

DRAFT MINUTES
RFAB PUBLIC COMMENT SESSION
March10, 2003

MEMBERS PRESENT

Edward Rhodes
Charles Randolph
Jesse Duell
Jim Deibler
Carolyn Brown
Carlisle Bannister
John Barr

MEMBERS ABSENT

Andy Ligon
George Hudgins

At 7:09 pm acting chairman Edward Rhodes called the meeting to order. Mr. Rhodes then asked Mr. Jack Travelstead to give a briefing on the current Wallop-Breaux funding situation.

Mr. Travelstead stated that the State of Virginia gets about 3.5 to 4.5 million annually from Wallop-Breaux funds. He stated that the overall state allotment was down, but the state saltwater percentage was increased from 24% TO 29%. As a result, there is more money available for other projects. Mr. Travelstead proposed to use these extra funds to supplement the Finfish Ageing Lab at ODU. This will reduce the amount requested for the Finfish ageing project from \$248,320 to \$62,080. In addition Mr. Travelstead added the VIMS Trawl survey will also receive alternate funding and its request from the license fund will be reduced.

Mr. Rhodes then asked Mr. Cory Routh to give the status of the Virginia Saltwater Recreational Fishing Development Fund. Mr. Routh stated that there will be \$1,585,697 available for projects in September of 2003.

Mr. Routh then asked for approval of the minutes from the January 13, 2003 meeting. Mr. Randolph made a motion to approve the minutes, and Mr. Deibler seconded the motion. The committee voted unanimously to approve the draft minutes as official.

Mr. Routh then asked for presentations from the three applicants that did not present at the January RFAB meeting.

V. Gloucester Point Boating Access

Mr. Bill Whitley made the presentation on behalf of the Gloucester Point board of supervisors. Mr. Whitley stated that boaters from 38 Virginia Counties use the facility. Mr. Whitley stated that the requested funds would be increased from \$75,000 to \$150,000. Mr. Whitley stated that public support for the improvements to the facility was high.

K. Pamunkey Indian Hatchery

Chief Warren Cook made the presentation on behalf of the Pamunkey Indian Hatchery. Mr. Cook stated that the facility is an important educational project for the surrounding schools. Mr. Cook stated that shad was an important forage fish for both saltwater and freshwater ecosystems. Mr. Cook stated that the total budget for the project is \$30,000, and they average 3 to 5 million fry each year. He stated that the facility has been stocking shad in the river since 1918.

H. and I. Eastern Shore Anglers Children's Tournament

Mr. Bill Mariner presented on behalf of the Eastern Shore Anglers Club. He is requesting \$800 for each project to provide t-shirts, prizes, and food for the children. Mr. Deibler asked how many children participate. Mr. Mariner said that 15-20 kids participate in each event.

Public Comment: Please note that most of the CCA comments were reiterations of this associations written comments, listed in appendix 1.

A. Estimating Relative Juvenile Abundance of Recreationally Important Finfish.

Marcel Montane of VIMS stated that VIMS has secured one year of funding for the VIMS trawl survey. He also stated that they may not get funding for subsequent years and may return to the RFAB to request funding. Mr. Montane requested that the RFAB approve funding for a few months prior to receiving the federal funding to cover the lag in receiving federal funding.

Mr. Larry Snyder of the CCA reiterated written comments that were submitted by the CCA.

B. Support of Finfish Ageing

Mr. Bob Pride of the CCA also reiterated the written comments, but added that the VMRC should continue to look for funding from the commercial sector to fund these projects.

C. Boat scarring Effects on SAV

Mr. Larry Snyder repeated written comments submitted by the CCA.

D. Enhancing SAV Habitat.

Mr. Larry Snyder reiterated written CCA comments.

E. Monitoring Relative Abundance of YOY American Eel.

Mr. Pride reiterated written CCA comments. Mr. Travelstead added there may be some commercial funds available for this project.

F. 2003 Wallop-Breaux Match

No public comments.

G. Capital District Kiwanis Club Children's Clinic.

Mr. Deibler asked if the \$3699 requested for the trailer was to buy it or to rent it. Mr. Brown said that it was to buy it.

Mr. Hayden reiterated written comments made by the CCA.

