

Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Shrimp Trawl Fishery Public Informational Meeting
380 Fenwick Road, Fort Monroe, VA
Tuesday, May 7th, 2024

ATTENDANCE

Members of the public present

- Spencer Headley
- Mark Sanford
- George Trice
- Marie Trice
- Mark West
- Travis Connelly
- Robert Crisher
- Dan Porter
- Todd Smith
- Lee Smith
- Doug Reid
- George Lee
- Charles
- Tracey Smith
- Jason Smith
- Justin Smith
- Nate Everette (Virtually)

VMRC Staff Present

- Patrick Geer
- Shanna Madsen
- Joshua McGilly
- Chris Davis
- Lewis Gillingham
- Brandon Foor

I. Introductions and meeting procedures

Chief Patrick Geer started the meeting at 4 PM, he introduced the staff present that are involved with this fishery and asked all harvesters to introduce themselves and what area they are fishing out of. Harvesters present were from several towns in the Hampton Roads area and areas from Cape Charles to Wachapreague on the Eastern Shore.

II. Update on the fishery and observer efforts

Mr. Chris Davis presented some background on the biology of the white shrimp present in Virginia and discussed the shrimp trawl fishery which started in state waters in 2017 and has grown since the first harvester that year. Mr. Davis discussed data collected from VIMS and SEAMAP, and it appears the white shrimp population is not expanding its range but shifting northward along the coast. Mr. Davis explained gear requirements for the state trawl fishery, harvesters can have a 16-foot beam trawl and must limit drag times to 30 minutes. Mr. Davis ended by discussing the landings from the Virginia Beach fishery and Eastern Shore experimental fishery, landings in Virginia Beach have been consistent from year to year but landings have been very low off the Eastern Shore.

Chief Geer presented information about concerns in the shrimp fishery with protected species and bycatch species compared to shrimp landings. The fishery has seen some minimal bycatch depending on the time of year and very low numbers of turtles caught during drags. Chief Geer discussed the shrimp trawl fishing in federal waters outside of 3 miles which is not managed by the state and NOAA requires specific permits not issued by VMRC. Chief Geer also discussed other topics linked to the fishery including neighboring states looking to create similar trawl fisheries, NOAA-protected resources, and marketing of shrimp.

III. Discussion on the existing shrimp fishery

Chief Geer opened the floor to the harvesters to voice their concerns and thoughts about the fishery. Chief Geer, Mr. Davis, and harvesters discussed issues and concerns linked to:

- The southern boundary for the Eastern Shore area
- When seasons can start, Virginia Beach has two defined fishing areas written in the Virginia state code each having different seasons defined in code
- Issues with water depths on the Eastern Shore and areas not being deep enough to hold shrimp in large quantities like off Virginia Beach
- The market for shrimp, as the season gets later in the year the size of the shrimp decreases and the market becomes poor with most harvesters shifting to other fisheries
- The number of people shrimping has also lowered the market value

- The possibility of creating a frozen shrimp market to supply shrimp when no one is fishing
- Allowing Eastern Shore experimental permit holders to fish a net with doors instead of a beam trawl so new harvesters won't have to invest as much into a new gear they may not use, a beam trawl set up costs over 10 thousand dollars to have built
- Turtle Excluder Device (TED) for larger nets, currently the 16-foot net used in the fishery does not need a TED, larger nets and having nets that use doors would require TEDS. If the fishery expands and shrimp landings continue to increase the use of larger nets can be examined in the distant future.
- Increasing the height of the net from 4 to 5 foot, it would increase the size of the opening with very minimal cost and effort

IV. Gather input on expanding the shrimp fishery

Chief Geer discussed proposed changes to the commercial shrimp fishery including, moving the southern boundary on the Eastern Shore to the Cape Charles light, eliminating the Eastern Shore experimental fishing permit, increasing the number of shrimp trawl licenses, allowing harvesters to fish any regulated shrimp trawl harvest areas, and eliminate the daily call-in requirement for reporting bycatch. Some harvesters questioned the landing requirements to stay eligible for the license. Harvesters must land at least 500 pounds of shrimp using shrimp trawl gear in at least one of the previous 2 years, harvesters do not need to have their own shrimp trawl boat to remain eligible. Harvesters asked about the seasons allowed off Virginia Beach, beach replenishment, offshore wind companies laying cables south of Dam Neck Naval Base, and trawling across the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay which is not allowed due to migratory species and shipping.

Chief Geer explained the upcoming timeline for these proposed regulatory changes – pending any administrative delays, the commission will have a public hearing at the June 25th meeting, the application period will be the month of July, and the lottery for new licenses will take place in August.

Some Virginia Beach harvesters are concerned about allowing harvesters to fish both areas and think most, if not or all harvesters from the Eastern Shore will fish Virginia Beach lowering catch and collapsing the market. Some Eastern Shore harvesters think Virginia Beach harvesters would benefit from fishing earlier in the season off the Eastern Shore or the staff should consider keeping the area as an experimental permit. No Virginia Beach harvesters voiced interest in fishing the Eastern Shore area even if they could start earlier in the year.

Staff and harvesters discussed what they feel is important when considering eligibility for new licenses. Harvesters think, previous year's landings, having the gear built and ready to fish, and the type of boat a harvester is planning to use should be considered when issuing new licenses. Deputy Chief Shanna Madsen brought up that if the Eastern Shore is no longer an experimental area, both Virginia Beach and the Eastern Shore may have to be open to all license holders and having a license linked to an area may not be possible legally. Some harvesters think leaving the Eastern Shore as an experimental area would be a better option than allowing harvesters to fish in both areas. Virginia Beach harvesters could apply for an experimental permit on the Eastern Shore if they wanted to begin fishing earlier in the year before the Virginia Beach season opens. Chief Geer discussed that if the Eastern Shore stays experimental there will still likely be an increase in licenses for Virginia Beach.

Mr. George Trice asked if allowing trawling at night could be possible due to his first trawl of the day always being the most productive, Chief Geer said it could be considered. Chief Geer let harvesters know that the fishery will hopefully expand and even though trawling is not allowed in the Bay other commercial gears can be used for shrimp in the Bay and its tributaries.

V. Public comment for items not on the agenda

There were no public comments on topics other than shrimp trawling.

VI. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 P.M.