

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2001 Session

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 967 (Delegate Weir)  
Environmental Matters

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**Peeler Crabs - Catching and Possessing - Size Requirements**

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This bill increases the minimum size of peeler crabs that may be caught or possessed from 3 to 3.5 inches across the shell from tip to tip of spike.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** The bill would not materially affect State operations or finances.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** Meaningful. By increasing the minimum size of peeler crabs by 7%, harvesters, dealers, and buyers should benefit from an increase in the value of peeler and soft crabs by at least 7%. Based on the value of landings of peeler and soft crabs from the 2000 crab season, the estimated increase in the value of landings is \$509,700 annually.

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**Analysis**

**Current Law:** A person may not catch or possess peeler crabs measuring less than three inches across the shell from tip to tip of spike. A person may possess a bycatch of peeler crabs measuring less than three inches if the bycatch is not greater than 30 per bushel or 60 per float. In determining the number of peelers measuring less than three inches, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) must select the minimum number of bushels or floats necessary to be representative of the person's catch.

**Background:** The blue crab is one of the most important species harvested in the bay and generates approximately \$90 million in economic benefit to the State. In the past several years, the blue crab harvest has decreased substantially. According to DNR, about 57 million pounds of blue crab were landed in 1993; in 1999, landings of blue crab totaled only about 32 million pounds. This year, Maryland's crab harvest hit a record low, with watermen landing a reported 21.9 million pounds.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** An emergency measure introduced during the 1996 session (HB 25) would have increased the minimum size of peeler crabs that can be harvested from three to four inches. The bill was referred to the House Environmental Matters Committee. No hearings were held.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Department of Natural Resources, Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader – February 26, 2001  
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Analysis by: Lesley Frymier

Direct Inquiries to:  
John Rixey, Coordinating Analyst  
(410) 946-5510  
(301) 970-5510