

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2007 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Senate Bill 206 (Senators Stoltzfus and Colburn)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Natural Resources - Soft Crabs - Bycatch

This bill allows a person to possess a bycatch of soft crabs measuring less than three and one-half inches in size if the bycatch is not greater than one undersized soft crab per dozen possessed.

The bill takes effect June 1, 2007.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The bill's changes would not directly affect State operations or finances.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: Meaningful.

Analysis

Current Law: Catching or possessing soft crabs measuring less than three and one-half inches is prohibited.

Background: The section of State law being amended by the bill applies to the species commonly known as blue crab. A blue crab can shed its hard shell 18 to 23 times during its three-year life span and increases by one-third of its size during shedding. The crab's soft shell only lasts for a few hours in the water before the crab must be removed to prevent the shell from hardening. The entire crab in the soft shell stage is edible.

The 2006 Bay-wide Blue Crab Winter Dredge Survey showed that the total abundance of blue crabs in the Chesapeake Bay declined in 2006, due in part to lower abundance of juvenile crabs. The lower abundance of juvenile crabs was still among the highest levels since 1997, and the overall blue crab abundance remains stable at low levels of abundance.

Small Business Effect: The Department of Natural Resources advises the bill's changes would allow for an average annual harvest of 45,000 undersized soft crabs, based on an average reported harvest of 45,000 dozen soft crabs from 2004-2006. During that period, the average dockside value of soft crabs was \$5.89 per pound. Assuming a dozen soft crabs weighs 2.5 pounds, the bill's changes could increase annual revenues for commercial crabbers by roughly \$50,000.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: HB 473 (Delegate Elmore, *et al.*) – Environmental Matters.

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

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 8, 2007
ncs/ljm

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