

**Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Crab Management Advisory Committee Meeting
Virginia Institute of Marine Science**

June 20, 2008

Members Present

Hon. Rick Robins
Tom Powers
Pete Freeman
Doug Jenkins
Chris Moore

Members Absent

Pete Nixon
Jeff Crockett
Jim Casey
Louis Whittaker
Johnny Graham
Paige Hogge
Marshall Cox, Sr
H.M. Arnold
Ronald Jett
Hon. John Mcconaugha

VMRC Staff

Jack Travelstead
Rob O'Reilly
Joe Grist
Laura Lee
Alicia Nelson
MPO Dize

Others Present

Ken Smith
Kathy Davenport

I. Introductions/Announcements

Mr. Robins began the meeting and gave the introduction. He said that members of industry have asked if VMRC was aware of the increase of crabs in the bay. Also, he has heard concern about the current market issues and if the industry will get any compensation in return. Harvesters have also noticed a drop in catch due to the increased cull rings. Staff has been asked to do a study of a number of different sized cull rings. That will not be available until the fall. He said that it would be used to address future years' regulatory actions.

II. Old Business

No old business was discussed.

III. New Business

a. Timeline and action plan for crab pot/buoy tagging, latent effort controls, and a transferable effort program.

Mr. Grist's presentation (with the timeline) detailed the pot/buoy tagging and allocation, as well as latent effort, and Mr. Robins asked for members to note the timeline in the presentation.

Mr. Powers asked about the process, in which staff notifies crab harvesters of regional pot/buoy tag distribution day. Mr. Grist noted that it would be similar to the striped bass tag distribution day (or days), in that harvesters would be notified of which day to retrieve their tags.

Mr. Travelstead asked the members of the industry how long in advance crab pot/buoy tags would need to be distributed to give ample time for harvesters to put them on their pots before the start of the season. Mr. Freeman said it depended on what kind of tag. Mr. Jenkins said that it would depend on how many pots and told the group that pot preparation and buoy painting depended heavily on weather conditions. Two weeks was considered adequate even for hundreds of peeler and crab pots. Mr. Jenkins asked about when the program would begin in relation to funding from the General Assembly. Mr. Travelstead said that the first year of the program would be managed without funding from the General Assembly.

Mr. Powers asked about what would happen without the General Assembly backing and additional staff. Mr. Travelstead said that, without the extra staff, the transferability would be difficult. For instance, in the first year, the transfers would be limited to one month.

Mr. Robins said that transferability is essential to the industry. Staff has agreed to do it in a one month period for the first year; however, with more staff there would be more flexibility and resources for transfers.

Mr. Powers asked if there was any provision for a waterman only purchasing a fraction of their allowance of tags. Mr. Grist said that some states, such as Oregon, require a declaration of the amount of pots to be fished prior to the start of the season. It is something that would have to be worked out in these meetings.

Mr. Powers asked if the numbers on the tag were the waterman's identification number. Mr. Grist responded that they are sequentially numbered to provide law enforcement a new tool for enforcement, similar to the striped bass tagging program.

Mr. Travelstead asked about replacement tags. There has to be some method for new tags to be provided in a way that wouldn't overwhelm the system or allow people to cheat.

The members of industry mentioned that 40 out of 300 pots were lost in recent storms. Mr. Jenkins said that it was a rare event, but something to think about. They have lost pots in those numbers before, but usually the owners can find them. Mr. Freeman mentioned numerous crab pots washed ashore during the same storm at Buckroe Beach.

Mr. Robins asked how many pots were typically lost during a large storm. Mr. Freeman responded that 50 to 60 pots out of 300 were generally lost during the first three months, and Buckroe Beach, Willoughby Spit, and Ocean View were some of the worst places for pot loss.

Mr. Travelstead asked if you gave somebody 10-20% more pots, how many will use them immediately, and how many will save them for future use.

Mr. Robins asked about a base replacement allocation of 10%, or whatever is appropriate, that was mailed out to the license holder at a couple of intervals through the season.

Ken Smith asked about color changes per year and per fishery. The tags would change color yearly, with the possibility of different colors between peeler and hard crab pots. Mr. Robins mentioned that accumulation of tags of the same color was a risk to the state.

Mr. O'Reilly asked about mailing out different color tags for replacement tags. Others of the committee said that it made sense to separate replacement tags.

Mr. Powers mentioned dual-color tags so that they wouldn't blend in with buoys, no matter what color they were.

Mr. Freeman discussed the tag he had nailed to his buoy. He said that the buoy had deteriorated around the tag, but the tag had not. He suggested that kind of tag.

Mr. Travelstead asked Mr. Freeman how many additional tags would be acceptable for him, and Mr. Freeman responded that roughly 30 tags would cover his seasonal loses.

