



Contact: Monica Allen 301-713-2370
Kim Couranz 410-267-5673

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Oct. 2, 2007

Report Says Chesapeake Bay Blue Crab Population Remains Lower than Average

The blue crab population in the Chesapeake Bay remained below the long-term average last year and fisheries managers are being urged to work with stakeholders to develop new steps to maintain a sustainable blue crab fishery, according to an advisory report released by the Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee. The annual Blue Crab Advisory Report provides information to help the states of Maryland and Virginia and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission decide how to manage the next season's blue crab fishery.

"Resource managers are dealing with a challenging situation with low levels of both juvenile and female crabs, and we are determined to work with the states to assist them with the most complete information possible," said Peyton Robertson, director of the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office, which collaborated on the Blue Crab Advisory Report.

The 2007 report bases its findings primarily on data collected by the bay-wide winter dredge survey, which is the most comprehensive and robust annual blue crab survey conducted in the bay. The data indicate:

- The abundance of crabs over 5 inches remains depressed compared to historical levels.
- The number of juvenile blue crabs entering the population was low, and was the second lowest since the survey began in 1989.
- The abundance of mature females, or spawning potential, was also found to be below average.

The 2006 Bay-wide crab harvest of 48.9 million pounds is among the lowest recorded since 1945. Based on the historical relationship between crab abundance estimated from the winter dredge survey and the following year's harvest, the 2007 harvest is predicted to be about the same as 2006.

Fisheries managers from Maryland, Virginia and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission adopted reference points in 2001 that define whether blue crabs are being overfished. Despite continued low abundance, the blue crab stock remains above the threshold set in these guidelines, and the 2007 Blue Crab Advisory Report determined that overfishing was not taking place in 2006.

The Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee, which currently is chaired by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and includes fisheries scientists from NOAA Fisheries Service, universities, and the states of Maryland and Virginia, advises fisheries managers on the status of the blue crab population in the Chesapeake Bay through the annual Blue Crab Advisory Report. For more information about the blue crab and for the complete Blue Crab Advisory Report, visit <http://chesapeakebay.noaa.gov>.

Since 1984, NOAA has provided science, service and stewardship to advance NOAA's mission in the mid-Atlantic region, and to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay through its programs in fisheries management, habitat restoration, coastal observations and education and collaboration with the Chesapeake Bay Program. The NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office was established in 1992 to provide a focus for NOAA's multiple capabilities and activities in the Chesapeake Bay.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office: <http://chesapeakebay.noaa.gov>