



Delaware Riverkeeper Testifies to Protect Horseshoe Crabs and Save Red Knot from Extinction

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Comment: Maya K. van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper to the NJ Marine Fisheries Council

If New Jersey and Delaware had done what needed to be done years ago, issued the moratorium on the bait harvest of the horseshoe crabs that the science showed was needed and that my organization and others had been calling for, we would have protected the crabs at levels that provided enough eggs on the beaches for the birds and we would have prevented the Red Knot *rufa* from reaching the brink of extinction, and protected other birds from stepping on the path that potentially will lead to the same end for them (the Semipalmated sandpiper and the ruddy turnstone, are now showing signs of risk as per the letter from David Chandra, Director of NJ Div of Fish and Wildlife, dated 12/27/2007).

But rather than listen to the science and do what was necessary, the agencies and politicians, and this Council, continued to debate and to make political decisions. Now, we are in dire straits.

While it is hard to make a decision that adversely impacts one portion of our community - in this case the watermen who rely on the crabs for bait - it is important that we not allow our focus to be limited to only that group when there are so many who are affected. As a council, you need to do what is right for the region, including the animal populations who will be most directly affected by your decision but have no voice in this process except for the one we give them. We must protect the horseshoe crabs for us all.

No matter what the decision made, members of our community, human and non human, will be impacted. So you must make the decision that is best for the community as a whole.

While folks may not want to hear it, those watermen that will be affected by this regulation have had more than 10 years to adjust their practices and businesses to accommodate for the loss of use of the horseshoe crabs.

The birds and the horseshoe crabs have had no such opportunity.

The best decision, based on all the evidence, to benefit the crabs and the birds and our community as a whole is a moratorium. And so I urge you to have the courage to allow the proposed moratorium to move forward and to proactively support it.

Delaware Riverkeeper Network

300 Pond Street, Second Floor
Bristol, PA 19007

tel: (215) 369-1188

fax: (215) 369-1181

drkn@delawariverkeeper.org

www.delawariverkeeper.org

There is no evidence that any measure short of a moratorium will ensure protection of the horseshoe crab population to the degree and levels needed to provide enough eggs for the birds and therefore needed to protect all of the ecology and related businesses they support.

The recently adopted ASMFC regulations allowing the male only harvest are not protective enough, are not based on science, and are already proving ineffective at providing the protections needed. And in fact, this approach may cause its own imbalance and harm.

NJ has been a recognized leader on this issue - it needs to stay in the lead and to continue to press others to do what is needed and what is right.

Delaware Secretary Hughes attempted to do what was right, a moratorium in Delaware waters. The watermen on that side of the bay, as those on this, challenged the proposal and wrongly won. But as incorrectly stated at your last meeting, that is not the end of it. My organization and others have appealed the ruling knocking down the regulations, and that appeal is moving forward through the court system.

It is time to stop the debate and to do what is needed and what is right.

A moratorium on the bait harvest is the best we can do, so it is what we must do.