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UMBI and DNR Extend Historic Blue Crab Research Collaboration

Baltimore, MD -- A fruitful research collaboration aimed at preservation of the Chesapeake blue crab population has now been extended for an additional ten years. An agreement signed by Maryland's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the University of Maryland Biotechnology Institute (UMBI) calls for expansion of the new hatch and release facility for blue crabs at Piney Point in St. Mary's County.

The complex life cycle of the blue crab, involving several microscopic larval stages, has posed many challenges to raising crabs in captivity. Working with the DNR, the Maryland Waterman's Association, and the Blue Crab Advanced Research Consortium (BCARC), UMBI's Dr. Yonathan Zohar has been the leader in breakthrough research that has made it possible to raise large numbers of the crustaceans—an effort that involves several innovative approaches for feeding the various stages of larvae, and also prevention of cannibalism among the growing stock. Dr. Zohar has received numerous awards for his leadership role in these collaborations, including the prestigious Chinese Academy of Sciences Albert Professorship, awards from the Maryland House of Representatives and Senate, and the University of Maryland Board of Regents award for public service.



Oded Zmora (left) and Dr. Yonathan Zohar with a few dozen of the baby crabs raised at UMBI's Center of Marine Biotechnology. These crabs will be reared in large numbers at hatcheries like the newly expanded facility at Piney Point.

This work involved both aquaculture facilities at UMBI's Center of Marine Biotechnology (COMB) and the conversion of a mothballed DNR oyster hatchery at Piney Point.

The new collaboration between UMBI and DNR at Piney Point will allow for expanded research on the biology and life cycle of the blue crabs. "This partnership will allow us to significantly scale-up our blue crab juvenile production, generating more cutting edge science based on experimental releases of those crabs to underutilized blue crab nursery habitats in the upper and lower Chesapeake Bay," said Dr. Zohar, COMB's Director. "This

research will help DNR to develop science-based strategies to manage the fishery and lead to novel approaches for improving conservation of the blue crab resource in Chesapeake Bay."

In 2006, Dr. Zohar and his partners released 130,000 individually tagged juvenile crabs into the Chesapeake, bringing the total number of crabs released since 2002 to over 300,000-the world's largest for crab study of any kind.

The new agreement adds ten more years to the successful collaboration that began in the summer of 2004.

"It is our intention that the unique partnership between watermen and scientists will result in the Piney Point facility becoming a prototype for other hatchery/nursery efforts in the U.S.," said Mick Blackistone, Executive Director of the MWA's Crabs Restoration Around The Bay, or C.R.A.B. program. "Further, it is our intention and hope that, with continued success, several more hatchery/nursery sites will be established in the near future in Maryland and Virginia to further the research and increase the brood stock of the blue crab. With the signing of this Memorandum of Understanding, and with the continued strong support from Senator Barbara Mikulski, NOAA's Chesapeake Bay Office and the Maryland DNR, we see a very bright light at the end of the tunnel. Watermen and the MWA are enthusiastic about the progress to date and the outlook for the future."

Lynn Fegley, Director of Operations for the DNR Fisheries Service, said that "This agreement will provide the potential to improve the current state of knowledge concerning the life history of blue crabs, and will allow us to learn more about the ecological functions of blue crabs in Chesapeake Bay."

With research centers in Baltimore, Rockville, and College Park, the University of Maryland Biotechnology Institute is the newest of 13 institutions forming the University System of Maryland. UMBI has 85 ladder-ranked faculty and a 2006 budget of \$60 million. Celebrating the institution's 20th year of service to Maryland and the world, UMBI is led by microbiologist and former biotechnology executive Dr. Jennie C. Hunter-Cevera. For more information visit www.umbi.umd.edu.

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