceptions

Participants felt that the biomedical industry should be given no special exceptions for the method used to harvest horseshoe crabs or timing of harvest. However, the participants supported Option 2 as long as states were sensitive to individual situations.

Monitoring Component A₂ (Biomedical Monitoring)

One AP member requested that the Technical Committee provide evidence to show “that the threshold for biomedical-associated mortality (57,500 crabs) that triggers management action may be reached soon” (Draft Addendum III; pp. 6). He noted that, “For the total mortality of biomedical crabs to exceed 57,500, the number of biomedical crabs would have to exceed 383,333 (assuming 15% mortality).” He understood the need for collecting information from biomedical companies to monitor and minimize mortality.

Regarding the questionnaire, one AP member commented that biomedical companies cannot monitor horseshoe crabs every step from capture to release. Some of the information is better collected from fishermen. In Massachusetts, the harvest and transfer of crabs is tightly regulated through reporting requirements.

Other Discussions

One participant noted that just as ecotourism and bird watching has a large impact on the economy through multiplier effects, horseshoe crab harvest has a large impact. The monetary value of horseshoe crabs are not only what the harvester gets (landing value), but also what the horseshoe crab as bait catches.