

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

November 16, 2012

**Members Present**

Hon. Rick Robins  
Hon. Joe Palmer  
David Bell  
Marshall Cox  
Ken Diggs Jr.  
Dan Dise  
John Graham  
Ty Farrington  
Ronnie Jett  
John Masiak  
Chris Moore  
Pete Nixon  
Tom Powers  
Kevin Wade

**VMRC Staff**

Rob O'Reilly  
Joe Grist  
John Bull  
Joe Cimino  
Lewis Gillingham  
Samantha Hoover  
Stephanie Iverson  
Adam Kenyon  
Laurie Williams

**Members Absent**

Paige Hogge  
Ken Smith  
Gregory Finney

**Others Present**

Jerome Bonnaville  
Trevor Bonnaville  
Charlie Gregory  
Kim Huskey  
Dr. Rom Lipcius  
Danielle McCullough  
Dirk Sanford  
Mark Sanford  
Mike Seebo

The minutes were recorded by Adam Kenyon. A complete recording of the meeting is available on the VMRC agency website.

## **I. Introductions/Announcements**

Hon. Rick Robins called the meeting to order at 3:05 pm. It was noted that Hon. Joe Palmer, Dan Dise, and Ronnie Jett were all present for the meeting via conference call. VMRC staff introduced and welcomed new CMAC members David Bell, Ken Diggs Jr., John Masiak, and Kevin Wade.

## **II. Approval of Minutes**

The minutes from the March 20, 2012, April 19, 2012, June 19, 2012, and September 17, 2012 were approved by unanimous consent.

## **III. UPDATE: Crab Dredge Gear Study**

Mr. Rob O'Reilly gave a brief update on the status of the Crab Dredge Gear Study. Mr. O'Reilly said that the study was set to begin on December 17, 2012 and continue through the first week of March for a total of 42 sampling days. The four fishermen selected to participate in the Crab Dredge Gear Study have been selected and will be allowed an average of 40 bushels of crab per day. The study will estimate the amount of incidental crab mortality in the crab dredge fishery and provide this additional scientific information to the Commission for consideration in season closures.

## **IV. 2012 Expected Crab Harvest**

Mr. O'Reilly provided an updated estimate of blue crab harvest during 2012. Staff used data from the Mandatory Harvest Reporting Database through July 2012 and estimated harvest from the remaining months in 2012 using a proportion of harvest rates from the 2010 season. Staff estimated that approximately 23 million pounds of blue crab will be harvested in 2012. This estimate would be down about 6 million pounds from 2011 (29 million pounds) and 2010 (30 million pounds).

## **V. Proposal to Extend the Crab Pot Fishery Season Through December 15**

Mr. O'Reilly updated CMAC on Maryland's decision to extend its crab pot season by six working days to compensate for missed days during Hurricane Sandy. Instead of closing the crab season on November 20, 2012, for female crab harvest, staff will recommend to the Commission to extend the Virginia crab pot harvest on female crabs an additional six working days to November 28, 2012. This extension will mimic the extension enacted by Maryland to compensate for any lost fishing days during Hurricane Sandy. The CMAC reviewed the situation and supported staff's recommendation by consent.

Mr. Joe Grist presented various bushel limit scenarios to CMAC that would allow the commercial crab pot fishery to remain open until December 15, 2012 while maintaining conservation equivalency. Mr. Grist reminded CMAC that this issue was first brought up by the committee as a step towards the industry establishing a year-round blue crab fishery in Virginia.

He explained that since staff was already recommending to the Commission six additional days of female blue crab harvest in late November that any extension beyond that would require a conservation equivalency measure. Mr. Grist said that staff estimated 349,380 pounds of blue crabs would be harvested from November 28 through December 15, 2012. To compensate for this additional harvest in 2012, Mr. Grist presented six different scenarios that would implement a conservation equivalency measure of bushel limits on individual pot category licenses. Three of the scenarios would implement bushel limits from November 28, 2012 through December 15, 2012 and through the 2013 crab pot season. Three other scenarios would only implement bushel limits during 2013. Bushel limits during 2013 were presented as being enforced either from March 17 through May 15, March 17 through May 31, or March 17 through November 30.

Mr. Ty Farrington asked if this extension would be for only 2012 or would this be for every season and would it be for both male and female crabs. Mr. Grist responded that this would be just for 2012 (subsequent extensions would have to be revisited annually) and it was for both male and female crabs combined. Mr. O'Reilly added that bushel limits in 2013 could potentially be brought back to the Commission, in the early part of 2013 for reexamination, once the actual harvest for 2012 is known.

Hon. Rick Robins asked if staff could show how many harvesters were actually harvesting in the spring at a rate that would be greater than the imposed bushel limit. Mr. Grist presented a series of graphs by license category that showed that a very small proportion of each license category will be limited.

Mr. Mark Sanford, from the public, commented that he felt that bushel limits were the way to go and that he supported the year round bushel limits in 2013. He said that the price for crabs during the fall is really good since December is a high demand time.

Mr. Farrington said that he thought the season extension would be a good thing for a one year trial and that the bushel limits that would be implemented may serve as a good control on the harvest of some of the lower pot category licenses. He said that he was not in favor of any bushel limits in 2012 but would support bushel limits in 2013 only.

Mr. Johnny Graham stated that since the water temperature was so cold, he did not believe that there would be very much harvest of blue crabs this fall. He stated that he felt bushel limits were a separate issue from the December extension and should be addressed at a separate meeting. Mr. Graham made a motion to leave the season as it is with only the additional six working days added. The motion was seconded by Mr. Dan Dise.

Mr. Farrington made a substitute motion to support an extension of the blue crab pot season from November 28, 2012 through December 15, 2012 with bushel limits compensating for an extra

harvest during March 17, 2013 through November 30, 2013. Bushel limits would be enforced depending on license category and would be as follows: 27 bushels for Crab Pot 85 or less licensees, 32 bushels for Crab Pot 127 or less licensees, 38 bushels for Crab Pot 170 or less licensees, 45 bushels for Crab Pot 255 or less licensees, and 55 bushels for Crab Pot 425 or less licensees. The committee voted 7 in favor and 3 opposed to make the substitute motion the main motion. The new main motion then passed 8 in favor and 3 opposed.

#### **VI. Proposal for Back Bay Crab Gear Management**

Mr. O'Reilly gave a brief review of proposed management in the Albemarle Watershed. This issue stemmed from House Bill 238, which clarified the jurisdiction as authority in Back Bay, stating that the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries had authority over all finfish fisheries and VMRC had authority of blue crab fisheries. CMAC approved a motion by consent to support staff recommendation to allow only crab pots and peeler pots in Back Bay.

#### **VII. Reconsideration of Crab (and Other) Fisheries Violations in Terms of Sanctions**

Mr. O'Reilly briefly explained that Commissioner Travelstead has asked staff to work with industry and law enforcement to reevaluate the current fisheries violations in terms of sanctions. The committee agreed to address this issue at the next CMAC meeting.

#### **VIII. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:21 PM. The next CMAC meeting will be scheduled at a later time.