H. Sunshine Children's Fishing Program.

Dr. Bob Allen of the Peninsula Saltwater Sports Fishing Association stated that their organization supports projects G, H, I, and J.

I. Morley's Wharf Children's Fishing Tournament.

J. Saxis Children's Fishing Tournament.

Mr. Hayden reiterated the CCA's written comments for both projects H, I, and J.

K. Pamunkey Shad Restoration.

Dr. Allen stated that the PSSFA does not support this request.

Mr. Hayden reiterated CCA written comments.

L. Human Health Issue Related to Mycobacteriosis in Striped Bass.

Mr. Pride reiterated written comments received from the CCA.

M. Determining Stock Status of Tautog in Virginia's Waters

No comments made.

N. Genetic Analysis of Population Structuring Within the Cobia.

Mr. Snyder reiterated written CCA comments.

O. Establishment of a Chesapeake Bay Trophic Interaction Lab.

Mr. Pride reiterated CCA written comment.

P. Daily movements of Age Two Striped Bass in the Potomac River.

No public comments.

Q. Chincoteague Curtis Merritt Harbor Restrooms.

Mr. Dan Haworth of Senator Nick Rerras Office, stated that the funds would not necessarily be used for the restrooms but used for boating related areas.

Mr. Snyder reiterated the CCA written comments.

Dr. Allen stated that the PSSFA was opposed to this project.

R. Development of Molecular Tools for *in situ* Hybridization Studies of Mycobacteriosis.

No public comments

S. Little Island Fishing Pier Facility Improvements.

Mr. Craig Lafferty of Virginia Beach stated that because of the sand replacement on the beach at Sandbridge, the effective length of the pier has been reduced for fishing. He stated that extending the pier will allow anglers more access to species commonly caught on the pier.

Mr. Dexter McNair of Virginia Beach, stated that the pier is like a “Fishing College” and that the anglers that use the pier are both professional and knowledgeable. He said that improving the ramp would be good for the area and it’s residents.

Mr. Steve Smith of Virginia Beach, stated that the Sandbridge pier is one of the last facilities used by locals and is not overrun with tourists. On the other hand he stated that it would improve the tourism in the area by keeping the locals that usually travel to North Carolina to pier fish, in Virginia.

Mr. Rhodes asked how many people were in support of the facility, approximately 20 people stood in support of the project.

Mr. Snyder reiterated written comments received from the CCA.

Mr. Chuck Macin of the Great Bridge Fisherman’s Association said that their association supports the improvements of this facility. He stated that the area needs this facility. He also stressed the need of handicapped accessibility.

Mr. Bill Walsh of Virginia Beach approves the concept but feels that licensed anglers should get a break on the fees to use the facility.

Dr. Allen stated that the PSSFA supports this project.

Mr. Haden reiterated written comments and presented a list of signatures of anglers that support the project.

Mr. Mark Wray of the Virginia Beach Anglers Club expressed the club’s full support of this project.

Mr. Jerry Jones of Newport News stated that he uses the pier and that a world record King Mackerel was caught at this location.

Mr. Joseph Robbins stated that the pier was originally designed as a pumping station and is very resistant to storm action.

T. Age Specific Fecundity of Bluefish.

No public comments.

U. Law Enforcement Vessels for VMP.

Mr. Pride reiterated the CCA written comments.

V. Gloucester Point Boating Access.

Ms. Carol Steele asked thos in support of this facility to stand, 9 people stood in support of this project.

Mr. James Adams of VDGIF stated that there were several reasons for the change in the funding request. After an evaluation it was determined that there would need to be more improvements than was originally requested.

Mr. Robert Howe of Gloucester stated that the facility is almost exclusively used by recreational anglers.

Mr. Roger Davis of Hayes requested that the RFAB approve this request. He stated that this is a needed facility and not only will serve as a recreational access site but also serves as a launch site for USCG, municipal, and state vessels.

Dr. Allen stated that the PSSFA supports the project with the increased cost.

Mr. Don Abernathy of Gloucester stated that this is a regional facility and will receive lots of usage from both resident and non-resident anglers. He said that the facility is in disrepair and needs to be addressed.

Mr. Russ Westerfield of Gloucester stated that this was the most convenient ramp for anglers in this area. He stated that the current facility is a safety concern and need to be repaired.

