

Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Blue Crab Management Advisory Committee Meeting
VMRC Conference Room
June 17, 2014
DRAFT MINUTES

Members Present

Hon. S Lynn Haynie (Chair)
Hon. James Close
David Bell
Marshall Cox
Daniel Dise (Phone)
Ty Farrington
G. Wayne France
Johnny Graham (Phone)
Chris Moore
Mark Sanford
Ken Smith

VMRC Staff

Rob O'Reilly
Joe Grist
Samantha Hoover
Stephanie Iverson
Rachael Maulorico
Laurie Naismith

Members Absent

Kenneth Diggs, Jr.
Ronald Jett
John Masiak
Peter Nixon
Tom Powers
Kevin Wade

Others Present

Hon. Ken Neill
John G. Boudiette
Paula Jasinski
Douglas F. Jenkins Sr
Dr. Rom Lipcius (VIMS)
Danielle McCulloch (VIMS)
George C. Pauls Jr.
Michael Seebo (VIMS)
Robert G. Smith
Timothy A. Wivell
Megan Wood (VIMS)

Minutes were recorded by Samantha Hoover and Rachael Maulorico.

I. Introductions/Announcement

The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm. Mr. Rob O'Reilly announced that committee member Mr. Tom Powers will not be able to attend the meeting tonight, but if a quorum is needed, he can be reached via telephone.

II. Approval of minutes from the May 20, 2014 meeting.

Honorable Ms. Lynn Haynie called for a motion to approve the minutes. She abstained due to her absence from the last meeting. The minutes from the May 20, 2014 meeting were approved unanimously.

III. Discussion: Management measures (primarily bushel limit reductions) to achieve a 10% reduction in the 2013 female crab harvest (pounds), to augment spawning potential in 2014 and 2015. Management measures will be provided to committee members no later than June 10, 2014.

Mr. Rob O'Reilly briefly explained that VMRC is bound by the Code of Virginia to take actions when the blue crab fishery is facing unhealthy conditions. He noted that during the last meeting the peeler fishery, sponge crabs, creek closures, and buyer reporting were all mentioned as potential management measures and should be addressed in future meetings.

Mr. Joe Grist presented proposed management options aimed at achieving a 10% reduction in blue crab harvest. He explained that the 2013 statewide blue crab harvest was 17,906,963 pounds and that the female crab harvest needs to be reduced by 10% from 2013 levels. The female crab harvest reduction goal is 1,314,371 pounds. Management option 1 is status quo, maintaining the current crab pot bushel limits for the remainder of 2014 and the first half of 2015. Management options 2 through 4 include variations of blue crab seasonal closures and reductions in bushel limits for the crab pot fishery, and other gear types between July 5, 2014 and July 4, 2015. Mr. Grist concluded his presentation with a comparison of how options 3 and 4 would have affected previous harvest years.

Mr. Ken Smith asked about the average amount of bushels caught for a particular pot category. Mr. Grist explained that looking only at the average harvest may skew the data due to fluctuations. Mr. Smith noted that due to fluctuations in harvest, smaller permit holders or dormant permittees could experience recoupment and prevent the intended 10% reduction. Mr. O'Reilly agreed that recoupment is a possibility, but the bushel limits will be most effective for the reduction during peak seasons and from full time harvesters. Mr. Ty Farrington expressed his concern that the bushel limits will not amount to anything. He stated that he prefers option 3 over options 2 and 4, but disagrees with putting the bulk of the reduction on full-time crabbers.

Honorable Mr. James Close expressed concern that there are currently too many pots in the water and that many harvesters are already setting more crab pots than their permits allow. Additionally, he stated that this issue is not an enforceable issue. Mr. O'Reilly agreed and reinforced that the reduced bushel limits will aid in reducing the harvest regardless of the amount of pots that are set.

Mr. Marshall Cox asked staff what they will be recommending to the Commission. Mr. O'Reilly replied that staff will recommend a 10% reduction and that staff supports option

3. He then reiterated that staff will present all the options at the June 24th Public hearing and it is up to the Commission as to which option they choose.

