



# *Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission*

## NEWS RELEASE

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*Working towards healthy, self-sustaining populations of all Atlantic coast fish species, or successful restoration  
well in progress by the year 2015*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
February 21, 2013

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### **ASMFC Approves Resolution to Ban the Import and Use of Asian Horseshoe Crabs as Bait**

Alexandria, VA – The Atlantic States Marine Commission approved a resolution to ban the import and use of Asian horseshoe crab as bait in state water fisheries along the Atlantic Coast. The resolution responds to a report by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) regarding the importation of Asian horseshoe crabs in 2011 and 2012 into New York State and their reported use as bait in eel and whelk fisheries. Further, there are reports of emerging interest on the part of bait dealers from the Mid-Atlantic to import Asian horseshoe crabs for the eel and whelk markets, and of the willingness of Asian fishermen to provide this supply.

Both the IUCN and Commission believe the importation of Asian native horseshoe crabs pose a significant threat to the welfare and survival of the wildlife resources of the United States, even if the imported horseshoe crabs are not alive when they are placed into the marine environment due to the introduction of parasites, pathogens and non-native species into American waters. Following is the full resolution:

#### **Resolution 13-01**

#### **Resolution to Ban the Import and Use of Asian Horseshoe Crabs as Bait**

Whereas, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) is comprised of representatives of the fifteen Atlantic coastal states and is charged with management of fisheries resources, marine, shell, and anadromous; and

Whereas, one of those fisheries resources is the Atlantic horseshoe crab (*Limulus polyphemus*) which is managed for its ecological services, use as bait, and in the biomedical industry; and

Whereas, horseshoe crabs are used as bait in fisheries for American eel and whelk fisheries; and

Whereas, bait shortages motivated seafood dealers in the State of New York to import 2,000 non-native Asian horseshoe crabs in 2011, and 7,400 kilograms of non-native Asian horseshoe crabs in 2012 for use as bait in state waters; and

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The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and anadromous species.

Whereas, three species of Asian horseshoe crabs (*Tachypleus gigas*, *Carcinoscorpius rotundicauda*, and *Tachypleus tridentatus*) pose a potential threat to the marine resources and human health along the Atlantic coast of the United States; and

Whereas, recent evidence presented in 2011 suggests that the populations of these three species of Asian horseshoe crabs are in decline; and

Whereas, it will take the United States Fish and Wildlife Service up to a year to add the species to the Injurious Wildlife list of the Lacey Act so importation can be regulated on a federal level; and

Whereas, in the meantime measures should be put in place to address the issue; and

Whereas, one species of parasitic flatworm lays eggs in tough cocoons on the shell of the Asian horseshoe crab, which can easily survive and hatch even if the host crab is killed; and

Whereas, the introduction of such or similar parasites would have detrimental effects on the American horseshoe crab population, and

Whereas, detrimental impacts on American horseshoe crab populations will likely impact food availability for migratory shorebirds, including red knots; and

Whereas, one species of Asian horseshoe crab (*C. rotundicauda*) is known to contain the powerful, potentially painful, neurotoxin tetrodotoxin (TTX); and,

Whereas, the potential for TTX accumulation in commonly consumed seafood product (whelk and eel) and subsequent human illness is unknown; and

Now, therefore be it resolved that the Commission's Horseshoe Crab Management Board recommend to its member states that they take any and all action to ban the importation and use of Asian horseshoe crabs as bait as soon as possible.

For more information, please contact Marin Hawk, Fishery Management Coordinator, at [mhawk@asmfc.org](mailto:mhawk@asmfc.org) or 703.842.0740.

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