

**Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Crab Management Advisory Committee Meeting
VMRC Conference Room**

November 12, 2008

Members Present

Hon. Rick Robins
Pete Freeman
Tom Powers
Joe Palmer
Peter Nixon
Doug Jenkins
Chris Moore
Russell Gaskins
Dr. John McConahaugh

VMRC Staff

Jack Travelstead
Rob O'Reilly
Mike Johnson
Joe Grist

VIMS Staff

Rom Lipcius

Members Absent

Louis Whittaker
Marshall Cox Sr.
Ronald L. Jett
Jim Casey
H.M. Arnold
Jeff Crockett
Paige Hogge
Johnny Graham

Public

Ken Diggs
Dennis Dalheim
Robert Weagley
Chris Ludford
George Smith

I. Introductions/Announcements

Meeting was convened at 6:05 pm. Mr. Robins noted a quorum was not present.

II. Approval of Minutes from October 2008 Meeting

Since a quorum was not present minutes could not be approved.

III. Old Business

IV.

Update on crab disaster fund

Mr. Travelstead made a brief presentation regarding the status of crab disaster relief monies for crab dredgers. The Agency has received approval from the Governor to spend money from a VMRC account, meant for waterways improvements, to allow 53 crab dredgers the opportunity to work this winter by removing debris and ghost crab pots from the Bay's benthos. The 53 dredgers were chosen based upon crab dredging activity during the 2005/2006 seasons, and were notified by mail to fill out an application. Any crab dredger who did not qualify for the program could request to be put on a waiting list in case not all of the original 53 choose to participate. The program will pay the dredgers to work three days a week, for \$300 per day and will cover fuel

costs. The start date is tentatively scheduled for December 1, 2008 and will run through March, 2008.

Mr. Freeman stated that he did not think three days a week were enough.

Update on latent effort controls

Mr. Travelstead stated that a public hearing was scheduled for the November Commission meeting. At the last CMAC meeting there seemed to be a consensus that if an individual had no hard crab pot or peeler pot harvest during the 2003 through 2007 season then they would be defined as latent and be placed upon a waiting list. This definition of latent harvest would result in 524 hard crab pot harvesters and 343 peeler pot harvesters to be placed upon a waiting list for re-entry into the fishery when it stock abundance of harvestable sized crabs had attained an abundance in the Bay of 200 million crabs for three consecutive years. He went on to state that there was interest, by CMAC, to reserve 5 to 10% of the pots placed upon the waiting list to be set aside for a hardship application process, whereby people could re-enter the fishery if deemed to be in a hardship position by VMRC.

Mr. Jenkins said that the set-aside percentage of pots should be raised as some people considered crab potting as a safety valve.

Mr. Robins stated that a small number of active watermen should have the chance to get back into the blue crab fishery.

Mr. Powers stated that CMAC needs to define hardship.

Mr. Nixon did not think anyone should be allowed back into the fishery until the resource improves.

Mr. Moore said hardship needs to be defined and followed strictly.

Mr. Jenkins asked about watermen who have commercially fished for many years in Virginia but may not have fished during the qualification period due to one reason or another.

Mr. Robins asked if CMAC should support an exemption.

Mr. Freeman replied that 210 pots (for a 300 crab pot license) is not enough for a full-time crabber and that crabbers should get the 30% of gear lost to reductions before anyone is allowed back into the fishery from the waiting list.

Mr. Powers stated that anyone given an exemption should be a full-time watermen defined as by having worked at least 100 days as a commercial harvester.

Mr. O'Reilly asked about the amount of gear a person, with a hardship exemption, would be given. He suggested they receive a nominal amount, like a 100 pot license minus whatever the current reduction value is (currently 30%).

Mr. Robins noted that there did not seem to be a consensus on the issue of reducing latent effort.

Mr. Travelstead stated that under staff recommendation people who are not considered active crabbers would receive a letter informing them that they are being placed on a waiting list and that there will be application process to determine if they are eligible to receive a hardship exemption.

Mr. Nixon stated that they should be required to use the license.

Mr. Powers added that they should not be able to transfer a hardship exemption license.

V. New Business

Cull ring study results

Mr. Grist presented preliminary results on the joint cull ring study between VIMS and VMRC. Preliminary data showed mixed results for the number of legal crabs caught in crab pots, with different sized cull rings for the areas sampled. However, when all of the data is combined, then a trend of decreasing numbers of legal crabs caught in pots with increasing cull ring sizes does appear. This data will be studied further.

Mr. Jenkins requested that more additional data should be collected from different parts of the Bay, specifically from rivers in the north western part of the Bay. Mr. Travelstead asked Mr. Jenkins if they should continue the study further before any further actions are taken with the 2 3/8-inch cull ring, and Mr. Jenkins said yes, and Mr. Jenkins went further to say he would work with whoever was conducting the study to have a site in his area.

Measures for next year

Mr. Travelstead asked about what actions the committee should consider if the resource starts to improve; for example should the opening and closing dates of sanctuary be changed.

Mr. Powers responded that the lower Bay should be protected in the spring for the cohort of crabs getting ready to spawn.

Mr. Robins asked what other things the staff should be evaluating for protecting the resource; such as bushel limits and sanctuary closure dates.

Mr. O'Reilly said we do not know where sponge crabs will be from one year to the next so closing any additional large areas will be hard to do.

Mr. Nixon asked how VMRC plans to address the problems that peeler pots present to the resource. He also stated that we should avoid bushel limits.

Mr. Robins said that Maryland is considering cull rings for peeler pots.

Mr. Powers said the quality of the product is important and thinks a larger size limit for peeler crabs and hard crabs would help.

Mr. Jenkins stated there are fewer peeler potters now and that number is continuing to decline.

Mr. O'Reilly asked what the amount of effort decline for peeler pots is, is it greater than hard crabs? We need to know the amount of effort; how many pots are actually being fished.

Mr. Travelstead stated that if the resource improves, then the first thing that crabbers would get back is the early season closure.

Mr. Nixon stated that a few things have changed in the fishery before the current decline. The James River was initially closed to crab dredging and then opened, the peeler pot fishery grew but has now started to shrink, and the spring crab fishery in the lower bay has grown.

Mr. Jenkins stated that deterioration in environmental conditions increases in the density of crab predators have contributed the decline in the blue crab fishery.

Use of agents

Mr. Travelstead started the discussion on agency use by saying in 2008, we had 105 registered agents: 92 for hard crab pot, 38 for peeler pot and 28 for both fisheries.

Mr. Robins asked if there had been any law enforcement violations for agents.

Mr. Grist responded there were some but he was unsure of their outcomes.

Mr. Robins asked if we need additional regulations for agency use.

Mr. Jenkins stated that the regulation should not be changed.

Mr. Powers stated that agency should be for hardship only.

Mr. Nixon stated that transfers should be limited with a minimum of 3 to 5 years between transfers.

VI. Next Meeting Date

Next meeting is scheduled for December 15, at VMRC

VII. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 PM.