

VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION
FINFISH MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

April 19, 2005 - 6:00 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

Hon. Russell Garrison
Hon. Ernest Bowden Jr.
Jeff Deem
Douglas Jenkins Sr.
David Agee (for Dr. Ken Neill)
Samuel Swift
Robert Weagley
Wyn Holbrook
Tom Powers
Chris Vaughan
Walter Rogers
William Laine Jr.

MEMBERS ABSENT

William Burress
Pete Nixon

VMRC STAFF

Jack Travelstead
Rob O'Reilly
Roy Insley
Ellen Cosby
Lewis Gillingham
Kenny Oliver

I. Introductions; Announcements

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chairman Russell Garrison.

Jack Travelstead announced there was an ASMFC public hearing on American eels and three people showed up with good comments. Mr. Travelstead distributed copies of the ASMFC American Eel Public Information Document and a hand-out from the Delaware Valley Fish Company. He said that the American eel is being considered for the Endangered Species List, but it may only apply to certain areas such as New England and the Great Lakes where the eels appear to be in trouble. Committee members were asked to review the documents.

II. Approval of minutes from the February 15, 2005 meeting

The minutes from the February 15, 2005 meeting were approved as written.

III. Old Business

A. Gill Net Marking Issues

Chairman Garrison stated that he needs enlightenment on how gill nets are set.

Ernie Bowden responded that they have to be set with the tide.

Doug Jenkins commented that in the Potomac River, they have to use red and green flags to denote which end is nearshore and offshore. There is a problem if you set it up and down the river.

Chairman Garrison reported that the problem he heard from gill netters is treble hooks caught in the nets.

Tom Powers said some gill nets appear to be set in random patterns.

Mr. Jenkins responded that recreational fishermen need to stay away from gill nets.

Chairman Garrison suggested that commercial gill netters could take weekends off.

Bobby Weagley stated that part of the problem is that no information about gill net markings is distributed to the general public.

Mr. Travelstead replied that we do have a gill net summary report that is available on request, but it is designed more for the commercial fishermen. He said we could put gill net marking information into the Saltwater Recreational Fishing Booklet and the Anglers Guide (currently being revised).

Sam Swift noted there is also a problem with fish dragging a line with a lure that gets tangled in the gill net.

Jeff Deem asked Mr. Travelstead for a chance to review the revised Anglers Guide before it is published.

B. Striped Bass Updates

Mr. Travelstead stated that staff is still waiting for the final 2004 recreational statistics from the NMFS, but it is not finalized yet. On the commercial side, poundage weight programs are being studied by Ernie's special striped bass management committee. Rick Robins drafted a compromise option at the last striped bass meeting and copies will be distributed to this committee for review. Staff favors a weight quota only if the provisions are enforceable.

Rick Robins briefly reviewed his proposal for this committee, including the IVR system. He said that fishermen would be required to call their striped bass harvest in on a daily basis. In addition, there would be substantial penalties for violators. Staff has not commented on his proposal yet and there is some concern about self-marketers.

Mr. Travelstead responded that we need two IVR systems, one for fishermen and one for buyers. We want to make sure the system will work, before changing over to it. The proposal also includes a maximum gill net mesh size of 6 3/4", but it would need time to be phased in. Another issue is the illegal use of Bay tags in the ocean and the illegal harvest of ocean fish by Bay fishermen. We need to propose some solutions, such as:

- 1) Establish separate seasons for the Bay and ocean, and allot one type of tag at a time;
- 2) Eliminate transit permits; and
- 3) Set mesh size restrictions, etc.

Mr. Travelstead noted that the problems occur in the early part of the season. The law now says that you cannot possess Bay-tagged fish in the ocean unless you have a transit permit, but everyone has one.

Mr. Powers remarked that the intent was to help people who docked their boat there (e.g. Rudee Inlet); we also need to look at gill net mesh size limitations in the Bay.

Mr. Bowden stated that we will still catch a few big fish with a smaller mesh size, but there is a difference between fishing in the Bay and the ocean. The striped bass committee meetings are open to the public, so anyone may attend. We need to phase in any net size limit because some fishermen have made recent investments in large mesh rigs.

Mr. Powers asked if the striped bass committee has discussed how to cover costs? He expressed concern that the burden should be on a specific fishery.

Mr. Travelstead responded that there is another committee looking at license fee increases. They have had three meetings so far, and will next look at each license and it's history.

By the May FMAC meeting, Mr. Travelstead said he will have something for this committee to consider for the recreational striped bass fall season.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Sheepshead Issues

Lewis Gillingham distributed a hand-out and briefed members on life history of sheepshead and other states restrictions. He reported on the recreational harvest data and the commercial landings for the last ten years. It was noted that sheepshead are a fairly rare catch in Virginia, therefore the numbers are imprecise. Also, ODU has not sampled sheepshead for age and growth studies.

Jeff Deem stated that some of the recreational fishermen are meeting with Dr. Cynthia Jones about ODU sampling sheepshead. They are concerned about the fishery wiping out the bigger fish and may recommend a modest creel limit.

Mr. Powers said this is similar to spadefish. We need to figure out how to keep it a quality fishery and not mess up the stocks.

B. Information on Tagging Highly Migratory Species

Mr. Gillingham explained that in the early 1980s, he worked with Dr. Birdsong on a survey for NMFS on bluefin tuna. Now it is a highly internationally regulated fishery. Hand-outs were distributed to committee members on highly migratory species. Mr. Gillingham went on to report that a free permit was issued initially. However, now a Highly Migratory Permit requires every angler to call in bluefin tuna catch (except in MD & NC).

In North Carolina in 1998, they started a pilot survey, which required anglers to fill out a catch card and then obtain a tag for each fish. All the fishermen and tackle shops supported this program. Consequently, it is still ongoing.

In Maryland there was concern with the accuracy of NMFS reports, so they set up their own program as well. All tuna must come through Ocean City, MD so it was feasible to design a program of catch cards and tags in Ocean City. Maryland drives the southern quota. Their program costs between \$25,000 - \$35,000 and is labor-intensive, but it is working.

Bob Pride, a member of the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council, spoke about the possibility of setting up something for Virginia. He stated that the surveys are not always accurate. He asked Jack Travelstead to find out what the other states are doing. He mentioned that we have a call-in system already for marlin and bluefin tuna (24 hours to call in); however, there is no incentive to call in. In Virginia, we have a lot of ports where tuna could be landed, which makes it complicated. He even knows of a boat that leaves from Middlesex County to fish for tuna.

Mr. Pride made a proposal: start with bluefin tuna and marlin. We have our tournament weigh stations that we could stock with catch cards and tags. We could do multi-years, so it would be less costly. We need to get a better handle on catch. There could be thousands of fish landed in Virginia. You would turn in a catch card and get a tag.

Mr. Travelstead said there were two main issues:

- 1) Do you favor it as a regulatory issue?
- 2) Would the Recreational Fund be willing to spend money? How many sites would we need?

Mr. Deem stated that measuring bluefin tuna is a problem. Several different techniques were discussed.

Mr. Bowden spoke about the problem in Chincoteague with only one weigh station.

Chairman Garrison said that we can bring this issue back at the next meeting. He spoke to the members about membership requirements. If you miss three meetings with no excuse, you will be replaced. He thanked the current members for their recommendations that have helped the Commission.

V. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting was scheduled for May 17, 2005 at 6:00 pm.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:25 pm.