

VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION
CRAB MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MARCH 2, 2004 - 7:00 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

Wayne Abbott
Louis Whittaker
Rob Brumbaugh
John Graham
Peter Nixon
Tom Powers
Pete Freeman

STAFF PRESENT

Jack Travelstead
Rob O'Reilly
Ellen Cosby
Kenny Oliver

MEMBERS ABSENT

Hon. Lake Cowart, Jr.
Marshall Cox
Jeff Crockett
Eddie Crockett
Jim Casey
William E. Abbott
Woody Zember
Ronnie Jett
Paige Hogge
Wade Harding
Lee Scarborough
Billy Moore
Lesney Miller
James Ashburn Sr.

I. Introductions, Announcements

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Jack Travelstead. He reported that Lake Cowart was unable to attend. Mr. Travelstead reviewed the agenda and distributed background materials. It was noted that we are still under the agreement with the other Bay jurisdictions to maintain the 15 % reduction level, and that a new stock assessment will be completed by the end of 2004. The current assessment is a length-based assessment (model). The next assessment will be different.

II. Approval of minutes

No minutes were considered for approval.

III. Old Business

Pete Nixon reminded members that the weather had been a big influence on the 2003 fishery.

Rob O'Reilly explained the difference between exploitation and fishing mortality. He agreed that there had definitely been a harvest reduction, but we have not doubled the spawning stock. Mr. O'Reilly cautioned members that we don't know how to judge where we are with the target. However, we can use the winter dredge survey, where we see higher levels of exploitation. There

will be a period of re-assessment.

Mr. Travelstead related that VIMS has been conducting a tagging study. They found that survival of mature females is only about two percent and stated that these results have us concerned.

IV. New Business

A. Crab License Moratorium ends May 26, 2004

Mr. Travelstead reminded members that the crab license moratorium will end on May 26, 2004 and stated that staff will propose another three-year extension. As far as administrative changes, we propose that anyone who is eligible this year would remain so for the next three years, as long as they maintain their CFRL and do not transfer their crab license. It was noted that the Commission will likely raise license fees and may charge a fee for transfers; consequently, we will not require the purchase of a crab gear license, if it is not intended to be used during the year.

Tom Powers asked how much money will be lost if latent gear licenses are not bought?

Pete Nixon asked how would you know if people were ever going to use their license?

Rob Brumbaugh was opposed to a three-year extension of the moratorium, and suggested just a one-year extension.

B. Update of the Crab Dredge Limited Entry Fishery

Mr. Travelstead reported that we will eliminate the requirement to dredge at least one day per year to maintain eligibility. There will be a lottery to fill vacancies to reach the 225 cap; then people will be eligible until they transfer out. We will eliminate the special dredge permit and the need to buy a dredge license each year; however, they must maintain their CFRL. We can also do away with the Crab Dredge Review Panel. There may be only 50-60 active boats in this fishery.

Members held a discussion on the economic impacts of the dredge fishery.

C. Hard Crab and Peeler Pots

Mr. Travelstead listed six issues that he had been asked to bring as discussion items. Members discussed each one separately.

1. Freddie Linton (Saxis) requested to allow food for feeding jimmy crabs in peeler pots from the second week in May to the second week in June.

Wayne Abbott stated that if you put bait in the jimmy chamber you are still baiting the

pot.

Louis Whittaker reminded members that a study was done five years ago on this issue by a VMRC staff person (Tina). He asked Mr. Travelstead to find the results of that study. Mr. Whittaker stated he would like to be able to feed the jimmy with a small piece of fish, to help keep it alive. Jimmies are scarce in May and very expensive. This would not be bait, just a small piece of food for the jimmy. At the General Assembly, it was changed in the 1980's. Consequently, the "shake & bake" method was developed on the Eastern Shore, which abused the system.

Mr. Nixon talked about baiting pots to attract white-signs. He noted that Eastern Shore people "vacuumed" creeks, and he was not sure if he wanted to open this can of worms.

Mr. Travelstead asked what degree of abuse of this do we want to tolerate?

Mr. Whittaker explained that he takes his jimmies home and feeds them. Mr. Nixon noted that some crabs last longer than others. Mr. Whittaker added that it also depends if you take the claws off.

Tom Powers asked if you could enforce one square inch of fish as food?

John Graham agreed that crabs are expensive, but white trash crabs may go in and bite the peelers. That is not conducive to a healthy resource. What about bringing jimmies back in and rotating with fresh crabs? Mr. Whittaker replied that he does rotate jimmies, but there is still mortality. The CMAC did not endorse this proposal.

2. Doug Jenkins asked for some relief for peeler pot fishermen to use hard crabs as bait on Sunday. Some of the crabbers in his area last year got tickets for possessing male crabs on Sunday. They have water quality problems and the jimmies only last two to three days. If they get an extra male in the walk-in pot, they want to be able to transfer it to their sex pot. If they bring male crabs back to the dock, put a half bushel limit on them.

