

February 10, 2022

Honorable Sarah K. Elfreth  
Chair, Chesapeake Bay Commission  
60 West Street, Suite 406  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Senator Elfreth,

I am writing on behalf of the Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team (SFGIT) and the Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee (CBSAC) in response to the Chesapeake Bay Commission's (CBC) letter and requests for a blue crab science workshop and benchmark stock assessment following the Commission's meeting on September 9-10, 2021.

The SFGIT jurisdiction leadership and CBSAC met in early December to discuss the need for a new blue crab stock assessment and the opportunity to hold a workshop focused on blue crab science. Overall, the SFGIT leadership and CBSAC agreed that a workshop with broad stakeholder participation would be beneficial. As mentioned in the request letter, a workshop would be an excellent opportunity to investigate drivers of blue crab recruitment, particularly as it relates to the low abundance of age-0 crabs in recent years, as well as other priority science needs identified by CBSAC through the Chesapeake Bay Program's adaptive management process.

With regard to a benchmark stock assessment, CBSAC expressed interest, as a necessary step to understanding the disconnect between the stock's expected response to management measures determined by the model, and the observed response. However, state fishery managers cautioned that there should be an evaluation of the new information and data available to determine if a new benchmark assessment would be valuable. In other words, there needs to be a determination that a new benchmark would result in an improvement over the current assessment and annual stock assessment updates.

Therefore, the SFGIT leadership and CBSAC have decided to pursue a science workshop with two primary objectives: (1) explore potential causes of low recruitment and address other priority science needs; and (2) assess the utility of a new benchmark assessment, including the identification and evaluation of new data and modeling techniques that could improve the assessment. The SFGIT leadership and CBSAC expressed the need for the workshop to be inclusive of experts outside the Chesapeake Bay region, that the Terms of Reference be developed prior to the workshop to focus the stock assessment discussion. The workshop is intended to take place before the end of the year (2022).

The SFGIT leadership and CBSAC are grateful for CBC's commitment to maintaining a sustainable blue crab fishery in the Chesapeake Bay and appreciate the support offered for these endeavors. Thank you for your time and consideration and please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Sean Corson  
Director, NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office  
Chair, Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team