

## SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 397

*Requesting the Secretary of Natural Resources, in consultation with the Virginia Institute of Marine Science and Old Dominion University, to establish a task force to study the effects of winter dredging on the long-term sustainability of the blue-crab fishery.*

Agreed to by the Senate, February 25, 1999

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 23, 1999

WHEREAS, the Chesapeake Bay blue-crab fishery generates annual revenue of approximately \$227 million; and

WHEREAS, the decline in other Bay fishery resources such as oysters and shad has increased fishing pressure on the crab population; and

WHEREAS, the fishing effort for blue crabs has increased five-fold between 1945 and 1995; and

WHEREAS, blue-crab landings have not increased significantly despite increases in the fishing effort; and

WHEREAS, the increased effort has decreased the efficiency of the fishery, as measured by catch-per-unit-effort; and

WHEREAS, recent studies of the blue-crab fishery have shown it to be operating at or beyond sustainable levels of fishing pressure, with one of the consequences being a decrease of the spawning stock; and

WHEREAS, a significant component of Virginia's blue-crab landings is derived from a wintertime dredge fishery which targets mature female blue crabs; and

WHEREAS, the preservation of blue-crab spawning stock is essential for sustaining the fishery, and blue-crab landings in three of the last four years have been below the long-term average for the crab harvest; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Secretary of Natural Resources, in consultation with the Virginia Institute of Marine Science and Old Dominion University, be requested to establish a task force to study the effects of winter dredging on the long-term sustainability of the blue-crab fishery. The study shall evaluate the options for restoring the blue-crab fishery, including but not limited to, whether a prohibition on the taking of blue-crabs should be imposed, during which the Commonwealth would compensate watermen for their lost income.

All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the task force for this study, upon request.

The Secretary shall require that the task force complete its work in time to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 2000 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.