

VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION

BLUE CRAB MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

VMRC CONFERENCE ROOM

July 10, 2006

MEMBERS PRESENT

Hon. Rick Robins
Mr. Tom Powers
Mr. John Graham
Mr. Jim Casey
Mr. Pete Freeman

MEMBERS ABSENT

Mr. Wayne O. Abbott
Mr. William E. Abbott
Mr. Chris Moore
Mr. Marshall Cox Sr.
Mr. Eddie Crockett
Mr. Jeff Crockett
Mr. Wade Harding
Ms. Paige Hogge
Mr. Ronald Jett
Mr. Lesney Miller
Mr. Billy Moore
Mr. Peter Nixon
Mr. Louis Whittaker
Mr. Woody Zember

VMRC STAFF

Commissioner Bowman
Mr. Jack Travelstead
Mr. Rob O'Reilly
Mr. Joe Cimino
Sgt. Ben Major
Dr. Rom Lipcius (VIMS)

PRFC STAFF

Mr. A.C. Carpenter

I. Introductions, Announcements

Chairman Robins called the meeting to order at 6:07 pm. Chairman Robins introduced himself as the Associate member of the Commission that will be chairing the Blue Crab management advisory committee (CMAC). The Chair then introduced Commissioner Bowman. The Commissioner thanked the CMAC members in attendance for their

participation. He also thanked Rom Lipcius, for his work and his willingness to re-evaluate the sponge crab fishery.

II. Approval of the minutes from the December 12, 2005 meeting.

Chairman Robins noted there was not a quorum. Mr. Powers had one correction to the minutes from December. Regarding item **IV. b, Review of proposal to eliminate requirement to transfer or sell boat or vessel to be eligible to transfer or sell crabbing license to another fisherman**, of new business, Mr. Powers' inquiry was in respect to capping the number of transfers not the number of licenses. The minutes were approved as amended.

III. Old Business

There was no old business.

IV. New Business

a. Update: Crab Stock Assessment

Mr. O'Reilly presented a slide presentation that summarized key findings of the 2005 stock assessment. He stated the conclusions of the first terms of reference from the recently completed stock assessment included a single unit stock and a natural mortality rate (M) for blue crabs of 0.9. A very strong juvenile class was present in 2005 (this was a finding of the 2005 CBSAC Advisory report. Other findings from the Report were also mentioned). The stock assessment group concluded that fishery independent surveys indicate crabs are at a low level of abundance, signs of a strong recovery are lacking and there is concern. The spawning stock is at a low level of abundance. Concerning fishery dependent data, the report shows that the stock is still at a low level compared to a long term average. Mr. O'Reilly stated that effort data for Maryland and Virginia's commercial fisheries is not yet at a level that can be included in an assessment.

Dr. Lipcius also spoke briefly to CMAC about the status of the stock. He addressed the issues of bias that can effect the stock assessment. Such issues would lead, in his opinion, to putting more weight in estimates of abundance than exploitation estimates.

Mr. Powers asked Dr. Lipcius if anyone had an estimate of impact of the recent loss of eelgrass. Dr. Lipcius answered that they do not have an estimate at this time but there will be one by the next winter dredge survey (Bay-wide Winter Dredge Survey a cooperative project between VIMS and Chesapeake Biological Laboratory). He also expressed great concern for the survival of age 0 and age 1 crabs. Finally, Dr. Lipcius stated that field estimates from tag and recapture studies concur with the current theoretical estimates of M being roughly at 0.9.

b. Review of the Dark Sponge Crab Prohibition Regulation

Mr. Travelstead stated that information from VIMS studies suggests that the current regulations for dark sponge crabs are not having the desired effect, because of the release survival rate of sponge crabs. He stated that Dr. Lipcius would discuss the findings further. Mr. Travelstead advised that even though CMAC did not have a quorum, he would like the

committee to make suggestions regarding this issue that could be presented to the Commission at the August meeting.

Dr. Lipcius started off by saying that he believed, in this case, there is consensus among both scientists and the crab fishing industry that the dark sponge crab prohibition was not having the desired effect for the resource or for the crabbers. He went into some details regarding the mortality and loss of sponge from females that are released after they are brought on board a vessel.

The committee engaged in some discussion on the issue. Several members pointed out that in recent years, sponge crabs are found earlier in the season. Mr. Powers stated that the current regulation has a *de facto* effect, a closure, which provides protection.

The committee discussed closing a larger area to crabbing, beyond the current sanctuary. Chairman Robins asked Dr. Lipcius if this possibility held merit for biological conservation that may be equivalent to a temporary shut down of the crab fishery. After some discussion the Chairman recommended that CMAC and VIMS continue looking at this issue and meet again prior to the Commission meeting in August.

c. A. C. Carpenter: Discussion of Size Limit Changes for the Potomac River Tributaries

Mr. Carpenter notified CMAC that the Potomac River Fisheries Commission (PRFC) had already approached Maryland DNR with a request to set blue crab minimum size regulations in Maryland tributaries of the Potomac River to match those of PRFC. He was making this same request of VMRC, to set the regulations in Virginia portions of the Potomac equivalent to PRFC's blue crab minimum size regulations. He went on to explain that for the 2007 season PRFC would have a size limit of 5¼ inches at the start of the season and that the size limit would increase during the season to 5½ inches. Mr. Carpenter explained that this size limit regulation will show an increase in the number of larger crabs that can be harvested, and at an early time in the season. This change in regulation, according to Mr. Carpenter, will be a great economic benefit for the crabbers in the Potomac River, who work mainly in a basket sales fishery. This request would mean that all crab regulations (MD DNR, PRFC, VMRC) west of Smith Point, Point Lookout would have a uniform size limit. In conclusion, he stated that Maryland DNR has not made a commitment to this, and that he is not asking for that from VMRC at this time. He also declared he would be willing to revisit CMAC members at their next meeting, if they so wished.

Chairman Robins thanked Mr. Carpenter and said that VMRC staff would have to look into this and perhaps provide the CMAC with some data at the next meeting.

There were three other issues that CMAC members brought up to be addressed at a later time. One was the use of multiple rigs, by one person, through an agent system. Another issue was adjusting the April 1st start date for harvesting. The final issue to be considered, at a later date, was appointing new members to CMAC so a quorum can be reached at meetings.

V. Next Meeting

The next meeting was set for Monday, August 21 at 7pm.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:42pm.