



Media Statement – Best Practices for Biomedical bleeding of Horseshoe Crabs

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On May 3, 2023, the Horseshoe Crab Management Board of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission will meet to consider a work group report on updated biomedical best management practices (BMPs) for the bleeding of horseshoe crabs. These purely voluntary best practices were first adopted in 2011. Despite more than a decade of scientific advances and a deepening understanding of the impacts of bleeding on horseshoe crabs, the BMPs have not been meaningfully revised since that time.

The Horseshoe Crab Recovery Coalition (HCRC) consists of some 45 conservation organizations and businesses dedicated to restoring horseshoe crab populations to their former levels. We advocate for a phaseout of the biomedical harvest replaced by widespread adoption of an already available synthetic alternative for endotoxin testing. Until that phaseout becomes complete, the coalition is proposing its own revisions to the BMPs to address the following deficiencies:

- They are not mandatory or specific and there is little or no regulatory oversight.
- Key data are not available to NGOs and the public-at-large.
- The process is optimized for the blood product and not for the health of the crabs.
- There is no consequence to killing horseshoe crabs: in fact, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service even encourage bleeding of bait crabs as a conservation measure. Massachusetts in particular uses this loophole to buy crabs from other states that are bled and then enter the bait market in that state through a so-called rent-a-crab program.
- Finally, there is no adaptive process to reduce the impacts of biomedical bleeding and no assessment of metrics to reduce crab mortality.

The HCRC proposes to address the deficiencies in the current BMPs through a variety of measures including:

- Calling for reduction in the mortality of bled crabs to less than 5 percent and total mortality from the entire capture-to-release process of less than 7 percent.
- Reforming the practice of storing crabs in ponds or pens prior to bleeding. Under normal conditions, holding time should be limited to less than 24 hours, and bled crabs should be released within 24 hours after the bleeding process.
- Selecting only healthy and undamaged crabs for bleeding.
- Improving reporting and Increasing transparency in reporting the number and sex of the crabs selected for bleeding, as well as those that are rejected.
- Developing a coastwide system of marking bled crabs to avoid rebleeding in the same year.
- Discontinuing the rent-a-crab program.
- Including egg density on spawning beaches as a metric in assessing impact of bleeding on spawning crabs.
- Initiating an adaptive management protocol to reduce current mortality of horseshoe crabs to a goal of less than 5 percent, including monitoring and reports made public to assess progress.
- Requiring regular auditing by regulatory agencies to ensure progress towards goals and compliance with the revised BMPs.

The coalition believes its best practice proposal is aligned with United Nations Sustainability Development Goals for Biodiversity and will help to ensure the health of U.S. horseshoe crab populations until the phaseout of the biomedical harvest is complete.

NOTE: The coalition submitted detailed commentary to the ASMFC which can be found in a separate attachment.