

Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Crab Management Advisory Committee (CMAC) Minutes
2600 Washington Avenue, Newport News, VA
VMRC Commission Room, 4TH Floor
Monday, May 18, 2015 – 5:00 P.M.

ATTENDANCE

Members Present

Honorable Lynn Haynie
Honorable James Close
Marshall B. Cox
Alan Parks Proxy for Daniel Dise
Doug Jenkins Proxy for G. Wayne France
Ernest George
Chris Moore
Bernard Wayne Morris
Pete Nixon
Mark Sanford
Ken Smith
Tom Powers

VMRC Staff Present

Joe Cimino
Ade Ehlen
Joe Grist
Samantha Hoover
Rachael Maulorico
Rob O'Reilly

Members Absent

Viola West
Ken Diggs Jr.
Donald Porter Sr.
Kevin Wade
Johnny Graham

Others Present

Rom Lipscius
Mike Seebo
VIMS student
Ty Farrington
Paula Jasinski
Bill Mullis
Lynnée Squires
Michelle Squires
John Ward

Minutes were recorded by Samantha Hoover.

I. Introductions, announcements & approval of minutes from the April 27, 2015 meeting

The meeting was called to order at 5:04 pm and 12 members were in attendance. A recording of the minutes can be found on the agency's website. The minutes from April 27, 2015 were approved with one correction, with ten members in favor and one abstention. Honorable Chairwoman Ms. Lynn Haynie did not vote on any of the motions during this meeting.

II. Consideration of management measures for July, 2015 through June, 2016.

A. Closure of 2015-2016 winter crab dredge fishery season

Mr. Rob O'Reilly stated that in regards to the winter crab dredge fishery, the triggers were not reached this year, but the Commission will look at the possibility to open or close the dredge fishery every year. He stated that staff's recommendation to the commission next week will be to not open the crab dredge season for this coming season because of the low abundance levels and because the triggers were not met. Several members expressed disagreement with the trigger system and felt that it needs to be readdressed. Honorable Mr. James Close felt that the crab dredge fishery is

being discriminated against. Mr. Tom Powers asked what the conservation equivalency would be in the spring, if the winter crab dredge fishery were to be opened. Mr. Pete Nixon spoke on the problem with out of state people being allowed to harvest during our spring crabbing fishery, but this is no benefit to Virginia. However, if our crab dredge season were to be opened, the money and crabs from that fishery would stay in Virginia. The committee agreed to express their concerns about the winter crab dredge season to the Commission at the next commission meeting.

B. Modifications to effort control (gear specific seasons and possession limits)

Mr. Joe Grist discussed the performance of crabbers that harvested different percentages of their bushel limit within their pot license category. The 85 crab pot category had the highest percentage of harvesting their entire bushel limit compared to other categories. The committee discussed the need to control effort and that they would like to improve crabbing for upper bay harvesters. It was also discussed that with the vessel limit being the highest pot category on board, both harvesters could potentially have all their pots deployed, which is almost guaranteeing them to harvest a vessel limit, due to a longer soak time. Some members stated this could be altering the crab effort data. Several committee members expressed disagreement with the current bushel limits. Mr. Mark Sanford motioned to have a 51 bushel limit for all crab pot licensees from March 17 through June 1, with no bushel limits for crab pots outside of that time frame. There was no second to the motion. Honorable Mr. Close stated that if you increase the bushel limits, in turn, you are increasing the effort because harvesters will put out more pots in order to achieve their daily bushel limit. Mr. Sanford decided to withdrawal his motion.

C. Possession of dark-colored sponge crabs as early as June 1

Dr. Rom Lipscius from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) presented several studies looking at monthly female sponge crab and egg mortality. The studies showed a sharp decline in survival rate starting in June, with August showing to have a very low survival rate. Temperature information that was presented showed the same trend of a higher mortality starting in June at 77°F. Dr. Lipscius stated that the VIMS can scientifically state that they would be able to support the request to allow possession of dark-colored sponge crabs as mid June. Mr. Pete Nixon added that the dark sponge crab rules are not enforceable because they are so subjective. Dr. Lipscius stated that there is no scientific basis for distinguishing between orange and black sponge crabs regarding known survival rates. He stated that a reasonable compromise would be to have an area that is closed to the harvest of all sponge crabs and open to harvest in other areas.

D. Modifications to sanctuary Areas 4 and 1

Dr. Lipscius discussed the upper portion of the sanctuary vs. lower historical sanctuary. VIMS found that closing an upper portion of the sanctuary on June 1st and then closing the historical sanctuary on May 1st is about an equal trade off, but is slightly in favor of conservation. The committee agreed that they need to figure out what will be best for everyone. Options that committee members discussed included: keeping the whole sanctuary open until June 1 with lower bushel limits; opening the southern part of the sanctuary from Cape Henry to the Lynnhaven entrance then across to Little Creek, with a permanent closure year round everywhere else; and,

opening the upper portion of the sanctuary from the lighthouse at Windmill Point upward until June 16th with lower bushel limits. Some members expressed interest in asking the Commission to work with the General Assembly to be able to adjust the boundary lines of the 1942 sanctuary. CMAC agreed that they need to continue to meet to figure out how the committee specifically wants to narrow or change the sanctuary.

Honorable Ms. Haynie asked the committee for recommendations on the topics discussed thus far. Mr. Ken Smith motioned to have the dark sponge crab prohibition to end by June 15th. The motion was amended by Mr. Pete Nixon to change the wording to “end no later than June 15th”. The motion was seconded by Mr. Nixon and passed unanimously. Mr. Tom Powers motioned to recommend to the Commission to request a study on the effects of crab density in pots on survival to be performed by VIMS. The motion was seconded by Mr. Mark Sanford and passed unanimously. Mr. Smith would like for there to be more discussion on the crab dredge fishery. Mr. Bill Mullis, from the public, agreed and would like for the Commission vote to delay decisions on this issue and have the CMAC meet again to discuss and talk about the pros of opening the dredge fishery. He would like the fishery to be opened and felt that the fishery has gotten a bad reputation due to the high mortality misconception. He stated that the regulations have not paid off for the industry, the economy, and the stock. Mr. Smith motioned that the CMAC requests that the Commission will table the crab dredge issue and allow for further CMAC discussion at a later date. The motion was seconded by Mr. Cox and passed unanimously.

III. Update from the Blue Crab Industry Panel

Mr. Mullis presented an update from the Blue Crab Industry panel. He listed the panel’s latent effort recommendations, accountability tool recommendations, and management and research recommendations.

IV. New Business

No new business was presented.

V. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:12 P.M.