

**VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION**

**FINFISH ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING**

**VMRC CONFERENCE ROOM**

20 September 2005

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Jeff Deem  
Robert Weagley  
Wynston Holbrook  
Hon. William Laine, Jr.  
Douglas Jenkins  
David Agee for Ken Neill  
Tom Powers  
Sam Swift  
Chris Vaughan  
Walter Rogers  
Russell Gaskins  
Hon. Russell Garrison  
Hon. Ernest Bowden, Jr.

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Pete Nixon

**VMRC STAFF**

Jack Travelstead  
Rob O'Reilly  
Eric Robillard  
Sonya Davis  
MPO Ben Major  
Lewis Gillingham

**I. Introductions, Announcements**

Chairman Russell Garrison called the meeting to order at 6:05 P.M. Jack Travelstead announced sheepshead has been added under New Business for this meeting.

**II. Approval of the minutes from the July 19, 2005 meeting**

The minutes were approved as written.

**III. Old Business**

**a. Striped Bass Update and Report from Striped Bass Committee**

Mr. Travelstead reviewed the Striped Bass Ad Hoc Committee proposals from its September 13 meeting. At its last meeting, the Ad Hoc Committee

withdrew support for the two-tag system scenario and proposed the following measures, by unanimous vote, although several members abstained from voting:

- 1) Ban all temporary striped bass quota transfers in 2006
- 2) Prohibit possession of Bay tags in Coastal waters
- 3) Eliminate transit permits
- 4) Allow gill nets of 5 to 6-inch mesh size in rivers for the month of February
- 5) Require all Coastal quota fishermen to fly a flag while striped bass fishing
- 6) Ban gill nets >9" from 1 November 2005 through 1 April 2006 and >8" from 1 November 2006 through 1 April 2007.

Mr. Travelstead focused attention on a table that detailed the number of striped bass, by age, harvested commercially in 2004, in each state. The Virginia commercial harvest of large striped bass (9 years and older) was significantly greater than harvest from any other state. This is expected to be especially troubling to the ASMFC Striped Bass Management Board since Virginia's quota is theoretically composed of 90% Bay quota (age 3 to 8 striped bass) and only 10% ocean quota (28 inches or greater).

Another consequence of Bay harvest of large striped bass is the further reduction in the number of tags available the following year, as the average size increases. A second table supported what has been contended concerning the temporary transfer of quota. Most transfers are from gears that traditionally catch small fish (pound net, haul seine) to gill net gear, which is responsible for the largest average size of fish.

Mr. Travelstead informed the FMAC the Commission has delayed their decision on this matter to gather additional guidance and has requested the FMAC re-visit this issue.

The FMAC reviewed the Ad Hoc committee's proposals and harvest information. Several members voiced support for the two-tag system which the Ad Hoc committee had initially supported, and the FMAC endorsed at their last meeting.

From the audience, Kelly Place stated the two-tag system would increase the discard rate because it would create a second tier for high grading.

Doug Jenkins stated mesh size restrictions would eliminate discards. Mr. Jenkins indicated a 6-1/2-inch mesh (gill net) would catch an 8-pound rockfish (on average) and a 7-inch mesh net would average a 12-pound fish.

Tom Powers, likewise, voiced support for a smaller maximum mesh size than recommended by the Ad Hoc committee. Members of the audience argued that a

smaller mesh size (less than 8 inches?) would increase the bycatch of other species (such as dog shark) besides striped bass.

Some members of the FMAC felt eliminating all temporary quota transfer (except for hardship cases reviewed by the Commissioner) was too extreme. "Tag brokers," holders of a large amount of quota, were the problem, according to some members and also supported by a 3-page solution submitted by a couple of fishermen to FMAC. After additional discussion, it was suggested that temporary transfers be limited to one share (gill net?).

Debate was suspended by chairman Garrison and the FMAC will discuss this issue further at their October meeting, the week before the Commission acts on this matter.

