

In 1925 the Bureau of Fisheries undertook an extensive survey of the conditions of the crab fisheries of the Chesapeake Bay and published a report of their findings together with recommendations. Based upon these recommendations, measures were adopted in the two States resulting in a very remarkable recovery in the abundance of crabs, so that by 1930 the production had reached an all-time peak of approximately 68,000,000 pounds, considerably more than double the production of 1925.

In 1932 there was some relaxation in the laws protecting sponge crabs and this was followed by a fluctuating decline in the industry, relieved by a rather brief but marked upturn in 1939. The past two years have been characterized by a marked downward turn which has been estimated to be 60% from the 1939 figure.

This decline has been characterized by a marked falling off in the catch per unit of gear used, as well as a decline in the total catch, and has brought severe depression to some branches of the industry in our State. Out of conferences held between the Commissions and the representatives of the industry in our two States came the request to the officials of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service in September of last year that a survey of existing conditions in the crab fishery of the Chesapeake Bay be carried out promptly and that recommendations be submitted looking to immediate legislative and administrative action.

The survey was undertaken and within the past several weeks the resulting report has been issued. It appears, therefore, to be most opportune at this time for the administrative officials of our two States to meet with the officials of the Department of the Interior and the Federal agency which conducted this survey, to consider what constructive measures may be adopted promptly to put into effect the suggestions incorporated in this report.

The question of the protection of our common crab population while in Maryland waters, has for sometime been a matter of particular concern to our Legislature and to our Conservation officials. I should like to review briefly the protective measures now in effect in our State. These measures, it is believed, have afforded a considerable degree of protection to our crab population.

There is in effect at the present time a closed season on all methods of taking crabs, extending from November 1st to May 1st. This period is closed by legislative enactment from December 1st to May 1st, and in recent years, by administrative action of the Commission, the month of November has been removed from the open season.

We have in Maryland, furthermore, a complete protection against the taking of sponge crabs at any time. It is recognized, however, that this type of crab is not present in Maryland waters in anything approaching the quantities in which it is to be found in Virginia at certain seasons.

It has been recognized by both States for a long time, that there existed a considerable and, to a large extent, unjustifiable mortality of crabs while in the shedding floats. Through cooperative effort between the industry and our officials, this mortality, which has been averaging in the neighborhood of 50%, has been reduced to approximately 20%, as affecting locally caught crabs.