Mr. Pride stated that this is the best deal that has ever come before the board.

Mr. Snyder stated that even with the increased amount the CCA still supports the improvements.

Mr. Adams stated that the County of Gloucester is also contributing some land for the parking area.

Mr. Phil Lownes stated that the deterioration of the ramp was due to the construction of the Coleman Bridge.

Mr. Phillip Ransone stated that he has seen very little maintenance conducted there in the 30 years it has existed. He stated that is was time for some improvements to this facility.

General Public Comment

Mr. Routh asked if the Board would now hear general comments about the license fund.

Mr. Pride said that there needs to be an overall access plan for saltwater facilities in Virginia. He stated that there needs to be a comprehensive plan for boating access.

Mr. Routh stated that there is going to be some cooperation between VMRC and the VDGIF.

Mr. Don Abernathy stated that there is a problem with commercial gill nets at the Back River reef and that this needs to be addressed.

Mr. Irv Fenton stated that there needs to be more funding for Mike Meier's Artificial Reef Program.

At 8:57pm Mr. Rhodes adjourned the meeting.

Appendix 1 CCA Public Comment

A. Estimating Relative Juvenile Abundance of Recreationally Important Finfish in the Virginia Portion of the Chesapeake Bay. **DO NOT SUPPORT, CONDITIONALLY DEFER UNTIL NEXT CYCLE.** This project does provide a valuable database important to the successful management of fish in this region. Recent information that VIMS will be receiving a significant federal grant to continue this effort dictates RFAB funds be withheld at this time. However, if these projected federal funds are not forthcoming, then the RFAB should consider the project during the second 2003 cycle.

B. Support of Facilities to Provide Finfish Ageing for Virginia Catches and Application of Virtual Population Analysis to Provide Management Advice. **PARTIAL SUPPORT, CONDITIONALLY DEFER UNTIL NEXT CYCLE.** Recent information indicates Wallop-Breaux funds will soon be made available to support this admittedly valuable project. The availability of these funds may necessitate the delay of RFAB support until the second 2003 cycle. Even if W-B funds are provided, a ¼ match will be necessary from the state. While we acknowledge this, we think the actual RFAB contribution should be only half of this ¼, as the commercial sector, which benefits equally from these studies, should contribute the other ½ of local state funding.

C. Boat Scarring Effects on Submerged Aquatic Vegetation in Virginia. **SUPPORT.** To date, this study has already highlighted the likelihood that commercial haul seine operations are the most likely cause of significant areas of scarring in several regions of SAV. We continue our support of this ongoing study that should form the basis of management measures that would protect key areas of SAV from the harmful effects of these activities. Such initial steps might likely form the cornerstone of efforts to protect and expand SAV, which will in turn foster a more viable and healthy shallow water biomass in the Chesapeake Bay. Such habitats are absolutely critical to speckled trout, crabs, and other important marine species.

D. Enhancing Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) Habitat: Research and Education for Restoration. **SUPPORT.** While we whole-heartedly support efforts to restore SAV to an increasing range of their former abundance, we feel the commercial sector must bear an equal financial cost in SAV restoration. The “bottom line”: if commercial monies are not forthcoming for this effort – then the restored areas must be declared off limits to all commercial fishing endeavors.

E. Monitoring Relative Abundance of Young-of-Year American Eel, in the Virginia Tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay. **DO NOT SUPPORT.** The fact that the American Eel is a popular bait and forage species for a few sport fish species, does not in itself justify this project as deserving over \$23,000 in recreational license funds. Eels spend a portion of their life in fresh water, yet no attempt has been made to garner inland fisheries support. More importantly, as a species of growing commercial interest, funding support for this and other similar projects on eels should first be sought from that sector.

F. 2003 Wallop-Breaux Matching Funds. **CONDITIONAL SUPPORT.** The support of our organization is given upon the condition the RFAB participate in the administration/allocation of these funds (as originally promised by Commissioner Pruitt several years ago), and that there be a corresponding public accounting of these funds. Such oversight will further ensure these funds are directed to critical and appropriate projects, such as item “B” above.

