Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Horseshoe Crab Biomedical Best Management Practices Work Group Meeting Summary

Webinar
March 13, 2023

Work Group Members: Benjie Swan (Limuli Labs), Brett Hoffmeister (Associates of Cape Cod), Daniel Sasson (SC DNR), Derek Perry (MA DMF), Katie Rodrigue (RI DEM), Nora Blair (Charles River Labs), Samantha MacQuesten (NJ DEP), Steve Doctor (MD DNR)

ASMFC Staff: Caitlin Starks

Public: Melissa Chaplin (USFWS), Kristoffer Whitney (), Glen Fernandes, John Martin, Susan Linder, Ben Levitan (Earthjustice)

The Biomedical Best Management Practices Work Group (BMP WG) met on March 13th via webinar to continue addressing the Board task to review and update the Biomedical BMPs. The WG reviewed a draft document including the recommended modifications to the BMPs. First, the WG discussed the background information that should be provided in the document. WG members suggested that there should be a brief description of the biomedical industry's history and average observed mortality rates to provide context. They also agreed that there should be an explanation of the document's purpose and audience.

The WG also reviewed a draft diagram to include in the document. The diagram illustrates the flow of horseshoe crabs from the point of collection, to the biomedical facilities, to their point of return to the ocean during the biomedical process. The goal is to clarify the steps in the process to which each of the BMPs are relevant. The WG suggested changes to make the diagram as accurate as possible, while also including processes used across different regions.

The WG discussed recommendations for research and management. They agreed to include a number of research recommendations in the document that could increase knowledge of the impacts of the biomedical industry on horseshoe crab populations. The WG considered adding a recommendation to the states about how to make use of the BMPs. They agreed that the goal of the BMPs is to minimize mortality and injury of horseshoe crabs, but considering the variation in practices across the states, some members do not think it is appropriate to suggest the BMPs be implemented as requirements. The WG agreed that it should recommend the states periodically review the BMPs to continue to reduce the impacts of biomedical collections.

Two public attendees made comments at the end of the meeting. Ben Levitan from EarthJustice commented that the work group should recommend that the states should make material publicly available on which states allow biomedical collections of horseshoe crabs, as well as

their permit requirements for the biomedical industry. He also stated that if the document produced by the WG includes observed mortality rates, it must be made clear what practices are being used that result in those rates. Regarding the research recommendations, he commented that if studies on biomedical mortality rates are reviewed to reevaluate the number used to estimate the mortality bled crabs, there would need to be full transparency and public input on the studies that are used.

Susan Linder commented that she appreciates that this WG is considering how to improve the BMPs to decrease mortality, and also appreciates that the public were able to listen in. She said it has been helpful to listen to these conversations to better understand the biomedical process and clear up misconceptions that some may have about it.

Staff will revise the document based on the WG's recommendations. The WG will meet again in several weeks to finalize the draft document for the Board's consideration at its May 2023 meeting.