

Both Maryland and Virginia have had in effect for a number of years minimum size limits on the various types of crabs. Our officials have been alert to rigidly enforce these limits.

Among the recommendations contained in the recent report of the Fish and Wildlife Service, perhaps the most important and far-reaching have reference to the protection of sponge or egg-bearing crabs, and two alternative proposals are advanced. The report states that a basic principle of crab conservation is protection of sponge crabs throughout the year. To maintain the fullest degree of natural reproduction Maryland should continue to enforce its law prohibiting the capture, possession and sale of sponge crabs. Virginia should enact laws with the same objective.

In view of the urgency of securing positive results as quickly as possible, our industry and conservation officials feel that measures directed to the complete protection of sponge crabs should be put into force at this time as the most positive and certain means to accomplish the desired recovery.

As an alternative proposal, the report recommends the establishment of crab sanctuaries to secure the protection of a large proportion of sponge crabs in a certain designated area. This is in line with action already taken by the Virginia Commission during the past season. However, it is felt that only time and further study will definitely establish whether or not this will constitute sufficient protection in view of the wide-spread and rapidly increasing use of the highly efficient crab pot.

The report recommends also the advisability of establishing sanctuaries on a seasonal basis in favorable areas for the protection of many smaller soft and peeler crabs in order that they may have a better opportunity to attain a larger size and a greater market value. This recommendation considered not only the better utilization of an existing supply of crabs but the preventing of gluts in the market for soft crabs during the early part of the crabbing season.

With the present self-imposed limitation of our State completely prohibiting the taking of sponge crabs, the prohibition of all winter dredging, and the prohibition of the taking of crabs by any means between October and May, it is our feeling that the industry cannot stand a further limitation of catch except in the interest of real conservation.

Such conservation requires the full cooperation between Virginia and ourselves in the protection of our common crab stock, which in equity should be shared on an equal basis.

When reliable information is available to establish the facts as to the quantities of crabs which each State is annually subtracting from our common population under existing methods of fishing, and if this information establishes the fact that some further contribution on the part of Maryland is necessary to equalize contributions made by Virginia, then I feel sure that it will be possible to secure the adoption of further conservation measures in Maryland such as the proposed sanctuaries in Maryland waters.

Such statistical information upon which to base sound administrative measures is unfortunately, to a large extent, lacking. It would seem, therefore,