G. Capital District Kiwanis Club Children’s Fishing Clinic 2003. **PARTIAL SUPPORT.** Most members of our organization feel this and similar programs are extremely important in fostering an environmental ethic in our youth. Therefore, we view this funding as part of a long-range developmental program that will continuously build new generations of recreational anglers. Other such programs have also been highly successful in providing a positive orientation to large numbers of disadvantaged youth. With the growth / expansion of such programs, we feel it is appropriate for the VMRC to develop some basic content guidelines for existing and new events. This will help provide a quick learning curve, hold down program costs, and ensure all programs are efficient in providing a meaningful and fun recreational fishing experience. However, in the case of this request, we recommend the RFAB fund only \$4635 out of the total request of \$8334. It is our opinion the petitioners should be able to implement a storage option at little or no cost, as opposed to the \$3699 they have itemized for a storage trailer for the fishing and associated equipment.

H. Sunshine Program Children’s Fishing Program (Portsmouth). **SUPPORT.** Our support of this and other educational opportunities that introduce children to the fun and ethics of recreational angling remains steadfast.

I. Morley’s Wharf Youth Fishing Tournament 2003. **SUPPORT.** Assuming a significant number of children are participating in this event, this money will be well spent in our opinion.

J. Saxis Fishing Pier Your Fishing Tournament 2003. **SUPPORT.** Again, another worthwhile endeavor. Also, please note some of the comments in “G” above. A more standardized tournament request format would ensure the number of participants be included in these proposals.

K. American Shad Egg and Milt Collection. **DO NOT SUPPORT.** This project represents one of a host of efforts in the eastern U.S. to restore the shad population. However, several factors dictate this as an inappropriate use of recreational salt water license funds. First, so long as the ocean intercept fishery continues in Virginia, funds should not be given to this project. Second, no request for funding has been made to VDIGF, as should have been the case for a species which spends a portion of it’s life in fresh water and which is actively pursued by fresh water anglers. Finally, it seems somewhat inappropriate for saltwater license funds to be indirectly supporting the private/tribal enterprise of the Pamunkey Tribal Hatchery.

L. Human Health Issues Related to Mycobacteriosis in Striped Bass. **PARTIAL SUPPORT.** We acknowledge “myco” poses a threat to both striped bass and many humans that come in contact with them. However, as this condition affects commercial watermen as well as recreationals, their industry should bear part of the burden to fund this research. Additionally, if the condition is really a threat to public health, then funding should also be sought from state and federal health agencies in order to contribute to the control of this infection. Consequently, we favor no more than 1/3 of the requested cost be contributed by the license fund. The other 2/3 of the estimated cost should derive from equal contributions from the commercial and public health sectors.

M. Determining Stock Status of Tautog in Virginia’s Waters Using Data from Virginia’s Fishery. **SUPPORT.** As a result of similar previous research, it was demonstrated Virginia tautog populations and movements are distinct from those further north, and consequently, merit separate regulatory measures. This project should provide data necessary to ensure the continued ability of Virginia regulators to stay “in the driver’s seat” on tautog management.

N. Genetic Analysis of Population Structuring within the Cobia. **DO NOT SUPPORT.** We have actively supported three previous cobia proposals in the past that did provide data useful to management initiatives undertaken by CCA Va. While we applaud the current petitioner’s desire to further add to the cobia database and seek further delineation of Virginia migrants in relation to the overall Atlantic stock, there is little indication this will enhance cobia populations in the near future. The majority of our organization questions how this research will result in additional protection of cobia above and beyond that already achieved by the coast wide two fish limit and the one fish recreational limit implemented in Virginia in 2001. It seems, in the case of cobia, grass roots efforts to “do the right thing” in Va. and Florida (also with a one fish recreational limit) have outpaced some scientifically based research in protecting the species. The even greater level of data available on these fish in the Gulf of Mexico has not prompted additional conservation measures there. An increasing number of anglers are beginning to view this species as “an inshore billfish”, in that even if it becomes more abundant, its harvest should still be maintained at minimal levels due to its unique status as the premiere inshore large game species along the South Atlantic coast. We feel the primary threat posed to the species at this point is through a potential expanding commercial market, and continued “illegal sales” by recreational anglers. Research that can show a direct correlation to forestalling these threats would be wholeheartedly supported by the CCA.

