

VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION

FINFISH ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

VMRC CONFERENCE ROOM

January 16, 2007

MEMBERS PRESENT

Hon. Ernest Bowden
Mr. Walter Rogers
Mr. Wynston Holbrook
Mr. Jeff Deem
Mr. Russell Gaskins
Mr. Douglas F. Jenkins, Sr
Dr. Ken Neill
Mr. Samuel Swift
Mr. Robert Weagley
Mr. Tom Powers
Mr. William Laine, Jr.
Mr. John C. Ludford for Mr. Pete Nixon

MEMBERS ABSENT

Mr. Chris Vaughan

VMRC STAFF

Mr. Jack Travelstead
Mr. Rob O'Reilly
Ms. Sonya Davis
Mr. Joe Grist
Mr. Lewis Gillingham
Mr. Mike Johnson
Mr. Joe Cimino
Dr. Hank Liao of ODU CQFE

ALSO PRESENT

Mr. David Agee
Mr. Jim Haydon
Mr. Chris Ludford
Mr. Harry Doernte
Mr. John Wyatt
Mr. Mike Handforth
Mr. Sean Morns
Mr. Dusty Crump

I. Introductions, Announcements

Chairman Bowden called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm. No introductions or announcements were made.

II. Approval of the minutes from the November 21, 2006 meeting

The minutes were approved.

III. Old Business

a. Update on Upriver Recreational Gill Net Issue

Mr. Travelstead explained to FMAC that the Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) had met with staff and a group of fishermen; however, there are continuing jurisdictional issues at this time. This matter will come before the Commission at a later date. Although the group that met with VMRC, and DGIF agreed on certain resolutions, staff has since been informed that some parties concerned would like to see other options. Mr. Travelstead said that if any new proposal is developed it will be presented to FMAC for review, prior to going before the Commission.

b. Continued discussion of Blueline Tilefish Issue

Mr. Grist presented an update to FMAC on recreational trips that included blueline tilefish and Snowy grouper off of Virginia's coast. He reviewed the current restrictions regarding these and other grouper species, for the waters south of Virginia. Mr. Grist stated that regulations imposed by the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (SAFMC) will become more restrictive in the near future. Also, SAFMC has concerns with the lack of regulations in waters north of their jurisdiction and they will be contacting Mid -Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (MAFMC) and NMFS about this. SAFMC also sent a letter to VMRC (a copy of which was provided to FMAC) requesting VMRC adopt regulations regarding blueline tilefish and the snapper-grouper complex. Mr. Grist also noted that David Nobles, CCA-Virginia President, had called and indicated that a letter of support for developing regulations, for the fishery, would be sent. Mr. Grist gave details on possible commercial restrictions which were not previously presented to FMAC.

There was some discussion about the nature of the fishery. Mr. Grist, in answering a question from Mr. Deem, stated there is a high mortality for these species, once they are brought up to a boat. Several members addressed the relatively small number of vessels that are involved in this issue. Mr. Grist explained that MRFSS does not do a sufficient job of estimating effort on opportunistic catches, and, therefore, no such estimate will be available for this fishery.

Mr. Neill stated that snowy grouper catches off Virginia are accidental, and since there is no directed fishery, he does not support using the SAFMC's recreational regulation with its inclusion of several species of grouper that are not seen here. This aggregate measure would only complicate things. He explained he does not have a problem with some preventative measure to address the tilefish fishery. He noted that Mr. Jim Brincefield, who charts sea bass trips and fishes for blueline tilefish can accept a 5-fish per person limit on tilefish.

Mr. Ludford, addressing the proposed commercial regulation, expressed concern with including blueline tilefish in a 300-pound aggregate trip limit with snapper-grouper. He pointed out that black sea bass fishermen may be able to catch some blueline tilefish, and it would be financially helpful if they are able to sell these as part of their catch. If the effort is modest, in both the commercial and recreational sides, it may not be necessary to include

tilefish as part of a 300-pound aggregate. Mr. Ludford suggested holding off on any regulations for blueline tilefish. He did not believe the fishery would expand quickly considering the cost of fishing offshore and in deep water. In the absence of restrictions, there should not be any reason to under report. If a fishery does develop in the future, then some action can be decided upon.

