

**Virginia Marine Resources Commission**  
**Finfish Management Advisory Committee (FMAC) Minutes**  
2600 Washington Avenue, Newport News, VA  
VMRC Commission Room, 4<sup>TH</sup> Floor  
Thursday, March 17, 2016 – 6:00 P.M.

**ATTENDANCE**

Members Present

Jeff Deem (Chairman)  
Skip Feller  
Jack Austin  
Ernest Bowden  
Peter Nixon proxy for Scott MacDonald  
Wes Blow proxy for Hon. Ken Neill  
Beth Synowiec  
Mike Avery proxy for Tom Powers  
Meade Amory  
Robert Weagley

VMRC Staff Present

Joe Cimino  
Lewis Gillingham  
Rob O'Reilly  
Jill Ramsey  
Ryan Jiorle  
Katie May Laumann

Members Absent

Hon. G. Wayne France  
Andy Hall  
Walter Rogers

Others Present

Ken Neill  
Jorj Head  
Bill Gorham  
Rich Gresens  
Dave Gresens  
Chris DeMassey  
Zach Hoffman

**I. FMAC Introductions; Announcements**

The meeting was called to order at 6:02. A recording of the minutes can be found on the agency's website.

**II. Approval of FMAC minutes from December 15, 2015 meeting**

Minutes from December 15, 2015 meeting were approved unanimously.

**III. Old Business**

- a. Discussion: Accountability measures for the NMFS Cobia Fishery Management Plan and recreational cobia management measures for 2016.

Chair discussed the MRIP estimate, saying that under the new MRIP methods, landing for recreational catch would be at least 3 times higher than what we are accustomed to. He thinks this means MRIP is wrong, but this is what we have to go on. Phone call survey is going to be followed by letters sent to the fishermen, which might increase reporting. The National Academy of Sciences is reviewing MRIP, and in 2018 they will be done with that.

Rob O'Reilly gave the introduction, and Ryan Jiorle gave a presentation on the state of the cobia fishery and management measures for 2016.

Management measures that have been proposed to SAFMC/NMFS for the cobia fishery moving forward include:

- 1) Size limit increase from 34 inch fork length to 37 inches
- 2) Limit per vessel going from 4 to 1
- 3) A delayed season, starting June 1

The implications of these measures, particularly how much longer they would allow the season to stay opened need to be considered.

Mike Avery, the proxy for Tom Powers, relayed Tom's concern that the commercial fishery should not be allowed to grow and should be capped at 10,000 lbs. Joe Cimino said that the commercial fishery is staying within its 8% of the harvest. The commercial fishery is being monitored, but changes could be made to the reporting requirements. A retail permit for restaurant buyers could be implemented to track it further. Wes Blow said that although there have been increases in the fishery; the quality of the bigger fish is dropping due to effort.

The question of whether we could move to a state-by-state allocation system for cobia was raised. Rob O'Reilly indicated that if that were to happen, it wouldn't be for at least another year and a half. He stated that that is not a measure we had proposed to SAFMC/NMFS, and re-stated the three measures that were proposed, listed above.

There was a discussion about how recreational data are sampled, and Beth Synowiec proposed requiring a permit for the recreational fishery; this would allow for required reporting and better data, like are available for the commercial fishery.

A concern regarding changing the vessel limit was discussed. Some of the people making a living from the cobia fishery mainly operate charter boats, but if we reduce their limit they will switch to fishing for it commercially, which could lead to commercial catches over the ACL. Staff noted that commercial hook and line licenses are capped at 200, so not every charter boat captain will be able to do this.

A member of the public representing charter and commercial fishermen from North Carolina, Bill Gorham, expressed concern over the need for more data. He asked if past modifications of the limits had led to biomass increases. Joe Cimino indicated that they had not. Mr. Gorham indicated that a June 20<sup>th</sup> closure of the fishery would adversely impact him economically. He also expressed concern over the fact that MAFMC only gets one vote at the South Atlantic Council.

Concern over a need for more data led to Wes Blow saying that Congressman Whitman has pledged to ask for a stock assessment to be completed sooner than planned in order to allow for better data informing management.

Rob O'Reilly said that he would try to get more up-to-date data before the next commission meeting on April 26, and to schedule another FMAC meeting to discuss it on April 18 or 19.

Beth Synowiec asked how much an increase in size limit would extend the season. Rob said that is not known. Rob O'Reilly indicated that trying for an increase in quota from Georgia to New York will take more work with the South Atlantic Council, and that that Council is already looking at 2017 management measures. 2017 measures probably won't be as harsh as 2016. Rob O'Reilly said that he would discuss a range of increases in size limit with NMFS in the morning.

Rich Gresens, a member of the public, noted that a reduction in this fishery will have huge economic impacts. Under this closure, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina get to fish their entire season while Virginia will get to fish virtually none of its season.. He asked if Virginia can go out of compliance until better data are available. Rob O'Reilly said that going out of compliance does not work. Meade Amory followed up by saying that until better data are available; we need to come up with measures that the fishermen can handle. He suggested a weekend only fishery, which staff said may not be an option and members of the public did not support. Dave Gresens asked that the Council consider that once these limits change, they won't be reversed.

#### **IV. New Business**

- a. Discussion: commercial and recreational management measure for gray trigger fish

This item was postponed until the next meeting. A brief update on the electro shocking of blue catfish issue indicated no recent changes regarding this issue.

#### **V. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 8:53pm.