

Virginia Marine Resources Commission  
Blue Crab Management Advisory Committee Meeting  
VMRC Conference Room

July 16, 2013

**Members Present**

Hon. Rick Robins (Chair)  
David Bell  
Ken Diggs, Jr.  
Ty Farrington  
Wayne France  
Ronnie Jett  
John Masiak  
Chris Moore  
Pete Nixon  
Ken Smith

**Members Absent**

Marshall Cox, Sr.  
Dan Dise  
John Graham  
Paige Hogge  
Tom Powers  
Kevin Wade

**VMRC Staff**

Rob O'Reilly  
Joe Grist  
Joe Cimino  
Reneé Hoover  
Samantha Hoover  
Stephanie Iverson  
Adam Kenyon  
Sally Roman  
Allison Watts  
Laurie Beth Williams  
MPO Chip Dize

**Others Present**

Robert Hollowell  
Douglas Jenkins  
Bill Mullis  
Roger Parks  
Mark Sanford  
Tim Wivell

The minutes were recorded by Allison Watts.

**I. Introductions/Announcements**

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm. A moment of silence was held in memory of the Hon. Joe Palmer, who passed away on July 11, 2013.

**II. Approval of minutes from the April 22, 2013 meeting**

The minutes from the April 22, 2013 meeting were approved by unanimous consent.

### **III. Update: CBSAC findings**

Mr. Joe Grist presented a summary of the final report of the 2013 Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee (CBSAC). As reviewed at the April Commission meeting, the 2012/2013 Bay-wide Winter Dredge Survey (2013 WDS) results indicated that the blue crab population is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. Overall crab abundance declined from last year, which was largely driven by the decline in juvenile abundance. Mr. Pete Nixon asked about the low abundance of male crabs in Virginia, and expressed his opinion that blue crabs are overfished. Mr. Grist explained that the reference points are based on female blue crabs, though CBSAC has developed male conservation triggers for management. Until male reference points are established, CBSAC has recommended a precautionary approach to avoid exceeding historical bounds on male exploitation rate and total crab (male and female) abundance. Mr. Nixon asked how the exploitation rate is derived for male blue crabs, and Mr. Grist explained that male blue crab harvest is divided by the total male blue crab abundance estimate. The 2013 exploitation rate estimates will not be available until 2013 harvest is known. The CBSAC report provided the recommendation that Bay-wide 2013 harvest be reduced by 10% from the 2012 estimated harvest. The bushel limits and vessel limits already implemented for 2013 in Virginia satisfied this harvest reduction.

### **IV. Discussion of possible future management options**

#### **a. Dredge fishery season (2013/2014)**

#### **b. Crab pot fishery, extension of season**

#### **c. Conservation equivalency: 2014 daily bushel limits**

Mr. Rob O'Reilly explained that staff would like to present any dredge season recommendations to the Commission in August to advertise for a public hearing in October, and then meet with an ad hoc panel to determine aspects of a 2013/2014 dredge season. Staff will provide trip and harvest data for past blue crab dredge fishery participants to the panel and Commission in determining who will be eligible to participate in the 2013/2014 season, if opened. Mr. Ken Smith stated that the Blue Crab Industry Panel has been discussing the dredge fishery, and asked if this data can be provided to the panel. Hon. Rick Robins asked if 2013 catch data will be available for later deliberations on crab management this year, and Mr. O'Reilly responded that if harvest data are complete through July, staff has been able to project the year's final harvest.

Mr. Grist presented the suite of management options under development by staff, and began by summarizing the management measures in place for 2013, including bushel and vessel limits. No blue crab pot season extension is in place at this time for 2013. He reiterated that CBSAC has recommended maintaining female crab harvest at 2012 levels, and any changes to blue crab management will require conservation equivalency measures. Staff presented thirteen preliminary options to the Blue Crab Management Advisory Committee (CMAC) with various scenarios that provide for a 2013/2014 crab dredge fishery season and a crab pot season extension in 2013. For the thirteen options, Mr. Grist explained the data sources used for the harvest projections and associated bushel limits required in 2014 for conservation equivalency.

Mr. Ken Diggs, Jr. asked if staff could create a scenario to allow a winter dredge season if the blue crab pot season ended on November 30. Mr. Smith asked if eligible crab licensees could declare whether or not they will not be using a license for the upcoming year, which could move that license onto a waiting list for the year. Mr. Grist explained that the Potomac River Fisheries Commission (PRFC) has attempted that in the past, but Virginia has a much larger fishery. It would be difficult to implement that for next year. Hon. Robins added that there is still a need for a long-term solution to latent effort, which is to be addressed by the industry panel. Mr. Robins also asked staff to re-cast the projections for the 85-pot and 127-pot license categories because of the implausibility of reported catch for those categories. Mr. Chris Moore recommended that this exercise should be done for all license categories, including peeler pot. Mr. John Masiak stated his opinion that full-time watermen with 85-pot licenses should be allowed to have more pots, and Hon. Robins explained that the influx of effort would be problematic. Mr. Diggs suggested another management option idea that would begin the dredge fishery season on December 10, with no crab pot season extension. Mr. Grist replied that it would be easier to start with an allocation of harvest to the dredge fishery, and then decide during which months that harvest should occur.

Mr. Doug Jenkins from the public stated his opinion that the main cause of crab decline is predation by puppy drum, blue catfish and striped bass. Mr. Robert Hollowell added that in addition to red drum, warm winters are causing problems for blue crabs.

#### **d. Limitations on the use of agents in 2014**

Mr. O'Reilly reminded CMAC of its decision to limit blue crab license eligibility for agents in 2013 to those who had an approved agent in 2012, plus a ten percent first-come, first-serve buffer. In addition, Commission-granted hardship exemptions were allowed. Mr. O'Reilly added that this new agenting system has not been contentious in 2013, and that he is aware of only two harvesters who were denied the use of agents this year. Of the 168 licensees eligible to register an agent in 2013, 134 have done so. Staff suspects that some crab licensees responded that they did want to use an agent in 2013, without any real intentions of using an agent, in order to preserve their eligibility. For 2014, staff recommends another discussion on how to limit the number agents. Mr. Nixon asked about eliminating agent use entirely, and Mr. O'Reilly said this would be difficult because of the long-standing use of agents in the blue crab fishery. Mr. Robins added that the original provisions for agency were as a mechanism for temporary situations, as opposed to full-time use of agents. This initial step toward limiting the number of agents in the crab fishery is a step forward.

#### **V. New Business**

Mr. Smith asked for clarification about the formation of an ad hoc dredge panel mentioned earlier in the meeting. Mr. O'Reilly explained that while it hasn't been constructed yet, its purpose will be to advise CMAC and the Commission on when and how to open the dredge fishery. Mr. Smith explained that the Blue Crab Industry Panel has been discussing the dredge fishery for months, and was unaware that VMRC staff was simultaneously developing options for a re-opening. Mr. O'Reilly explained the ad-hoc dredge panel will be comprised of experts

in the dredge fishery field. Hon. Robins added that this specific engagement would involve VIMS and VMRC staff, as well as past crab dredgers who aren't necessarily involved in the industry panel. The Blue Crab Industry Panel will not be purposefully excluded.

Mr. Ty Farrington asked for information on crab licensees who use an agent full time or just part time. Mr. O'Reilly stated that staff can provide CMAC with how many weeks each year each harvester uses an agent. Additionally, Mr. Farrington announced the next Blue Crab Industry Panel meeting would occur on July 28, 2013 at the Hampton Crowne Plaza.

## **VI. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 pm.