Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 11, 2026

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ASMFC Horseshoe Crab Board Initiates Draft Addendum X to Consider Stakeholder Recommended Changes to the ARM Framework

Newport, RI – The Commission's Horseshoe Crab Management Board initiated Draft Addendum X to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) to consider changes to the Adaptative Resource Management (ARM) Framework, including modifying the horseshoe crab and red knot utility functions, and adding a minimum population threshold to the female horseshoe crab harvest policy function. The ARM Framework is designed to balance the commercial harvest of horseshoe crabs with the abundance of migratory shorebirds — in particular, the threatened rufa red knot — which depend on horseshoe crab eggs as a critical food source during their migration stopover in Delaware Bay Region each spring.

Draft Addendum X responds to recommendations from the horseshoe crab stakeholder engagement process completed earlier this year. Participants represented groups with interests in horseshoe crab harvest management in Delaware Bay: bait harvesters, bait dealers, the biomedical industry, ecosystem conservation organizations, horseshoe crab conservation organizations, and shorebird conservation scientists and organizations. The process convened stakeholders to explore possible changes to the values-based components of the ARM Framework to better align the model with current stakeholder values. These components include the utility functions for horseshoe crabs and red knots, which assign quantitative measures of value to different levels of horseshoe crab harvest and red knot stopover abundance, and the harvest policy functions, which translate long-term projected horseshoe crab and red knot population trends into optimal annual harvest recommendations.

Draft Addendum X will consider three changes to the ARM Framework's utility and harvest policy functions based on recommendations with broad stakeholder agreement:

1. Update the horseshoe crab harvest utility function to reflect a male-to-female bait harvest value ratio of 2.65 males per 1 female, based on values elicited from bait harvesters and dealers.
2. Update the red knot abundance utility function using values elicited from conservation stakeholders.
3. Update the harvest policy function to trigger zero female harvest if the Delaware Bay population of female horseshoe crabs falls below 7 million crabs.

The Board will consider approval of Draft Addendum X for public comment in January 2027, with public hearings held in the late winter/early spring.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and diadromous species.

The Board also maintained the male-only harvest specifications for the Delaware Bay region established for 2027. The Board reviewed survey data for red knots and horseshoe crabs and determined no changes to the specifications are needed.

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