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A Victory for Horseshoe Crabs and Shorebirds Along New Jersey Shores

After a large out-pouring of concerned citizen calls and emails to NJ Senators, the NJ Senate responded and passed the horseshoe crab harvest moratorium (S1331) by an overwhelming 39-0 vote on Monday, March 17th. This is a great victory for the horseshoe crabs and birds that arrive to shore in May and June along our Jersey beaches.

This vote follows efforts to combat a decision made by the New Jersey Marine Fisheries Council to continue harvesting crabs this spring despite input from conservation groups, citizens, scientists, and NJ DEP to continue the moratorium on crab harvesting until crab and shorebird numbers reach sustainable and healthy populations.

On February 28th, after testimony from the Delaware Riverkeeper and other conservation groups, the New Jersey Assembly Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee voted 5-0 to forward the Horseshoe Crab harvest moratorium for vote by the full Assembly. The Committee members included Assemblymen Doug Fisher, Nelson Albano, John Amadeo, Marcia Karrow, and L. Harvey Smith.

As a result on March 10, 2008, the NJ Senate Environment Committee followed suit and voted in favor of the horseshoe crab moratorium legislation and it was passed out of the Senate Environment Committee by a vote of 6-0. The full Assembly then pushed through the legislation and on Monday, March 17th, Senators overwhelmingly made the legislation a done deal by a unanimous vote. Horseshoe crabs and shorebirds soon to arrive along Jersey beaches will have a better chance to recover thanks to this needed legislation.

In the state of Delaware, collection of horseshoe crabs for bait is still permitted. Horseshoe crabs are used by fisherman to catch eel and conch. Under this legislation, the biomedical industry is still allowed to bleed crabs and return them unharmed. Any person possessing or using horseshoe crabs in violation of the statute is liable to fines of \$10,000 for the first offense and \$25,000 for the second and subsequent offenses.

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