

**Virginia Marine Resources Commission**  
**Finfish Management Advisory Committee (FMAC) Minutes**  
2600 Washington Avenue, Newport News, VA  
VMRC Commission Room, 4<sup>TH</sup> Floor  
Monday April 18, 2016 – 6:00 P.M.

**ATTENDANCE**

Members Present

Jeff Deem (Chairman)  
Jack Austin  
Skip Feller  
Scott MacDonald  
Wes Blow proxy for Hon. Ken Neill  
John Bello proxy for Tom Powers  
Beth Synowiec

Members Absent

Meade Amory  
Ernest Bowden  
Hon. G. Wayne France  
Andy Hall  
Walter Rogers  
Robert Weagley

VMRC Staff Present

Rob O'Reilly  
Joe Cimino  
Lewis Gillingham  
Samantha Hornsby  
Ryan Jiorle  
Jill Ramsey

Others Present

Bob Allen  
Louis Argiro  
Mike Avery  
Jeff Bickel  
Johnny Boyd  
Will Bransom  
Phillip Burrese  
Chris Damasi  
Alex Field  
Jonathan French  
Austin Hayne  
Jorj Head  
Zack Hoffman  
Kelly Hoggard  
Jake Kenneally  
Jen Kwoorski  
Don Lancaster  
Jon Maguire  
Tom Maynard  
Patrick McGrath  
S. Musiek  
Ken Neill  
Chris O'Brien  
Kent Reifschneider  
Randy Richardson  
Stan Simmerman  
Matt Smith  
Larry Snider  
Mike Snider  
(2 others present)

**I. FMAC Introductions; Announcements**

The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm. A recording of the minutes can be found on the agency's website.

**II. Approval of FMAC minutes from March 17, 2016 meeting**

The minutes from the March 17, 2016 meeting were approved unanimously.

**III. Old Business: Discussion on accountability measures for NMFS Cobia Fishery and on Management Plan and recreational cobia management measure for 2016.**

Mr. Rob O'Reilly began the meeting by giving the committee an update on the ASMFC involvement, where the other states currently stand on the cobia federal closure, and informed the committee on other meetings that are still going to occur in reference to the cobia closure.

Mr. Jonathan French, representing a large number of cobia stake holders, gave a brief presentation, recommending that Virginia reject the closure and go into non-compliance. He stated that the regulatory levers were created without Virginia representation and that the closure is in direct conflict with the National Standards of Fishery Management authored by the Magnuson Stevens Act. He also stated that he thinks that VMRC should request that NOAA issue an interim final rule to suspend the closure, recalculate the annual catch limit with a fair allocation that is equitable across states, and review the catch data for the three year time period before re-issuing any closure if needed.

Mr. Ryan Jiorle gave a brief update on the 2016 recreational cobia season, on the cobia stock assessment, and on the potential Virginia regulation changes involving vessel limits and/or minimum size limits and their effect on the federal waters closure date. He also presented information on the status of the stock and biology of the species.

Several charter captains, business owners, and recreational anglers, stated that they do not support the federal closure of the cobia fishery and that they recommend to the committee that they vote to go out of compliance. Mr. Mike Avery, a representative of the Virginia Saltwater Sportfishing Association, stated that there is ongoing pressure toward NOAA, to consider reversing their closure action. He feels that if the committee were to vote to not comply with the federal closure, it would put even more pressure on NOAA. Mr. Randy Richardson, from Wallace's Bait and Tackle, stated that the cobia closure would effect many businesses, including himself, Sam Rust Seafood, and Wilcox Bait and Tackle. He stated that he had about \$65,000 in Cobia related sales last year and that this closure could put them out of business. Mr. Chris Damasi, charter captain, stated that Virginia is already the strictest on the coast in regards to regulations and should not have to have further restrictions when other states are not changing much. He also stated that most of the cobia tournaments occur in August, so the closure would eliminate the income that comes from these tournaments. Mr. Will Bransom, president of the Norfolk Anglers Club, stated that increasing the minimum size cobia is the most effective measure to achieve a reduced catch and positively influence spawning stock biomass and avoid negatively impacting the charter industry.

Committee member Jack Austin commented that since there is no question that Virginia harvested over their quota last year, it is the management committee's job to address this problem and make reasonable recommendations for the commission, not simply recommend to not comply. He added that he would like to see a combination of a more limited vessel limit, a significant increase in minimum size limit and the implementation of a cobia landing permit which would require reporting in order to improve data. Committee member Skip Feller proposed a motion that starting at the end of the federal season for 2016 only, in state waters, a one fish per person limit or a three fish vessel limit maximum would be implemented and that there would be a 37 inch minimum size total length limit with one of the three fish 50 inches or greater for the vessel. The motion was seconded by Mr. Scott MacDonald and passed 4:3:0.

#### **IV. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 8:23pm.