

VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION

FINFISH ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

VMRC CONFERENCE ROOM

August 19, 2003

MEMBERS PRESENT

Peter Nixon
James Kellum
Robert Weagley
Wynston Holbrook
Ken Neill
Hon. Gordon Birkett
Hon. Russell Garrison
Douglas Jenkins
Tom Powers
Chris Vaughan
Sam Swift
Jeff Deem
Lyell Jett
Hon. William Laine, Jr.

VMRC STAFF

Jack Travelstead
Rob O'Reilly
Roy Insley
Warner Rhodes
Lewis Gillingham

I. Introductions, Announcements

The Chair, the Hon. Russell Garrison, called the meeting to order at 7:05 P.M.

II. Approval of the minutes from the July 15, 2003 meeting

The minutes were approved without modification.

III. Old Business

A. Continued discussion and recommendations on SAV and Haul Seine Issues

Jack Travelstead reminded FMAC that this committee, the Commission and the Haul Seine Task Force had been working on these issues for several months and no clear solution has yet to appear. Mr. Travelstead said staff held a meeting with the task force, which includes haul seine industry members, recreational fishermen, conservation organization leaders and members of the public, on August 11, 2003. At that meeting, Dr. Orth provided his latest interpretation regarding prop scarring on the SAV beds. The diverse group developed six scenarios to resolve prop scarring in SAV beds. The proposals ranged from immediately prohibiting haul seining in SAV beds where scarring was prevalent to delaying any modification of present restrictions until VIMS has analyzed the aerial photos taken in 2002 and 2003.

Mr. Travelstead stated the haul seine fishery will end in about four weeks and will not start again until April 2003. Dr. Orth has indicated the aerial photographs taken in 2002 and 2003 can be analyzed by January 2004. Given this information, staff feels it is in everyone's best interest for the Commission to delay a decision on this matter, until data from 2002 and 2003 can be considered. The Commission would still be able to take action in 2003 before haul seine fishing begins in April 2004. Mr. Travelstead stated the real solution was for the haul seine fishermen to voluntarily modify their operations to lessen the impact to the grass beds.

Pete Nixon made the following **motion**:

Delay a recommendation on this until Dr. Orth has evaluated the 2002 and 2003 aerial photographs, sometime after January 1, 2003. The motion carried 11-0 with one abstention.

Roy Insley (Director, Plans & Statistics) introduced himself, as many of the Finfish members are newly appointed, and asked to address the Committee. Mr. Insley stated several haul seine fishermen have spoken to him since the August 11 meeting and indicated their willingness to modify their operations to reduce impact on the grass beds. Additionally, individuals will be seeking Sea Grant funding to examine and identify appropriate gear modifications. Mr. Insley concluded the fishermen have indicated their desire to work with VMRC to find a solution to the grass bed-scarring problem.

B. Continued discussion and recommendations on 2004 commercial black sea bass management provisions

Mr. Travelstead provided FMAC with a handout containing twenty 'suggestions' for changes to the 2004 black sea bass fishery, developed during a meeting with the black sea bass industry on August 13. Additionally, copies of letters addressing this issue received since the August 13 meeting were attached. Some of the suggested regulatory changes were specific to the present fishery, while other suggestions addressed the allocation of the anticipated 18% increase in black sea bass commercial quota in 2004. Staff has requested additional data

from NMFS, in order to evaluate the suggestions. Once this information is acquired, staff will need time to evaluate the various options. Once this is completed, at least one more black sea bass industry meeting will be held. Staff will present those results to FMAC. Staff will most likely request the Commission advertise a wide array of options for a public hearing in September.

Chairman Garrison recognized Harry Doernte (commercial black sea bass hook-and-line-fishermen) in the audience. Mr. Doernte attended the August 13 meeting and cautioned FMAC to view the list of options as merely a shopping list, as all suggestions were listed, and none had been presented with any detail.

IV. New Business

A. Possession of Bluefish Fillets

Copies of 4 VAC 20-580-10 ET SEQ., "Pertaining to the Alteration of Finfish," were distributed to Finfish. This item arose from an incident where a MPO warned a recreational fisherman (who was using cut bluefish for bait) that he was required to keep the carcass from all bluefish that had been filleted. Mr. Travelstead stated staff had reviewed the regulation and discussed the issue with Col. Steve Bowman. Apparently, the officer had misinterpreted the requirements for finfish, such as bluefish, which are managed by a possession limit but no minimum size requirement. Therefore, the issue had been resolved and no action or discussion was needed by FMAC.

Following the resolution of the bluefish fillet issue, a discussion ensued, regarding the 20% reduction in the recreational striped bass fishery, scheduled for 2004. Rob O'Reilly addressed the FMAC and stated the reduction was based on a lower quota for 2004, as determined by Maryland's Harvest Control Model which projects an exploitable stock biomass (striped bass 18 inches or greater make-up the exploitable stock in the Bay). Virginia is waiting for additional, critical data from NMFS, which should be available in early September. Mr. O'Reilly assured the FMAC a wide spectrum of options would be considered including "large size limits coupling with fewer fishing days." Mr. O'Reilly said the data and analysis would be presented to FMAC at a later date.

V. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting date will be Tuesday, September 16, 2003, 7 PM.

VI. Adjournment

Chairman Garrison adjourned the meeting at 8:30 P.M.