

## **BLUE CRAB**

(06/02 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

**Stock Status**--Concern. Significantly reduced landings of "hard" blue crabs for 2000 and 2001, following the historically record high landings observed during 1996 - 1999, has caused increased industry concern for the health of the resource and fishery. Although hard crab landings were lower in 2001, a significant increase in "peeler/soft crab" landings yielded a record harvest of 2.2 million pounds. The increased "peeler/soft crab" harvest along with other market factors resulted in market saturation for these product segments. 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 ten 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 1992-2001**-- 50,030,921 lb, \$32,861,950  
(Includes Hard, Soft, and Peeler Crab Landings and Value)

**2001 Commercial Landings and Value** (preliminary)-- 32,179,852 lb, \$32,231,040

North Carolina's number one fishery in value and number two fishery in pounds landed.

Although landings in 2001 were almost 20 million pounds lower than the 10 year average, value of the fishery was almost equal to the 10 year average of \$33 million.

**Average Recreational Landings 1992-2001 and 2001**-- Unknown

**Status of Fisheries Management Plan (FMP)**-- North Carolina FMP adopted by the MFC on December 11, 1998. FMP currently being revised, scheduled for completion early 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 2000 and 2001 were 4.4 and 7.6, 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](#)