Mr. Travelstead said he's had some phone calls about this issue, and crabbers in other areas are allowed one bushel of hard crabs for personal use.

Kenny Oliver stated that if a recreational guy can have a bushel, then so should a commercial guy.

Mr. Abbott thought this would encourage stealing from hard crab pots.

Mr. Travelstead noted that there is no prohibition on removing jimmy crabs from peeler pots on Sunday if re-baiting pots.

Mr. Oliver said that no undersized jimmies were allowed.

Mr. Whittaker commented that this is such a short period of time that they use jimmies in their pots; it's a law enforcement problem with inconsistencies between areas. He noted that he declaws the jimmies right away, and he doesn't catch many extra males in May.

Mr. Travelstead summarized the discussion. We can allow two things: harvesting males to use as bait, and carrying a bushel of males on board to use as bait, but not landing jimmies to sell. The committee members agreed that this should go to the Commission.

3. Doug Jenkins reported that on foggy days in April and May, his crabbers need an extra hour because they lose time trying to find their pots.

Mr. Powers proposed that they go to a nine-hour day for those two months.

Mr. Travelstead reminded members if they lighten up on any restrictions, then they have to tighten up somewhere else to maintain the 15%.

Mr. Nixon stated his crabbers have a worse problem with tides than fog. He commented that the eight-hour workday is a joke, because the crabbers are just setting more pots; it has accomplished nothing. It has been a nightmare dealing with the fog and tides.

Mr. Jenkins asked about giving up the last week in November in exchange for a nine-hour day in April and May? Mr. O'Reilly said that the price is different, as well as the harvest amounts, but he agreed to look into it.

4. Bobby Weagley requested that the committee consider going back to a one day a week off and do away with the eight-hour workday.

Mr. Abbott was opposed to taking a day off.

Mr. Graham inquired how many convictions there had been for the eight-hour workday? Mr. Oliver responded not many, but they were found guilty in court.

5. Pete Nixon had requested that we tighten the rules on the use of agents and the problem of people using multiple agent cards. He noted that one family in Portsmouth all have licenses, but don't even own a boat. It was suggested that the person who holds the license needs to be on the boat, but there will be special circumstances. There is a problem with abandoned pots. Some people put out 900 to 1000 pots, which is excessive.

Mr. Powers proposed that an agent should only be used for hardship cases; maybe for a week.

Mr. Nixon asked if we should require the license holder to be on board in any limited entry fishery, except for hardship cases. He remarked that licenses should not have been an investment.

Mr. Whittaker noted that he needs a certain amount of licenses to obtain enough peeler

crabs, and he can't always be on the boat.

Mr. Oliver said the pot limit is an enforcement problem, but it gets complicated when the buoys have multiple numbers on them.

Mr. O' Reilly proposed that a person could act as an agent for only one person, with a maximum of two CFRLs.

Mr. Travelstead noted that this discussion needs to continue.

6. Pete Nixon wanted the committee to consider tightening the rules on crab license transfers.

Mr. Travelstead reminded members of the four conditions that control the transfer of a license: death, incapacitation, relative, or sale of boat. They are virtually impossible to enforce, do we want to maintain these?

Members generally agreed that people should not have to sell a boat in order to transfer a license.

Mr. Powers expressed concern about latent effort.

7. Mr. Travelstead stated that the dark sponge crab regulation needs to be re-visited. He reported that VIMS has been conducting a study on the survival of larvae. As a result of that study, we could do away with the harvest restriction on dark sponge crabs, but go with a week or so of no harvest. The third week of July has been suggested.

Mr. Nixon related that there are no big crab rigs in Lynhaven any more.

Mr. Graham commented that the black sponge regulation was a good intention, but it paralyzed crabbers in Lynhaven. There is not much room for them to move. Let them harvest all sponge crabs except during one week. Maryland bans the harvest of sponge crabs on July 5; perhaps we could coordinate time-wise.

8. Other issues. John Graham remarked that he had record production after the hurricane. He questioned the low values on the Virginia Crab Harvest Table.

Mr. Travelstead replied that other measures such as the level of spawning stock and fishing mortality rates are used to assess the health of the stock.

Mr. Whittaker stated that with the devastation on Tangier and in Poquoson, etc. after the hurricane, many men have taken other jobs and will not return to the water.

Mr. Powers raised the point that people want to be able to fish the five-pot recreational crab pot license on Sunday. Currently only unlicensed two pots can be fished on Sunday.

Mr. Abbott said he was in favor of no recreational crabbing on Sunday.

There was no support for Mr. Powers proposal.

V. Adjournment

Some members requested that the next meeting start at 6:00 instead of 7:00 PM. The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 PM.