

BLUE CRAB 2001

(06/01 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

Stock Status--Concern. Preliminary estimates from stock assessments conducted by N.C. State University researchers indicate that harvest may be near maximum sustainable yield (MSY). MSY for the NC blue crab resource is difficult to estimate and may not be reliable, due to the crabs short life cycle and the varied and complex estuarine system in NC. Estimates of MSY for the blue crab are between 48 and 60 million pounds. MSY at 60 million pounds has been exceeded in two of the last five years. Additionally, the stock assessment suggests there has been a decline in spawning stock biomass in recent years. A complete stock assessment is planned for the blue crab resource in North Carolina when the necessary data is available.

Average Commercial Landings and Value 1991-2000-- 50,968,678 lb, \$30,674,341
(Includes Hard, Soft, and Peeler Crab Landings and Value)

2000 Commercial Landings and Value (preliminary)-- 40,543,193 lb, \$37,359,795
North Carolina's number one fishery in value.

Average Recreational Landings 1991-2000 and 2000-- Unknown

Average Number of Award Citations 1991-2000 and 2000-- N/A

Status of Fisheries Management Plan (FMP)-- North Carolina FMP adopted by the MFC on December 11, 1998. Effort management options for the crab pot fishery were discussed by the Marine Fisheries Commission and its committees in 1999-2000. It was decided to allow all licensed commercial fishermen to participate in this fishery without gear limits.

Research and Data Needs-- Research and data needs are listed in the FMP.

Current Minimum Size Limit-- 5 inches from tip of spike to tip of spike except mature females, soft and peeler crabs, and from March 1- October 31 male crabs to be used as peeler bait. A tolerance of not more than 10 percent by number in any container shall be allowed.

Harvest Season-- Open year round

Size and Age at Maturity-- Most are mature at 5 inches, 12 to 18 months

Historical Maximum Age-- 5 to 8 years old, Current Maximum Age---- 2 to 3 years old

Juvenile Abundance Indices Average (JAI)-- 7.29 crabs per minute for 1987-1998 (unvalidated). JAI's for 1999 and 2000 were 10.8 and 4.4, respectively. Despite variability in abundance, there is no general downward or upward trend in recruitment.

Habits/ Habitats-- Migration and movement among various habitats are seasonal, depending on life stage, sex, maturity, and associated salinity preferences. Many different habitats are used during migrations from high-salinity ocean waters to the lower-salinity and freshwaters of the coastal sounds, rivers, and creeks.

For more information, see [DMF Species Leads page](#)