

Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Finfish Management Advisory Committee (FMAC) Minutes
2600 Washington Avenue, Newport News, VA
VMRC Commission Room, 4TH Floor
Tuesday, October 20, 2015 – 6:00 P.M.

ATTENDANCE

Members Present

Jeff Deem (Chairman)
Meade Amory
Jack Austin
Ernest Bowden
Scott MacDonald
Will Bransom proxy for Beth Synowiec
Robert Weagley
Skip Feller
Tom Powers
Walter Rogers

Members Absent

Honorable G. Wayne France
Honorable Dr. Ken Neill
Andy Hall

Others Present

Bob Allen
John Balderson
James Close
Bob Fisher, VIMS
Robert Weagley Jr.
Sally Roman, VIMS

VMRC Staff Present

Joe Cimino
Lewis Gillingham
Samantha Hoover
Katie May Laumann
Rachael Maulorico
Rob O'Reilly

Minutes were recorded by Rachael Maulorico.

I. FMAC Introductions; Announcements

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 pm and a quorum was present with 10 members in attendance. An audio recording of the meeting can be found on the agency's website.

II. Approval of minutes from September 15, 2015 meeting

The minutes from September 15, 2015 were approved unanimously.

III. Report from VIMS (Bob Fisher) and staff on Atlantic sturgeon issues.

Bob Fisher of VIMS and Virginia Sea Grant presented research on Atlantic sturgeon and commercial gill net interactions in the inshore Virginia striped bass fishery. Researchers at VIMS have been examining possible modifications of anchored gill nets in the Chesapeake Bay and James River in order to prevent interactions with Atlantic sturgeon in the striped bass commercial fishery. This ongoing research is also measuring population trends of sturgeon in the Bay and its tributaries. Research has shown that interactions with sturgeon in gill nets are more likely to take place in the bottom of anchored gill nets than in the top when in the Bay. This has led VIMS and members of the commercial industry to examine the difference between traditional anchored gill nets and gill nets with modified raised footropes. Catch rates

of striped bass and sturgeon interactions between the two net types were examined. Results have shown that catch per unit effort (CPUE) of striped bass was statistically the same between the modified and traditional nets and that sturgeon interaction in the modified nets was lower. Through this study, researchers also have a better understanding of the spatial and temporal components of sturgeon migrations in and out of the Chesapeake Bay water system.

Katie Laumann from VMRC fisheries management staff presented information on the new Atlantic Sturgeon Programmatic Take Permit. On April 6, 2012, an endangered species listing went into effect for the Chesapeake Bay Sturgeon Distinct Population Segment. Take (including any catching or killing) of endangered species is prohibited under Section 9 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Because there is incidental take of sturgeons in the Virginia commercial gill net fishery, Virginia must apply for a Programmatic Take Permit (ITP) under Section 10(a)(1)(B) of the ESA of 1973 in order to continue that fishery. The take permit will last 25 years, and includes a conservation plan with 3 major components: 1) Estimated number of takes (used to establish thresholds), 2) monitoring (through a State-managed observer program), and 3) minimizing & mitigating measures that will be modified through an adaptive management approach as the observer program collects and adds to the available data. Initially, the allowable number of takes (including lethal and live-releases) is based on the 2010 take estimate of 1,056 Atlantic sturgeon, or 26,400 takes over the full 25 years. This number will be re-estimated over the course of the ITP (based on data from the observer program), and re-estimates will be used to establish thresholds for management to be implemented in the form of minimizing and mitigating measures.

IV. Discussion: Transferability of spiny dogfish limited entry permits

Members of the Committee expressed their interest in examining ways to allow transferability of Virginia spiny dogfish permits in light of the increasing age of permit holders. Discussion of the Committee focused on determining an activity threshold that would allow the transfer of active permits only. Some members were concerned that opening all permits for transfer would add effort to a market that can't sustain high levels of landings. The Committee decided to table the matter until a future meeting so that decisions can be made before the start of the next fishing season. Chief O'Reilly informed the Committee that the 2016/2017 fishing season will see a 50% reduction from the 2015 quota. However, this quota will still be slightly higher than Virginia landings in the past two seasons.

V. Discussion: Creating a dedicated haul seine site in Virginia Beach.

The discussion was tabled until further notice.

VI. Discussion: Recreation cobia management

Joe Cimino presented the Committee with an update on recreational cobia harvest in Virginia provided by the Marine Recreational Intercept Program. The 2015 South Atlantic recreational total allowable catch was exceeded. The South Atlantic Council staff has decided to wait until the end of the year to see final landings. The Committee decided to postpone any decisions on harvest limits until the South

Atlantic Council deliberates. Mr. Cimino informed the Committee that some recreational harvesters would like to see a six fish boat limit similar to Florida's.

VII. Possible update on cownose ray issues

The Committee was informed that a cownose ray scientific and management workshop will be held on October 23, 2015 in Baltimore, Maryland. This meeting will be a collection of managers and researchers in the Chesapeake Bay region that will consolidate information for use in potential stock assessments. The Committee requested that Bob Fischer of VIMS update them on conclusions from the meeting at the next FMAC meeting.

VIII. Review: Recent MAFMC actions from its October meeting

Mr. O'Reilly gave a brief update on the actions from the Mid Atlantic Fisheries Management Council's (MAFMC) October meeting. The council voted for an approximate 50% reduction in the commercial quota coastwide for the 2016/2017 spiny dogfish fishing season. This was due to mechanical failure of the National Marine Fisheries Service's vessel that is used to survey spiny dogfish for abundance estimates in a spring trawl survey. The MAFMC voted for a 21% increase in the recreational harvest limit and commercial quota of black sea bass for 2016 and 2017. The Council also voted to move forward on a blueline tilefish management plan. Mr. O'Reilly encouraged the Committee to promote reporting by recreational fishermen to help in future data needs. The summer flounder fishery will see a 25.6% reduction in both recreational and commercial harvest limits in 2016; this is in addition to the 35% reduction that was taken in 2011.

New Business

No next meeting date has been decided at this time. No new business was voted on.

IX. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 pm.