



# CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Environmental Protection and Restoration  
Environmental Education

## Senate Bill 53 Natural Resources – Commercial Crab Harvest – Start Time

Date: February 4, 2025  
To: Education, Energy and Environment Committee

Position: **UNFAVORABLE**  
From: Allison Colden  
Executive Director

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **OPPOSES** Senate Bill 53 which would require the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to allow harvest of blue crabs at least 4 hours prior to sunrise from July 1 through September 30, inclusive, without limiting the end of harvest time by 4 hours accordingly.

Currently, blue crab harvest start times vary by gear type, but begin 30 minutes to 1 hour prior to sunrise with the exception of the summer holidays (Memorial Day, Juneteenth, Independence Day, and Labor Day) where harvest times are extended 1 additional hour prior to sunrise. This limits current harvest times to 8 and 10 hours per day for crab potting and trotlining, respectively.

The health of the blue crab population Bay-wide is assessed annually through the [Blue Crab Winter Dredge Survey](#). This survey determines the total number of crabs present in the Bay and is used to advise fishery management. In 2024, survey results indicated that the population remains well below the long-term average, with juvenile and adult males remaining below their respective averages for a fourth consecutive year. Based on this information, the Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee, which issues scientific recommendations for fishery management urged a precautionary approach, highlighting the need to protect mature females to maintain a healthy spawning stock and conserve adult males given a key conservation trigger has been exceeded for 3 consecutive years.

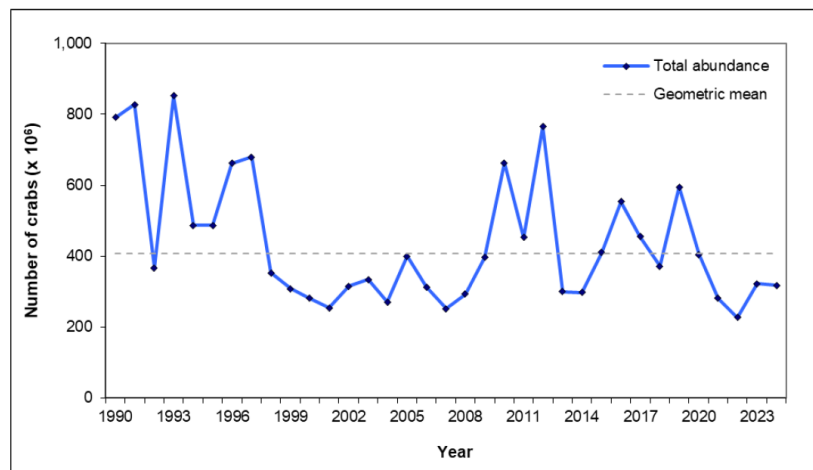


Figure 1: Winter dredge survey estimate of total blue crab abundance in Chesapeake Bay, 1990–2024.

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*The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 200,000 members and e-subscribers, including 71,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.*

In response to these concerning results, DNR implemented harvest limits on male crabs for the first time in the fishery's history and has worked to constrain fishing effort on adult females to increase the potential for the species' recovery. In addition, the Chesapeake Bay Program is working on an updated stock assessment that will attempt to identify and address the causes of recent poor population performance.

Under current regulations, Maryland's watermen harvested 25.1 million pounds of blue crabs in 2024, the highest of the three Bay jurisdictions (MD, VA, Potomac River Fisheries Commission) and more than 50% of the nation's total blue crab harvest. As introduced, SB 53 would allow each waterman to harvest an additional 3-3.5 hours *minimum* each day, resulting in hundreds of additional days of total fishing effort each season. Such shifts in start time could be considered if they also shifted the end time 4 hours earlier, but as written, SB 53 would simply serve to increase overall harvest effort in this fishery at a time when blue crabs likely cannot sustain additional harvest pressure.

**For these reasons, CBF urges the Committee's UNFAVORABLE report on SB 53.**

For more information, please contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney, at [mstegman@cbf.org](mailto:mstegman@cbf.org).