

Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Crab Management Advisory Committee (CMAC) Minutes
380 Fenwick Road, Fort Monroe, VA
Wednesday, June 8, 2022 – 5:00 P.M.

ATTENDANCE

Members Present

Hon. Ed Tankard
Mark Sanford
James Hudgins
Bernard Wayne Morris
Tye Burns
Chris Moore
Ernest George
Marshall Cox
Tom Powers
Peter Nixon
Kenneth Diggs

VMRC Staff Present

Pat Geer
Adam Kenyon
Shanna Madsen
Alexa Galván
Somers Smott
Joshua McGilly
Lewis Gillingham
Jill Ramsey
Andrew Button
Captain Chris Miller

Members Absent

Daniel Dise
Donald Porter Sr.
Johnny Graham

Others Present

Trenton Scott
Jay Diggs
Scott Wivell
Tim Wivell
Gerald Parks
Ian Taliaferro
Richard Murray IV
Rich Murray III
Justin Johnson
Lynnee Morris
Douglas Jenkins Sr.
Darryl Hurley II
Jim Hudgins
Jacob Jewell
Joshua McAllister
Dan Halland
Kyle Robbins
Kevin Moore
Josh Pancoke
12 members of the public via YouTube

Minutes were prepared by Somers Smott.

I. Introductions; announcements

The meeting was called to order at 5:11 P.M. Mr. Adam Kenyon, Deputy Chief of Fisheries, introduced Captain Chris Miller as the law enforcement point of contact for CMAC. DC Kenyon also outlined the plan for this meeting, reminding the committee that the last CMAC

meeting was to present the Winter Dredge Survey results and harvest numbers. The goal for this meeting was to reach consensus on management measures for 2022-2023. He explained that there are options on the table for immediate implementation, with additional options that will be discussed at a fall meeting. Finally, DC Kenyon summarized a cross jurisdictional meeting with several state agencies where it was agreed that action was necessary, but that a steadfast reduction percentage was not the main goal. In other words, non-quantifiable reductions in addition to quantifiable season/bushel limits were possible management options.

II. Approval of minutes from the May 23, 2022 meeting.

The minutes from the May 23, 2022 meeting were approved by consensus.

III. New Business

1. Discussion of potential management responses

Fisheries Management Scientist Alexa Galván presented possible management options for the 2022-2023 crab fishery. Options ranged from less to more restrictive, depending on how many future non-quantifiable reductions the committee supports for next crab season (Table 1). She further explained that the future non-quantifiable reductions need to be discussed in the fall. This meeting was entirely for changes to season dates and bushel limits, which would be voted on at the June Commission meeting.

Table 1. Management measures proposed by staff. Options A-D were presented first, and the committee suggested Option E during the meeting.

	Status Quo	With long-term changes			With some long-term changes	With no long-term changes
Option		E	A	B	C	D
Season Opens	17-Mar	17-Mar	17-Mar	17-Mar	17-Mar	1-Apr
Low Bushel Ends	31-Mar	15-May	15-May	30-Apr	30-Jun	30-Jun
Low Bushel Begins	-	1-Oct	1-Nov	16-Oct	1-Oct	1-Oct
Season Closes	30-Nov	30-Nov	15-Nov	15-Nov	15-Nov	15-Nov

Mr. Marshall Cox began by expressing concern about making strict season opening and closing dates, since the crab population relies heavily on water temperature. He explained that his first pot set of the year can range drastically because of the water temperatures, and he encouraged that the committee make a request to stop using steadfast season dates.

Mr. JC Hudgins asked why every option has status quo for the season opening date. DC Kenyon said that based on conversations at the last meeting, staff created options that protected female crabs in the fall. The committee had also suggested reducing the overexploitation in the

spring. Mr. Hudgins then asked for clarification on the closing date of November 15 across all the options. DC Kenyon explained that this is a reduction to help increase female abundance, and that staff are willing to close it earlier but not later because of the savings generated from that month. Ms. Galván further explained that there is actually more harvest in the beginning of November, but staff decided to leave those two weeks in to help harvesters.

Mr. Kenneth Diggs expressed concern that all these options only affect full-time crabbers, while part-time crabbers remain unaffected. DC Kenyon explained that reductions target the beginning and the end of the season to try to accommodate for pot placement and retrieval. He further explained that the future non-quantifiable reductions could address the part-time issue.

Mr. Mark Sanford asked how much reduction and how many watermen are affected by the closure of the second half of November. DC Kenyon said that it affects a minimal amount of watermen. Ms. Galván further clarified that it does provide savings towards the reduction and that it protects the female crabs. She also mentioned that the lower bushel limit options in the spring could help reduce overexploitation by part time crabbers that only participate during that time. Chief of Fisheries, Pat Geer, further iterated that parsing out part-time vs. full-time crabbers cannot be done at this time, and this meeting needed to focus on immediate changes for the June commission meeting.

Mr. Chris Moore suggested a new option, labelled Option E in Table 1. He suggested keeping the lower bushel limits through May and again in October, but then extending the season into the end of November. Mr. Moore asked Mr. Diggs if the lower bushel limit helped increase prices. Mr. Diggs explained that the price goes down because at that time, the crabs are imported from Louisiana. He said the highest price he could get from crabs was at the end of November. Mr. Pete Nixon said he used to catch the full bushel limit often, but he almost never catches the limits now. He believes there is a lack of market for crabs in general.

