

Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Blue Crab Management Advisory Committee Meeting
VMRC Conference Room
May 20, 2014

Members Present

Mark Sanford
David Bell
Tim Wivell proxy for Marshall Cox
Kenneth Diggs, Jr.
Chris Moore
Ty Farrington
G. Wayne France
Johnny Graham
Tom Powers
Ken Smith (Phone)

Members Absent

Hon. S. Lynn Haynie
Marshall Cox
Paige Hogge
Ronald Jett
John Masiak
Peter Nixon
Kevin Wade
James Close
Daniel Dise

VMRC Staff

Rob O'Reilly
Joe Cimino
Ande Ehlen
Rachael Maulorico

Others Present

John G. Boudiette
Douglas F. Jenkins, Sr.
Roger Parks
Kim Huskey
John B. Graham Jr.

Minutes were recorded by Rachael Maulorico.

I. Introductions/Announcement

The meeting was called to order at 6:08pm. Mr. Rob O'Reilly stood in as chairman for the meeting in Honorable Ms. S. Lynn Haynie's absence. Mr. O'Reilly explained that the bushel limit modifications had not yet been completed, but that the request for a June public hearing will have a broad advertisement to allow room for adjustments.

II. Approval of minutes from the April 30, 2014 meeting.

Mr. Ty Farrington recommended the addition of Chairman Close's statement regarding his opinion on the history of the peeler pot fishery. Mr. O'Reilly obliged that the previous meetings minutes will be edited and updated online. Mr. Tom Powers motioned to approve the April minutes and the minutes were approved unanimously.

III. Information Updates

Mr. O'Reilly informed the committee on the GIT meeting at VIMS June 4th-5th where blue crabs will be discussed on the 5th, and any interested committee members were encouraged to attend.

IV. Discussion: Management measures for 2014 and 2015

Mr. O'Reilly reiterated the results of the 2014 Winter Dredge Survey which presents a depleted/overfished fishery and the resulting management options that were presented in the April CMAC meeting. These options focus on an overall 10% percent reduction from 2013 harvest levels.

Potential management measures include:

1. Reduce summer 2014 bushel limits July 15-August 31
 - a. Conserves spawning crabs
2. Bay-wide November 15, 2014 closure on fall harvest of females
 - a. Conserves some spawning age females and the 2015 first-time spawning crabs that are currently juveniles
3. Crab pot season opening April 1, 2015
 - a. Conserves spawning potential but recoupment could negate this
4. Lower 2015 Crab Pot Spring Bushel Limits
 - a. Conserves spawning potential of first time spawners
5. Peeler pot season opening May 1, 2015
 - a. Lessen waste and conserve spawning potential
6. Establishment of peeler pot bushel limits
 - a. Lessen waste and conserve spawning potential

Mr. Farrington called for alternative conservation measures that are not based on bushel limits, and used establishing creek closures as an example. Mr. O'Reilly reiterated that the stock is overfished and that Virginia, the PRFC and Maryland all agreed to take a 10% harvest reduction.

Mr. Chris Moore asked for a date in which CMAC would need to propose 2015 management measures to VMRC in order to start planning ahead. Mr. O'Reilly answered that unfortunately we are bound at the moment by waiting on dredge survey results for the next year, but can implement measures for 2015 and adjust bushel limits depending on those results.

Mr. O'Reilly discussed that the VMRC is working to change the blue crab management framework to be August 1 through July 31 (or something similar) to allow time for planning after the yearly survey results are released.

Mr. Doug Jenkins from the public stated his concern over predation by rockfish and catfish, and that he and Dr. Rom Lipcius will be working on gillnet studies to begin documenting predation.

Mr. Johnny Graham feels that bushel limits will negatively affect stakeholders, and that blue crab fishery management needs to address the entire life cycle, rather than only focusing on female crabs. He stated that 2013 had been the worst year in the history of blue crab landings and considers this to be a product of poor management since 2008. He recommended raising the size limit of peeler and soft shell crabs, defining peeler crabs, and creating sanctuaries in shallow creeks to protect juveniles. These recommended management measures could assist in protecting mating and juvenile crabs, and spawning females. In addition, he explained that the current female-based plans have changed the dynamics of the fishery by moving effort from the bay and into the tributaries. He explained that his goal in recommending these options is not to hurt the peeler harvesters or any other blue crab harvester but to consider alternative management measures for the 2015 season.

Mr. Ken Diggs expressed concern over using only the VIMS Winter Dredge Survey to base management decisions. Mr. Diggs would also like to see a focus on conserving juvenile crabs, and increased management for invasive species.

Mr. Farrington requested creating a subcommittee that focuses on establishing tributary sanctuaries and begins addressing the peeler fishery. Mr. Farrington made a motion to advertise establishing a 50% reduction in bushel limits for female blue crab harvest for November 16th through November 30th, rather than a November 16th female closure. The motion was seconded by Mr. Mark Sanford, and the motion passed 7-0-1.

Mr. Sanford made a motion to establish bushel limits as of July 1 on peeler pots, and the motion was seconded by Mr. Graham. Mr. Jenkins expressed concern to the committee that the peeler run is a short time frame and bushel limits can negatively affect a peeler fisherman in cases of weather and other environmental conditions. Mr. Sanford withdrew his motion with the note that bushel limits for peeler crabs need to be discussed in the future. Mr. Graham seconded the removal.

Mr. Farrington recommended discussing peeler mesh size instead of cull rings when considering peeler management options.

V. New Business

Mr. Sanford wanted remind staff that opening the ocean front to commercial crabbing needs to be discussed sometime in the future, but recognizes that now is not the proper time.

Mr. O'Reilly mentioned that sponge crabs, sanctuaries, peeler crabs, and peeler pot mesh size all need to be addressed for the 2015 season and can be discussed at the next meeting. He recommended that the committee talk among each other to work on ideas and potential management plans for these topics.

VI. Next Meeting Date

The next CMAC meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, June 17, 2014.

VII. Meeting Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:34 pm.