Mr. France asked staff if these management measures are only for one year. Mr. O'Reilly replied that the options are set for July 5, 2014 through July 4, 2015 and will need to be addressed again next year.

Daniel Dise inquired about the reductions Maryland is planning to do. He had heard they are closing the female harvest early and creating bushel limits for stackable licenses. Mr. O'Reilly replied that they are creating bushel limits and still have to establish management measures for the juvenile protection. Mr. O'Reilly also explained that the PRFC will continue rolling closures and are currently creating bushel limits with help from VMRC staff.

Mr. George C Pauls Jr., from the public, stated that the juveniles are not in the middle of the bay and that management measures like cull rings and sponge crab regulations have not changed anything. He thought that the peeler pot fishery is the problem. Mr. Doug Jenkins Sr., from the public, disagreed with Mr. Pauls and thought predation by red drum, blue catfish and striped bass are the true problem. Mr. Farrington motioned to accept option 3 over the other three options for the 10% reduction. Mr. Cox seconded the motion. Ms. Haynie requested an examination of closures in August instead of May. Mr. O'Reilly stated that due to the lack of information on the peeler fishery we cannot accurately compare the two fisheries. The motion carried with 6 members in favor, 2 opposed, and 1 abstention.

IV. Continue discussion on further crab management measures

Mr. O'Reilly opened the discussion by stating that this agenda item is aimed at promoting the introduction of ideas for future crab management measures and would like the committee to give staff suggestions.

Mr. Mark Sanford and Mr. Cox expressed their concerns over the effectiveness of the current blue crab sanctuary and reported that many of the sponge crabs are not in the sanctuary. Dr. Rom Lipcius, from VIMS, reiterated that after the sanctuary is opened the majority of the sponge crabs stay in the sanctuary until they spawn. Additionally his tagging study found that females inside the sanctuary are less likely to succumb to fishing mortality.

Mr. O'Reilly stated that after the commission meeting, staff will start looking towards future measures including any that are discussed tonight. Additionally, in order to get the

frame work needed to create other management measures, CMAC meetings will need to be held more frequently than in the past.

Mr. David Bell requested that the committee and staff consider sponge crab regulation changes. He recommended allowing sponge crabs to be kept earlier in the season due to high mortality rates of sponge crabs once they have been caught and culled. Dr. Lipcius replied that mortality in these cases depends heavily on temperature and the amount of time the crabs are held in the traps. He commented that due to warming waters, a reevaluation of seasonal water temperatures could be reviewed. Mr. Sanford stated that all sponge crab laws should be removed. He explained that he has found that wind and wave action contribute to the mortality of captured sponge crabs as well and that this was not considered in the mortality study. Dr. Lipcius agreed that mortality rates vary, depending on where you are. Ms. Haynie requested staff put considerations for sponge crab regulations on the agenda for the next CMAC meeting

Mr. Ken Smith briefed CMAC about the Industry Panel Pilot Program. The idea would focus on promoting a TAC system and a year-round crab fishery. He hopes that the Industry Panel will continue to create ideas like this and hopes that CMAC will discuss and support them along with the Commission.

Mr. Farrington requested that the management discussed at this meeting only be used during a depleted case. If the abundance comes back up, CMAC would like the ability to make changes. Mr. O'Reilly stated that staff will advise the Commission that there was a consensus amongst CMAC to be able to address these management measures again next year.

Mr. Moore asked where staff is with the trigger analysis. Mr. O'Reilly replied that staff is hoping for a decision from CBSAC in late summer or early fall. Mr. Cox requested information on current environmental factors that could be impacting the blue crab stock.

V. New Business

Megan Wood, graduate student at VIMS, introduced herself and explained that she is proposing to create a spatially explicit juvenile blue crab model with the intent of creating better estimates of blue crab juveniles from the winter dredge survey.

No other new business items were discussed.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:49pm.