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Marine Fisheries Advisory

**MARINE FISHERIES ENACTS FINAL RULES FOR
HORSESHOE CRAB FISHERY –
Fishery scheduled to close July 7th to allow accounting of landings**

The Division of Marine Fisheries (*Marine Fisheries*), with approval of the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission, has implemented final rules governing the Commonwealth's horseshoe crab fishery. Final rules amend the date of the temporary closure of the fishery from July 1st to July 7th. Other emergency actions have been finalized as is, including: 1) a lowering of the daily catch limit from 1,000 to 400 crabs, 2) a moratorium on new permits, and 3) a new overall quota limit of 165,000 crabs (down from 330,377 crabs).

All permit holders must report to *Marine Fisheries* by the 5th of the month the landings of the preceding month. The amendment to the closure date to July 7th accommodates this five day "reporting window" and gives *Marine Fisheries* staff a day to tally all reports and assess any reporting deficiencies. Closures will be avoided if the harvest totals are below the target quota and reporting rates are high.

These regulations have been enacted 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.

For more information, contact DMF at 617-626-1520.