The committee discussed additional replacement tags. If a harvester used all the replacement tags (say 15%) at the beginning of the year, and lost 20% of the gear, than there would still be an overall reduction at the end of the season.

Mr. Travelstead mentioned that expecting law enforcement to count all tags to check for replacements was too cumbersome, MPO Dize agreed.

Mr. Grist gave the second half of the presentation on latent effort. Mr. Jenkins mentioned that some of the crabbers who fished for all eight years, but only had little harvest were also drawing social security and sold few crabs per year. Often, red tide and other events discourage the crabbers, and they pull their pots and wait for a better crabbing year. Mr. Jenkins said that the committee should consider what a privilege is versus a right. Mr. Jenkins strongly disagreed to limiting access to fisheries.

Mr. Smith mentioned the cost of boat operation and the investment required to be a crabber. Watermen are scared that crabs are going to come back because the market will crash.

Mr. Jenkins expressed concerned that VMRC has abused the regulatory authority granted in 1984. He believes that the power should go back to the General Assembly.

Mr. Robins said that we do have to manage the crabbing issue within the degraded environmental conditions; however, as the main part of the blue crab review, the state has to come up with a viable effort control system, because the state has not been able to control the mortality rate. He also suggested that anyone could put forth an alternate proposal for the committee to discuss.

Mr. Freeman expressed concern that if watermen get taken off the list, they can never come back into the fishery. They might be holding on to the licenses for retirement. Mr. Travelstead mentioned that there would be room for growth in the fishery if abundance returns.

Mr. Jenkins was concerned with the impact of foreign crabs coming in and the transportation of crabs from Georgia and Louisiana. The local buyers don't care about who brings in the crabs.

Mr. Robins said that the benefits of the allocative system is that the allocations reflect the person's interest and history in the fishery. The resource has been poor for a number of years causing a poor industry. We need to recover the resource, and an allocative model would allow us to recover it.

Mr. Freeman said one reason he isn't crabbing is because they can't sell them. Another reason, if we stay where we are right now, but don't get any packing houses, they will be out of business. He said the industry is losing packing houses, because they aren't getting crabs in November and December.

Mr. Robins said that if effort control isn't effective, we could loose the resource and loose the industry. Mr. Freeman responded that effort control is not as bad as no business.

Tom Powers said that there is a way to give credit for full time waterman who work other gear during the year but have also been crabbing, and that there should also be credit for long term waterman who have a history of crabbing, but are slowing as they age. That needs to be quantified.

Mr. Robins responded that staff began with a qualifying period over the past 8 years; this is a much larger pool of active participants than what we've seen in 2007. When we look at credits for a full time waterman or credits for long term participation, this is what we looked at so that we wouldn't hurt people who have been actively fishing long term.

The industry members were asked if fishing one week every few weeks was about keeping the license or personal consumption. Mr. Jenkins responded that those fishing patterns were by crabbers who wanted to do it as a quality of life issue.

Mr. Freeman asked about fishing another crabber's pots under this new system (for example, fishing his son's pots. Mr. Robins responded that Mr. Freeman's son would have an allotment based on participation. If there had been a medical hardship, the commission could allocate a share.

Mr. Powers explained that commercial cards would not need to be "used", because it would be like striped bass tags with permanent and temporary transfers.

Mr. Smith expressed concern about the loss of the seafood industry and hopes that it can be rebuilt. Mr. Powers said that the first people allowed back into the fishery would be the ones who had a history of harvest. Mr. Smith thought the watermen should be able to handle more of the crabbing issue. He and Mr. Jenkins also believe that a waterman should get something in return for his or her license, because it was an investment.

Mr. Robins said that gas prices and other industry problems are short term, but, long term, industries adjust. As an example, during the scallop period, production increased in a short period of time, and it took time for the market to adjust to fundamental change in supply. He agrees that the industry can be brought back. What the agency believes is that the resources can be restored first. Short term, it's a tough situation, but long term, it can be rebuilt.

Mr. Robins and the industry members discussed a buy back program for inactive licenses. Mr. Jenkins felt that it was the only fair thing to do. The agency is making decisions that affect people's life and culture.

Ms. Davenport was asked about the loss of agents. She answered that the loss of transferable agents would be very difficult. Her business lost 600 dozen crabs due to loss of agents this year. She said that they have a short period of time to make money. She also said that transferability of tags would resolve the problem. Mr. Powers added that the person you are transferring to must have a waterman's card, and Ms. Davenport said that they pushed for the commercial card so that they could work within the industry in any way that was successful.

Mr. Robins announced that the committee will reconvene in July, and the group will put together some additional constraints looking at the pool and activity.

IV. Next Meeting Date

No date for the next CMAC meeting was set.

V. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 PM