Mr. Powers asked if it would be reasonable, if Virginia was under the same quota system as the rest of the states south of here, and shifted to a trip limit or by-catch limit after Virginia's share of the quota was met. Mr. Grist responded that before any quota allocation could be considered for Virginia, the status of the stocks would have to be reevaluated, to include the waters off of Virginia, and then quota could be reallocated. Mr. Grist stated that staff was open to other management suggestions, than what has been presented.

It was pointed out that before any quota allocation was considered for Virginia the status of the stocks would have to be reevaluated, to include the waters off of Virginia. Mr. Grist stated that staff was open to other management suggestions than what has been presented.

The Committee asked for the input of Mr. Harry Doernte, a hook-and-line commercial fisherman who participates in the black sea bass fishery. He explained that he has been aware of blueline tilefish, for well over 20 years; however they are not pursued by the sea bass fishermen because they do not have the gear to make it profitable. One of Mr. Doernte's major concerns was the status of Warsaw grouper. He stated they are off the coast of Virginia and that their population can be easily decimated. FMAC should be concerned with snowy grouper populations as well. SAFMC considers the population overfished and overfishing is occurring. Mr. Doernte suggested that Warsaw grouper should not be allowed to be sold, though a vessel may have a one fish possession limit per trip. Also, he felt that there should be commercial trip limit set for snowy grouper. He found the 300-pound aggregate trip limit acceptable and suggested perhaps limiting snowy grouper to 100 pounds out of the total 300 pounds. The snowy groupers off Virginia are large, most likely female fish that do not migrate, he explained. He did feel that there should be something in place to prevent a major expansion of the commercial blueline tilefish fishery. In Mr. Doernte's opinion, the Golden tilefish population off Virginia was overfished.

After some further discussion, Chairman Bowden stated that it would be valuable for FMAC to consider the issue at length. Mr. Travelstead noted that no action needs to be taken immediately. No motion was made at this time.

c. Report from ODU on Sheepshead Research

Mr. Liao presented a review of the report provided to RFAB, regarding the 2-year project funded by RFAB. This project is intended to assist in the understanding of the population dynamics of sheepshead in Chesapeake Bay and possible management recommendations. Mr. Liao gave details regarding the macroscopic analysis of the reproductive status of sheepshead in the Bay. Preliminary results suggest females have the greatest spawning potential, from June through August. Therefore, it may be beneficial to place a seasonal and or temporal closure on the fishery during these months, to allow the fish to spawn, according to Mr. Liao.

Mr. Powers requested that an interim possession limit on sheepshead be included as a discussion item for the February FMAC meeting.

IV. New Business

a. Update: 2007 Recreational Summer Flounder Proposals

Mr. O'Reilly informed FMAC that due to the late date that ASMFC established the total allowable landings for summer flounder, VMRC did not have the ability to host as many meetings as in the past. However, an Ad hoc committee did meet on January 9th to discuss options to reach a 53 percent reduction to the recreational flounder fishery for 2007. He presented the options that the Ad hoc Recreational Summer Flounder Committee voted to endorse.

Mr. Handforth, a member of the ad hoc committee, addressed the FMAC and requested that FMAC consider an addition option that had not been presented during the ad hoc meeting. Also he suggested finding some way to allow Virginia to have 2 different size limits, for the seaside versus the bay.

Mr. O'Reilly noted that having a split management scenario would be difficult for Virginia to satisfy ASMFC requirements regarding such management. He also expressed great concern over the amount of landings such a split would produce, were there not specific area targets or quotas.

A motion passed to send all of the ad hoc committee's options plus the late addition from some of the ad hoc committee members, the Commission.

b. Presentation on the future of fisheries management

Mr. Travelstead handed out a presentation that was provided to him by Mr. Peter Paul, regarding the future of fisheries management. Mr. Travelstead explained that the Commissioner had met with Mr. Paul and had recommended that he come before FMAC. Mr. Paul was unable to be present at this meeting and asked Mr. Travelstead to print out his power point presentation for the committee. The committee reviewed the presentation, and welcomed Mr. Paul's comments. No motions were made at this time.

V. Next Meeting

The next meeting was set for February 20, 2007 at 6pm.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20pm.