Tom Powers made the following motion:

**The FMAC supports adding a prohibition of temporary transfer of striped bass quota to the public hearing notice and endorsed the other measures already approved for public hearing.**

The motion carried.

#### **b.) Update on recreational flounder harvest**

Rob O'Reilly provided a handout and reviewed the Marine Recreational Fishery Statistical Survey (MRFSS) data through wave 3 (through June) for 2005. Virginia's recreational target for summer flounder is 800,000 fish for 2005. Virginia was under its allowable target catch by nearly 22.8% in 2004 (with a 17-inch minimum size limit). In 2005, the minimum size limit was lowered to 16-1/2 inches and the results through June suggest the 16-1/2-inch limit is "just about right" for Virginia's fishery, according to O'Reilly. Unfortunately, the latest Stock Assessment for Summer flounder indicated fishing mortality is increasing and stock biomass is not increasing at the necessary rate. Therefore, NMFS has proposed to lower the 2006 Total Allowable Catch (all Atlantic Coast states, commercial and recreational combined) by 21%, to 28.9 million pounds. The bottom line for Virginia recreational flounder fishermen--expect a higher size limit in 2006 (unless we fall well below the 800,000 fish target in 2005) and perhaps some closed period.

### **IV. New Business**

#### **a.) Discussion of sheepshead conservation**

This item was added to the agenda at the request of FMAC member Tom Powers, who provided a handout and presentation. Mr. Powers stated the recreational fishery for sheepshead is growing rapidly but the commercial fishery for sheepshead is negligible. Mr. Powers requested the FMAC consider a four-fish

possession limit for all hook-and-line gear (includes commercial hook and line) but no size limit.

Chairman Garrison requested comment from the audience (several anglers had attended solely to speak on this issue).

An unidentified recreational angler stated this fishery (sheepshead) had exploded the past several years in Virginia because it is “world class” in terms of the size of fish. He wants to see this quality trophy fishery preserved and restrictions put in place.

Another unidentified recreational angler stated he was a participant in the VMRC tagging program, has seen the fishery increase and is concerned there are no limits on the number or size of fish that can be harvested. He has tagged and released 75 sheepshead this year and claims “they are easy to catch.” He knew of anglers that had kept as many as 40 sheepshead. He requested a limit be put in place “now.”

Another angler stated Virginia sheepshead are much larger than those of North Carolina or Florida. He was concerned Virginia’s fishery is on “local fish” that return year after year and could be fished out with too much fishing effort.

Kelly Place argued unless there is a biological problem with sheepshead, the commercial fishery should not be restricted. Commercial fishermen need new, available avenues of income, as other courses are restricted. If the recreational fishery elects to establish possession, size or season limits, they should only apply to recreational fishermen.

Larry Snyder, speaking for the CCA said the sheepshead is a common fish, it is caught inshore (available to lots of anglers) and has no protection. The CCA considered requesting limits last year and VMRC staff provided a briefing to FMAC in April 2005. Instead of pushing for restrictions, the CCA influenced ODU to conduct a study of sheepshead. ODU has submitted a three-year study proposal to the Recreational Advisory Board and it is under consideration for funding 1 January 2006. The CCA has become more concerned this year, as even greater recreational effort has been directed at sheepshead, especially along the CBBT complex. Based upon the rapid expansion of the recreational fishery, the CCA feels some restrictions are warranted now, rather than wait three years for the study to be completed. The CCA supports the ODU study but requests an interim possession limit be established for the recreational and commercial hook and line fishery.

Chairman Garrison suggested this item be placed on next month’s agenda and give the various organizations time to poll their members as to the proper course of action. After more discussion, it was determined the fishery was “about over”

for this year and would not begin until next spring, so this item could wait until the November meeting.

The FMAC requested a discussion of the Shark Management Plan be placed on next month's agenda.

**V. Next Meeting Date**

The date and time for the next meeting was discussed but not set.

**VI. Adjournment**

Chairman Russell Garrison adjourned the meeting at 8:15 P.M.