

REPTILES

Florida Urged To Require Turtle Excluder Devices For Blue Crab Traps

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BY JOHN VIRATA

The state of Florida does not require turtle excluder devices in crab traps, but the state's diamondback terrapins (*Malaclemys terrapin*) are drowning in them, so an international group of turtle experts sent a petition to the state to require them. The group, which was convened by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, sent a letter to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, asking it to endorse a rule to include bycatch reduction devices in crab pots used in the state. The rule was written by the Center for Biological Diversity, the Florida Turtle Conservation Trust and the Diamondback Terrapin Working Group.

Diamondback terrapins get caught in crab pots and drown, turtle experts say.

According to the Center, diamondback terrapins, the only turtle that is found living in estuaries on the east coast, are drowning in these pots, as they have no way to escape.

"Diamondback terrapins are an iconic animal of our inland coastal waters," Craig Stanford, chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission's Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group said in a statement released to the media. "They become trapped and drown by the thousands in crab pots, which pose a grave mortality risk to their future survival in the state of Florida.



George Heinrich
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This mortality can be easily reduced by attaching bycatch reduction devices to crab pots."

These devices are already required in New York and New Jersey on commercial and recreational crab pots. Delaware and Maryland require them on recreational pots and North Carolina is considering similar measures.

In 2009, a study found 133 dead terrapins in two abandoned crab pots in Georgia.

The diamondback terrapin is a medium-sized turtle that has a gray black carapace with varying shell patterns and skin colors. The female tends to grow larger than the male, with the male reaching about five inches in length and the female reaching nine inches in length.