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*From the Baltimore Sun*

## Watermen oppose terrapin-trapping ban

By Tom Pelton  
sun reporter

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Watermen objected strongly to a proposal to ban the trapping of diamondback terrapins during a public meeting in Annapolis last night.

But biologists with the [Maryland Department of Natural Resources](#) said that the slow-reproducing reptiles couldn't survive much fishing pressure, especially because their habitat is being rapidly destroyed.

"Terrapin are in fact very sensitive to human-induced mortality," biologist Lynn Fegley told a crowd of about 40 fishermen and environmentalists during a meeting at the agency's headquarters.

The state wildlife agency and several legislators are weighing a prohibition on the trapping of Maryland's official state reptile in the wake of a new state study that found that more than 10,000 were reported caught last year -- several times the annual catch reported in previous years.

The commercial harvest rose despite regulations introduced in August that were billed as a way to save the terrapin by reducing the catch. The new rules banned trapping from November through July but for the first time allowed the capture of smaller turtles, with shells 4 to 6 inches long, from Aug. 1 through Nov. 1.

In response to a growing market for terrapin soup in Asia, watermen suddenly started catching more small turtles, and shipping them to China or keeping them for breeding in aquaculture, according to watermen and state officials.

"You've got to start being more intelligent with your regulations," said seafood dealer Michael Johnson. "That made no sense ... and it opened up a whole new world of pressure on the species. ... The watermen should not bear the brunt of this mistake."

Larry Simns, president of the Maryland Watermen's Association, told state officials that his group will fight

any ban on terrapin trapping. Simns said a ban would hurt the incomes of fishermen without targeting what he believes are the real problems -- motor boats, which kill turtles, and shoreline development that ruins turtle nesting habitat.

Howard King, director of the fisheries program for the state, said his agency "as quickly as possible" will draft new regulations on terrapin catching, and that a ban "is certainly an option."

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