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Marine Fisheries Advisory

MARINEFISHERIES TAKES ACTION TO CONSTRAIN GROWTH IN 2008
HORSESHOE CRAB BAIT FISHERY –
Public Hearing on Emergency Action Scheduled for May 2nd

Effective March 31, 2008 , Director Paul Diodati has taken emergency action to regulate the upcoming horseshoe crab fishery for those fishermen taking crabs for bait purposes. The actions include: 1) a lowering of the daily catch limit from 1,000 to 400 crabs, 2) a moratorium on new permits, 3) a new overall quota limit of 165,000 crabs (down from 330,377 crabs) and 4) the temporary closure of the fishery on July 1 to allow accounting of landings to determine catch levels.

These actions are being taken to cap landings near current levels in anticipation of unprecedented pressure on Massachusetts fisheries, resulting from shortages of crabs in other states from Virginia to New York that have taken actions to conserve crabs through lowered quotas, delayed season openings, male-only harvest rules, or complete moratoriums. In the past weeks, New Jersey enacted a prohibition on all harvest and New York lowered its daily catch limit to 200 crabs down from 500 in an attempt to cap its annual landings at 150,000 crabs (60% below its allowed landings under the interstate plan).

While the Massachusetts quota is set at 330,377 crabs this level has not been reached since the interstate plan's quotas were enacted in 2000. Division of Marine Fisheries biologists feel the quota is unsustainable and is made further problematic by state and federal closures of key producing areas such as Monomoy Island and Pleasant Bay . There are concerns of local depletion if the remaining open areas are expected to bear the harvest burden of increased landings over current levels.

The decision to cap the state's quota at 165,000 crabs is designed to cap the landings at – or near - the level seen in the past two years. Reported landings in 2006 totaled 171,906 crabs and in 2007 was 150,858. These levels were the highest since 2000.

The Division of Marine Fisheries and the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission will accept comments on these emergency actions at a public hearing on Friday, May 2nd. The hearing will start at 1PM at the Best Western Bridge-Bourne Hotel (100 Trowbridge Road, Bourne). Comments received by e-mail (marine.fish@state.ma.us), fax (617.626.1509), or mail (251 Causeway St., Suite 400; Boston , MA 02114) will be accepted until 5PM on Friday, May 2, 2008.