

Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Blue Crab Management Advisory Committee Meeting
VMRC Conference Room
November 3, 2014

Members Present

Hon. S. Lynn Haynie
Marshall Cox
Kenneth Diggs
Daniel Dise
Wayne France
Ernest George
Chris Moore
Wayne Morris
Peter Nixon
Mark Sanford
Ken Smith
Kevin Wade
Viola West

Members Absent

Donald Porter Sr.
Tom Powers
James Close
Johnny Graham

VMRC Staff

Joe Cimino
Ande Ehlen
Joe Grist
Rachael Maulorico
Rob O'Reilly
Sally Roman

Others Present

Paula Jasinski
Tim Wivell
Douglas F. Jenkins, Sr.
Ronnie West
Curtis Jenkins
Michelle Squires
Lynnee Squires

Minutes were recorded by Rachael Maulorico.

I. Introductions/Announcement

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 pm by the Honorable. Lynn Haynie. Ms. Haynie welcomed 4 new members to the committee, Ms. Viola West, Mr. Ernest George, Mr. Wayne Morris, and Mr. Donald Porter. Mr. Rob O'Reilly explained to the committee that the role of the VMRC staff, CMAC, and VIMS is to advise the Commission on blue crab related issues. The goal of the next few CMAC meetings will be to discuss and propose regulatory amendments that CMAC will recommend to the Commission by late winter, to set in place by spring 2015.

II. Approval of minutes from the June 17, 2014 meeting.

The minutes from the June 17, 2014 meeting were approved by unanimous consent.

III. Staff presentation of recent harvest and winter dredge survey results (2013-2014)

Mr. Joe Cimino presented Virginia blue crab harvest data by gear for years 2008 through 2013. He explained that preliminary harvest data for to data for 2014 shows relatively low harvest in the spring, a summer harvest comparable to 2013, and a productive fall harvest for 2014. Ms. Sally Roman presented information on the Winter Dredge Survey design and discussed the results of the survey for December 2013 through March2014. According to the 2014 Winter Dredge Survey results, the Chesapeake Bay blue crab fishery is not currently overfished but the stock is depleted. .

IV. Staff presentation of past and current conservation management measures adopted by the Commission.

Mr. O'Reilly presented the history of blue crab management measures in Virginia. He explained that fisheries managers cannot control abundance of the stock, but can have to rely on reacting to abundance fluctuations by aiming conservation efforts at protecting the spawning stock each year. Mr. Marshall Cox requested that staff provide a copy of the history of blue crab management measures to all CMAC members, so that the members can review the regulatory history and discuss measures may be effective to continue with in the future. Staff provided this history later in the meeting. Mr Cox also reminded the committee members to consider how and future proposed management measures will effect various geographic locations in the bay differently. Mr. O'Reilly asked the committee to focus on current regulations when discussing amendments. Mr. O'Reilly informed the committee that the entire bay-wide jurisdiction is working on developing management measurres on a seasonal basis from July through June the following year in order to allow greater time between the winter dredge survey results and the placement of conservation measures.

V. Discussion of Industry Requests

A. Up-River/Temporary Sanctuaries

Mr. Joe Grist introduced the topic of up-river or shallow water sanctuaries. He reminded the committee that this has been a frequently-mentioned topic by industry in previous committee and Commission meetings. Mr. Chris Moore asked staff if adjusting the size of the current female sanctuaries in order to allow for proposed shallow water sanctuaries is a possibility. Mr. Grist responded that the CMAC may discuss any type of adjustments, and that seasonal adjustments may be the easiest to

work with. He reminded the committee that these sanctuaries have been proposed by industry in the past in order to give protection to male crabs and alleviate congestion in shallow water areas. Mr. Wayne France questioned if the discussion of a new conservation measure was even necessary if the results of the most recent winter dredge survey have not been released. Mr. O'Reilly replied that staff is requesting the CMAC to review current conservation measures and deliberate on their effectiveness, and develop new management measures that the committee deem effective. Management measures in the past few years have been reactionary and now is the time for the committee to discuss which measures are working and which need to be adjusted. Mr. Cox requested that staff present the CMAC with harvest data that shows where male crabs are being harvested in Virginia, in order aid the committee in discussing possible sanctuary locations. Mr. Nixon stated that creek systems have become overly congested since the establishment of the crab sanctuary in the bay, which has made males increasingly difficult to find. Additionally, this congestion blocks crabs from entering and exiting the creeks and rivers during migration.

Mr. Doug Jenkins, from the public, commented that in order to discuss juvenile protection, the Winter Dredge Survey conducted by VIMS will need to have improved abundance estimates in the shallower creeks. He also stated that upriver sanctuaries will reduce the already short season for those who harvest up the rivers, because these areas are temperature driven. He suggested that if upriver sanctuaries are discussed, they need to be balanced with adjustments in the current sanctuary or elimination of the catch of sponge crabs.

Dr. Rom Lipcius from VIMS explained that although male abundance is low, the exploitation rate has remained steady for the past 10 or 15 years. Additionally, the best available science does not suggest sperm limitation. He does not see strong scientific support for the protection of males. Mr. Wade asked if predation has anything to do with abundance in the river systems. Dr. Lipcius replied that he does think predation is a major driver in abundance, and VIMS is currently evaluating the impacts of predation and habitat on crab abundance. He recommended that bycatch by each gear may need to be evaluated, and commented on the low bycatch amounts from the crab dredge gear.

B. Mandatory Buyer Reporting

Mr. Joe Cimino presented information on buyers within Virginia who purchase blue crabs from harvesters. He explained that 90% of blue crab sales in the last 3 years have come from either the top 42 buyers (buy more than 100,000 pounds) or from retail, out-of-state, or personal use. If buyer reporting becomes necessary in the future, it will be a larger administrative undertaking than any other quota managed

species currently in place and will require the large amount of sales categorized as retail to be reported and accounted for.

C. Sponge Crab Regulations

Mr. Cox recommended addressing sponge crabs, sanctuaries, and pot tagging at the next meeting. Committee discussion led to a decision to establish an informal working-group meeting in December that will allow the committee members to talk candidly about issues and discuss any regulations they would like to address in the next few meetings.

D. Winter Dredge Fishery Trigger Analysis

Ms. Roman presented an update on the development of trigger options that will aid the Commission in deciding when an opening of the winter dredge fishery could occur. These options include 4 triggers that evaluate spawning age female crabs in the Winter Dredge Survey and the exploitation fraction each year. These options have been approved by the Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee (CBSAC). Mr. Nixon asked if the current political landscape will support a dredge fishery opening. Mr. O'Reilly replied that the mortality study provides enough data to show that the dredge fishery is a viable fishery that can be well managed. Under the conditions established by the triggers staff can support an opening of the fishery.

Mr. Chris Moore asked how opening the fishery will happen once the trigger is hit. Mr. O'Reilly gave an example that there could be a 1.5 million pound quota given to the dredge fishery, if that is what the Commission favors. Fisheries management staff will project harvest by all other gears in order to manage them with bushel limits and other conservation measures that are already in place.

VI. New Business

Dr. Lipcius requested CMAC to recommend to the Commission a mandatory turtle exclusion device in all recreational crab pots for the conservation of diamond back terrapins. He reported that his studies show that commercial pot gears do not impact the turtle population, and therefore would not need the turtle exclusion device. The CMAC requested that Dr. Lipcius and staff write the recommendation to present at the next meeting and the committee may be able to vote on it then.

VII. Next Meeting Date

The next CMAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, December 4, 2014 at 4:00 PM.

VIII. Meeting Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:34 pm.