

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

April 21, 2009

Members Present

Hon. Rick Robins (Chair)
Hon. John McConaugha
Ken Smith for Louis Whittaker
Doug Jenkins
Pete Nixon
Joe Palmer
Johnny Graham
Ronald Jett
Marshall Cox
Chris Moore

Public

Chris Ludford

Members Absent

Jim Casey
Paige Hogge
John Freeman
Tom Powers
Daniel Dise
H.M. Arnold

VMRC Staff

Robert O'Reilly
Jack Travelstead
Joe Grist
Joe Cimino
Mike Johnson
Laura M. Lee
Linda Farris

VIMS

Rom Lipcius
Mike Seebo

Due to technical difficulties, an audio tape of the meeting was not available.

- I. Introductions/Announcements**
- II. Approval of Minutes from March, 2009 Meeting**

Minutes were approved.

- III. Old Business**

Mr. Robins announced that all of the regulatory measures that were advertised for the April Commission meeting will be re-advertised at the May meeting for consideration. The only measure that will still be considered at the April Commission Meeting will be the public hearing for defining the dates of closure for the Historical Crab Sanctuary.

IV. New Business

Mr. O'Reilly presented the findings of the 2008–2009 Winter Crab Dredge Survey. The results from the survey indicate that the population of age 1+ crabs was 232 million, which exceeds the interim target number of 200 million. The total number of crabs in the bay was estimated to be just over 400 million. The exploitation rate for crab harvest in 2008 was 50%, which is larger than the target exploitation rate of 46% but less than the threshold level of 53%. Recruitment stayed below the 18-year survey average.

Dr. Lipcius presented sampling protocols for the winter crab dredge survey. He stressed that all sampling locations are determined randomly so as to give a fair representation of the bay as a whole. Sampling equipment used included a 6 foot crab dredge, that is fished for approximately one minute and averages 115 meters of bottom dredged. Biometrics are taken and recorded for the crabs captured. There was a brief discussion between Mr. Smith and Dr. Lipcius about why the survey doesn't target areas where crabs are known to frequent. Dr. Lipcius responded that it would bias the survey and not give an accurate statistical random measure of the crab population.

Mr. Travelstead stated that hearings for most of the crab regulations scheduled for the April Commission meeting would be postponed until the May meeting and will be re-advertised accordingly. The public hearing of the Historical Crab Sanctuary closure dates is still on the April agenda. In addition, this committee should review the 5 pot recreational license, prior to the May Commission meeting, since the requirements for its re-instatement have been achieved, according to regulation.

Mr. Travelstead then presented the results of the VMRC Buyers Survey. A few of the survey highlights included: over 90% of the buyers indicated that the market for the 2009 crab season will be either the same or worse than the 2008 season; forty-seven percent of the buyers felt that the fall closure on female crabs had the greatest affect on their operations; and eighteen percent number of the buyers felt that the closure of the crab dredge season had the greatest effect on their operations.

Mr. Travelstead discussed the contents of a handout, which provided estimates of the predicted reduction in harvest associated with the new management measures implemented in 2008. The handout also provided the predicted reduction in harvest that could be achieved for various possible management scenarios under consideration for 2009. Mr. Travelstead pointed out the substantial contributions of the closure of the dredge fishery and the ban on fall harvest of female blue crabs on the reduction in harvest observed in 2008. He added that the effect of reducing the number of licensed pots had on crab harvest could not be quantified because there is no clear understanding of the relationship between effort and harvest.

Mr. Travelstead stated that staff would support not having a fall closure on female crabs again this year if the Commission left all of the other regulations in tact.

Mr. Nixon stated he would like to see the fall closure on the harvest of females lifted.

There was a brief discussion on changing the dates of the fall closure on female crabs with opening crab dredging for a limited time. Mr. Robins indicated that the committee was given handouts, these should be studied by the committee, and that this could be discussed at the next CMAC meeting.

Mr. Robins asked what was the committee's recommendation for action on the Historical Crab Sanctuary.

Mr. Palmer stated he would like to see the Historical Sanctuary date pushed back to May 15th this year due to the cold March, which limited crab harvest in that area.

Mr. Travelstead stated that staff supported leaving the date the same as the rest of the sanctuary, May 1st.

Mr. Nixon indicated that the committee should support a May 1st date to prevent a fall closure on female crabs.

Mr. Palmer made a motion to change the date to May 15th for the Historical Crab Sanctuary. Mr. Cox seconded the motion.

Mr. Nixon made a substitute motion to have the date set at May 1st. Mr. Moore seconded the motion. The motion to make the substitute motion the main motion passed 5 to 4. The main motion then passed by a 5 to 4 vote.

Mr. Robins asked what the committee preference was on the 5 pot recreational license. The committee passed by consent that an option be presented that the license can not be re-instated until the interim target population level of age 1+ has been reached for 3 years, the same as the waiting list for commercial crabbing licenses.

Mr. Ludford asked the committee to take up the issues of water quality effects on the blue crab population this summer.

Dr. Lipcius asked that the committee make a recommendation to the Commission to have terrapin excluder rings installed on all recreational crab pots. He then indicated that the study of terrapin by-catch in crab pots and a study of the dredge fishery will be completed by the end of the year.

Mr. Robins stated that at the last committee meeting it was decided that they would like to see the results of the study before making a recommendation.

Mr. Ludford asked why disaster relief monies were being used to fund terrapin research when it should be going to helping the crabbing industry.

Dr. Lipcius responded that the diamond backed terrapins in the Chesapeake Bay are being considered to be added to the endangered species list. If this happens it could strongly affect the crabbing industry.

V. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM. No date for the next meeting was given.