

VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION
HARD CLAM MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
VMRC CONFERENCE ROOM

DRAFT MINUTES

August 22, 2002

MEMBERS PRESENT

Hon. Kenneth Wayne Williams
John S. Forrest
John Wayne Register
William Davis
R. Bryan Zasimowich

MEMBERS ABSENT

Davis Callis
George Demarco
William B. Hall, Jr.
Joshua Merritt, Jr.
James Close
Chip Petre

VMRC

Chad Boyce
Roy Insley
J.A. Copperthite
J.A. Todd

I. Introductions, Announcements

The meeting was called to order at 7:10 P.M. by Chairman, Hon. Kenneth W. Williams.

II. Approval of minutes from the February 20, 2002 meeting

Minutes were approved as written.

III. Old Business

Billy Davis asked if staff knew anything about the dredging that was going on in the immediate vicinity of the Norfolk International Terminals (NIT). He stated the area was being dredged and asked if staff was aware of this. Chad Boyce responded the area near NIT was not scheduled to be dredged until the spring of 2003. He stated the Army Corps of Engineers may be conducting some maintenance dredging in the channel. Mr. Boyce assured the committee that staff would look into it.

IV. New Business

a. Status of the 2002 Clam Relay Season in the Hampton Roads Shellfish Relay Area

Roy Insley asked the committee for an update on the catches from the relay area as a result of the extension of the relay season granted by the Commission last month. Mr. Davis indicated the majority of the clammers have stayed in the relay area as a result of the season extension. Mr. Zsimek indicated that overall clam catches have decreased a little, but nothing significant. A request was made by a member of the committee to create a new and separate management area similar to the Hampton Flats area, but this area will be located from the ammunition pier northeasterly along the northern portion of the channel to the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel. He suggested this area should be opened for clam relay. This request was put in the form of a motion and was passed unanimously.

b. Review of proposed dredging/fossil oyster shell mining near Norfolk International Terminals (NIT)

Mr. Boyce briefed the committee on the proposed dredging project adjacent to NIT. Mr. Boyce informed the committee that NIT had applied for a permit to dredge a large area directly westward of the terminals to allow for better access to the loading/offloading piers. Mr. Boyce then informed the committee of his conversation with Dr. Jim Wesson, where Dr. Wesson explained how the area was scheduled for shell mining back in the 1950's, but it was never dredged, but his intention was to mine fossil oyster shells before the dredging occurred. Mr. Boyce gave a summary of a survey that had been completed in the area, that showed moderate densities of clams were present. Discussion followed on the importance of this area to the clammers. Mr. Forrest noted that he had worked this area on a regular basis, and this would severely affect him. Mr. Boyce told the committee the dredging was not scheduled to begin until March or April of 2003. The committee voted unanimously to hold a public hearing held at the Commission on the dredging adjacent to NIT.

c. Discussion of Possible Management Strategies in Clean Clam Areas

Mr. Davis inquired about increasing the tolerance for small clams from 2% to 10% on clam relay areas. Mr. Insley responded that staff had looked into this, but felt the item should be discussed at further length. Mr. Insley commented the increase of tolerance would be more cumbersome to law enforcement, and would just allow more "illegal" clams to be harvested by everyone. Officer Copperthite added that he did not have any objections to setting a higher tolerance limit, but that he was not speaking for all of law enforcement. The issue was discussed further. A motion was made to establish a 10% tolerance on clams below the minimum size limit on relay bottom, and passed unanimously.

Mr. Insley explained that staff is concerned about the decline of catch per unit effort (CPUE) on clean clam areas. He talked about the importance of the Newport News Management Area to the clammers in winter months, and how staff is concerned these areas are being overfished. Mr. Insley proposed the possibility of establishing a 1 and 3/8 inches minimum size limit on clean bottom and relay bottom (statewide). Some of the committee members discussed this option at great length. He added that perhaps an increase in minimum size could justify an increase in the tolerance percentages for small clams. He stated that staff might be able to support tolerance higher than 2% if industry could support a statewide minimum size limit of 1 and 3/8 inches. Most members wanted to discuss this option with other clammers and discuss this again at the next meeting. The issue was discussed by all committee members, and was tabled until the next committee meeting.

V. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting date was not scheduled.

V. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 P.M.