

Part 3- Chopping Block - Blue Crabs

Next week, February 19th-21st, the Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) will also be reviewing a Decision Document looking at using Adaption Management to reduce commercial blue crab harvest. Although no vote will be required at this meeting, the timeline for implementation of management changes is scheduled for final vote in May 2025!

With the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) asking for 11.6% to a 51.6% commercial harvest reduction though strict bushel limits and 3-to-6-month harvest closures, now is the time to come to every one of these meetings, talk with your MFC members, and DMF staff!

Blue Crab Adaptive Management Timeline

February 2025 - MFC is presented with and reviews management options

March 2025 - Public comment opportunities and review of management options by the Northern, Southern, and Shellfish/Crustacean Advisory Committees (ACs)

May 2025 - MFC votes to adopt a management option

After the May vote - DMF Director implements the MFC adopted management option through Proclamation

Amendment 3 Adaptive Management

Amendment 3 to the Blue Crab Fishery Management Plan (FMP) set the framework and guidelines for using adaptive management. Exact wording of this framework are as follows:

1. Update the stock assessment at least once in between full reviews of the FMP, timing at the discretion of the division

- a. If the stock is overfished and/or overfishing is occurring or it is not projected to meet the sustainability requirements, then management measures shall be adjusted using the director's proclamation authority*
 - b. If the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring, then management measures may be relaxed provided it will not jeopardize the sustainability of the Blue Crab stock*
- 2. Any quantifiable management measure, including those not explored in this paper, with the ability to achieve sustainable harvest (as defined in the stock assessment), either on its own or in combination, may be considered*
- 3. Use of the director's proclamation authority for adaptive management is contingent on:*
 - a. Consultation with the Northern, Southern, and Shellfish/Crustacean advisory committees*
 - b. Approval by the Marine Fisheries Commission*

Upon evaluation by the division, if a management measure adopted to achieve sustainable harvest (either through Amendment 3 or a subsequent Revision) is not working as intended, then it may be revisited and either: 1) revised or 2) removed and replaced as needed provided it conforms to steps 2 and 3 above.

Although DMF did attempt to achieve bullet point 1, the updated stock assessment did not pass peer review.

DMF clearly states in the documents, "an updated stock assessment is not currently available to inform stock status".

If stock status (aka overfished and overfishing status) from the failed stock assessment is "not currently available", then bullet point 1 and everything else in the Adaptive Management Plan are all moot points!

In fact, as we interpret the adaptive management strategy, approved in Amendment 3, the use of adaptive management for any purpose is contingent on the results of the

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updated assessment.

Why else would the FMP require that the assessment be updated?

Without a usable stock assessment update, we do not believe the Division/Commission can use adaptive management and make changes to the current management strategy. **If stakeholders are expected to adhere to the fishery management plan, DMF and the MFC should be held to the same standard, after all they approved it!**

Blue Crab FMP **Blue Crab Decision Document**

Public Comment

Public comment will be accepted on these issues in person at the February MFC meeting, through the online portal, and/or through written comments.

Online Comment Portal

Written comments can also be mailed to:
February 2025 Marine Fisheries Commission Meeting Comments
P.O Box 769, Morehead City, N.C. 28557

Or hand delivered to:
Division of Marine Fisheries' Morehead City Headquarters Office
3441 Arendell Street, Morehead City, N.C.

Summary

The NCFA is continuing to work hard on this issue as well as the other issues before us. Reach out and let us know if you have questions or need help with anything. Stand by for more information as we draw closer to the meeting next week.

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