O. Establishment of a Chesapeake Bay Trophic Interaction Laboratory Services Program. **PARTIAL SUPPORT.** Our organization agrees with the overriding principal of this proposal that future effective fisheries management will require a much greater understanding of the trophic interactions of fishes in our region. The establishment of this program represents an important early step in garnering this understanding. However, as we have noted in some other proposals, here again, the commercial industry can potentially reap equal rewards from this approach, and should thus bear 50% of the cost of this proposal.

P. Daily Movements of Age Two Striped Bass in the Poropotank. **DO NOT SUPPORT.** Although our record of support to studies on striped bass, their associated forage species, and their habitat is long and well documented, this study appears to add only marginal information to the overall information necessary to successfully manage the species. The limited geographical implications of this “upriver” study do not inspire confidence in the project’s ability to provide meaningful data important to the recreational angling sector.

Q. Chincoteague Curtis Merrit Harbor and Launch Facility Restrooms. **PARTIAL SUPPORT – DEFER UNTIL NEXT CYCLE.** While we generally are supportive of projects providing increased access to the recreational angling community, the structure of this proposal raises some concerns. Our primary concern rests with the direction of the requested funds. Most of the project’s focus appears to be on enhancements to a marina for the docking of resident and transient vessels. In fact, before any funds are allocated, the RFAB should verify that recreational and charter boats have complete access to this facility. We have heard that in the past such users were only allowed to use slips not filled by commercial fishing boats. The \$90,000 for restrooms seems excessive when viewed in this context. More appropriate costs that we would support in such a facility should be geared toward fish cleaning stations, parking, and launching ramp improvements. In fact, there are no stated plans in the package to upgrade the existing ramp. Until this proposal’s funding requests are redirected more appropriately to the goals of the RFAB, we recommend its deferral until at least the next request cycle.

R. Development of Molecular Tools for *in situ* Hybridization Studies of Mycobacteriosis in the Striped Bass. **PARTIAL SUPPORT.** Similar to our rationale in project “L” above, we agree with the stated objectives and value of the study. Similarly, as the outcome of such a study potentially benefits the commercial and recreational sectors equally, the two should each contribute 50% of the requested amount.

S. Little Island District Park Pier Enhancement and Extension. **SUPPORT.** As we indicated when this project was initially forwarded during the previous cycle, we agree it is well founded in providing a quality ocean pier fishing experience to a very large number of visitors. However, due to the combination of limited funds and high project costs, we recommended this proposal be deferred to the next (now present) cycle. Although we support the initial stage of the project now, we still feel the costs should be awarded on an approximate 50/50 cost-sharing basis between the city of Virginia Beach and the license fund. Also, the overall large amount of financial support that would flow from the saltwater license fund must dictate that the future use of this facility would be free of charge or at a significantly reduced rate to users possessing a Virginia Saltwater Fishing License. Finally, some plan should be agreed upon for recoupment of license money on some pro-rata basis if the pier is destroyed by a storm and not rebuilt by the city.

T. Age-specific Fecundity of Bluefish in the Mid-Atlantic Bight. **SUPPORT.** We agree with the petitioners that critical data has been missing in order to better understand the population dynamics of what has been a very cyclical availability of this important recreational species. Hopefully, the relatively modest cost of this request will lead to better knowledge of age, fecundity and in turn, an ability to predict and managerially react to key indications of bluefish abundance.

U. Law Enforcement Vessels for Virginia Marine Police. **SUPPORT.** Our support of this request is yet another in a long unbroken line of actions to give law enforcement the assets they require to perform their duties. The need for small shallow draft vessels to patrol Eastern Shore inshore areas certainly seems appropriate. However, two issues come to mind. First, even if this funding is made available, are/will there be sufficient numbers of law enforcement officers available on the Shore to warrant this vessel increase at this time. Second, we again continue our request that future proposals should not be dependent solely on the license fund, but should instead be focused primarily on attaining state general funds.

V. Gloucester Point Boating Access Improvement. **SUPPORT.** As one of the relatively few public access projects in this cycle, this long-needed enhancement to the Gloucester Point ramp area will provide greatly improved accessibility to the lower York River and the adjoining Chesapeake Bay for the region's recreational fishermen. Money well spent!