

## **BLUE CRAB**

(06/03 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

**Stock Status— Concern.** Significantly reduced landings of “hard” blue crabs during 2000 - 2002, following the historically record high landings observed during 1996 - 1999, has caused increased industry concern for the health of the resource and fishery. Overall landings increased slightly from the 2001 levels. “Peeler/soft crab” landings were the lowest since 1994. Abnormally low rainfall associated with the summer drought of 2002 led to increased salinities and influenced crab distribution and promoted increased harvest in some of the more inland waters (i.e., Chowan, Perquimans, and Pamlico rivers). The majority of the 5 million pound increase from 2001 to 2002 came from the Albemarle area, which includes Albemarle and Currituck sounds, and Alligator, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Roanoke, and Chowan rivers. A significant increase in crab pot effort was also evident in the Albemarle area. During 2002, many areas (i.e., Pamlico, Core, Bogue, Stump, and Topsail sounds; Neuse, Bay, and Newport rivers) yielded the lowest landings on record for the period from 1994-2002. Hard crab pot effort was also at a record low in the Pamlico, Core, and Croatan sounds, and in the Pamlico, Neuse, Bay, and Newport rivers. Although overall landings and/or trips were down in the noted areas for 2002, catch-per-trip (CPUE) increased from 2001 to 2002 in Pamlico, Core, Croatan, Roanoke, and Masonboro sounds; Neuse, Bay, Newport, White Oak, and Cape Fear rivers, Inland Waterway, and Lockwood Folly. Landings and effort in the Southern coastal area have remained relatively stable throughout the 1994-2002 period.

**Average Commercial Landings and Value 1993-2002—** 49,691,750 lb, \$34,789,064  
(Includes Hard, Soft, and Peeler Crab Landings and Value)

**2002 Commercial Landings and Value (preliminary)—** 37,676,165 lb, \$33,103,705  
North Carolina’s number one fishery in value and number two fishery in pounds landed.  
Although landings in 2002 were almost 12 million pounds lower than the 10 year average, value of the fishery was almost equal to the 10 year average of \$34.7 million.

**Recreational Landings for 2002—** 133,421 lb (Recreational Commercial Gear License Survey) **Landings by Recreational Non-license Holders—** Unknown

**Status of Fisheries Management Plan (FMP)—** North Carolina FMP adopted by the MFC on December 11, 1998. FMP is currently being revised, scheduled for completion in 2003.

**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 2001 and 2002 were 7.6 and 9.4, 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](#)