Mr. Cox asked why these reductions are needed. Ms. Galván explained reductions are necessary because of the results from the past two years' Winter Dredge Survey, the VIMS juvenile survey, and low harvest numbers. DC Kenyon added that scientists at VIMS are citing consistent decreases in crab abundance. Mr. Cox continued to say that there is already a reduction occurring because several people are not crabbing – he cites tons of crab pots out on docks all throughout Virginia. He asked what would happen if the survey came back next year with increases in abundance. DC Kenyon reminded the committee that the Commission has extended the season previously based on successful survey results. Mr. Cox asked what the staff recommendation was for the reductions. DC Kenyon said that staff prefer option A or B or something similar paired with conservative long term options. Mr. Cox expressed concern over having to implement measures now as well as later, and Chair Tankard reminded the committee that something must be done. DC Kenyon agreed that significant changes needed to be made Chesapeake Bay wide. Ms. Galván mentioned that Maryland is considering lower bushel limits for females and decreasing the season for males. Chief Geer reminded the committee about the low abundances in 1998 and how they stayed low until VMRC made changes. He said experts at VIMS are estimating a low spawning stock because of the results of the surveys. Mr. Hudgins

asked for assurance that if the population recovers, the watermen will get season time and bushel limits back. Staff agreed that that was the ultimate goal of crab management. When asked why small crabs are not making it into the fishery, Ms. Galván cited the Winter Dredge Survey pattern with juvenile abundance. She said that in years of high juvenile abundance, years of high crab harvest followed. In low juvenile abundance years, years of low crab harvest followed.

Mr. Nixon asked for the percent reductions on all the options staff presented. DC Kenyon said staff has an idea of the reduction from each option, but reminded the committee that a steadfast percentage was not the goal of management. He explained that the non-quantifiable changes were also important to conservation of the fishery. Mr. Hudgins asked about the effect of predation on the crab population. DC Kenyon agreed that it was a problem, but that it was not something staff could tackle before the June commission meeting. Ms. Galván informed the committee that she has been working on an invasive catfish workgroup to try to increase the market for catfish in Virginia. Mr. Cox asked if staff had considered changes to the sponge crab season. DC Kenyon said it was possible to change that in the future, but the only analyses completed for this month's commission meeting were seasons and bushel limits.

Mr. Doug Jenkins encouraged staff to take a deeper look at the effect of predation on the crab population. He specifically expressed concern about striped bass and crabs. He was also concerned about the lights on the end of docks across the bay. He believes the lights attract juvenile crabs, and then predators can easily access them.

Mr. Jacob Jewell disagreed with staff and believes that the proposed options are a much greater reduction than the committee realizes. He was concerned about the difference in bushel limits between license types, and believes the bigger licenses are getting a much larger reduction with the proposed bushel limits. He said he preferred no sponge crab fishery over any other option listed. DC Kenyon clarified that the green options are about a 5% reduction, the orange option is about 7%, and the red option is about 10%. The reduction amount depends on the reference year of the data. He agreed that bushel standardization is an issue and could be an option on the list for future meetings, but with harvest at an all-time low, the timing is not ideal for that change.

Mr. Gerald Parks expressed concern about predators, specifically catfish. He also believes the Commission should open the crab dredge season back up to till the bottom of the bay. He doesn't understand how removing the crab dredge fishery didn't bring back the crabs like he was promised.

Mr. Darryl Hurley explained that Virginia has the strictest laws for crabs compared to nearby states. He believes that predation is also a huge issue for the crab industry.

Mr. Hudgins asked where Option E fell in the reduction percentage scale. DC Kenyon told the committee that Option E provided about a 4-6% reduction depending on the reference year. Mr. Tom Powers reminded the committee that they would then be obligated to make further changes in the fall.

Mr. Tye Burns expressed concern about the lack of reduction proposed by Maryland. He does not believe they are doing as much as Virginia is. DC Kenyon reminded the committee that comparing the two fisheries is not always accurate since their fishery has many more crabbers and a much different male/female composition.

Mr. Cox proposed a motion – approve Option A. The motion failed due to lack of a second. Mr. Diggs and Mr. Hudgins agreed that their favored option is Option E.

Mr. Ernest George told the committee he believes that taking management measures is moving too quickly. He believes staff and the committee need to take more time to discuss and create options. Mr. Wayne Morris agreed with Mr. George and encouraged staff to deal with predation first.

Mr. Powers asked if it was possible to post two draft regulations on our website and have the commission decide at their meeting at the end of June. Chief Geer said that was not an option, and DC Kenyon told the committee that a single draft regulation must be posted by Monday.

Mr. Cox made a second motion – status quo. Mr. George seconded the motion. Mr. Diggs expressed concern about how staff and the Commission would do something anyway. Mr. Powers suggested a substitute motion to approve Option E. Mr. Diggs seconded the motion. Mr. Powers said the changes would be made, and then if the population begins recovering maybe further reductions could be avoided. Chair Tankard brought the motion to a vote, and the vote passed: 7 in favor, 3 against, and 1 abstention.

V. Other Business

Staff asked the committee to rank non-quantifiable reductions for the fall meeting. After discussion, it was determined that fixing agents is the number one issue for seven of the committee members. All committee members agreed crab sanctuary is the second highest priority. Mr. Nixon added that there needs to be a law protecting crabs above sanctuaries as well. The committee agreed pot tagging stood in the middle priority. Mr. Nixon suggested limiting how often licenses could be transferred. Mr. Sanford introduced the idea of higher penalties on crabbers breaking the law. The committee agreed.

DC Kenyon said staff would get out information for the fall meeting and that any changes would be done with time for the industry to adjust.

Mr. Powers asked for an update on the Little Creek/Fort Story closure. DC Kenyon said staff are waiting on leadership changes within the agency.

VI. Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 7:09 P.M.