

Study shows pregnant blue crabs at risk

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Virginia officials are considering scrapping a law enacted in 1996 that protects pregnant blue crabs in Virginia waters, especially near Hampton Roads.

Watermen are prohibited from taking crabs with dark brown or black bulging bellies -- a sign the crab is ready to give birth. But new scientific evidence suggests as many as 90 percent of such female crabs die, with most of their eggs also perishing, when trapped and tossed back, the *Virginian Pilot* reported.

Now state officials are considering dumping the law in favor of one or two measures: Expanding a no-take sanctuary in the middle of Chesapeake Bay to include ocean waters south along Virginia Beach to the North Carolina line and-or extending the 927-square-mile sanctuary north, into the deep waters of Pocomoke and Tangier sounds.

Officials are expected to decide the issue within the next few months.

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