

VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION
CRAB MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

JULY 19, 2004 - 6:00 PM

Draft Minutes

MEMBERS PRESENT

Hon. Lake Cowart, Jr.
Wayne Abbott
Peter Nixon
Marshall Cox
Pete Freeman
Tom Powers

STAFF PRESENT

Jack Travelstead
Rob O'Reilly
Roy Insley
Ellen Cosby
Stephanie Iverson
Joe Cimino
Kenny Oliver

MEMBERS ABSENT

John Graham
Jim Casey
Jeff Crockett
Eddie Crockett
Louis Whittaker
William E. Abbott
Woody Zember
Ronnie Jett
Paige Hogge
Wade Harding
Lee Scarborough
Billy Moore
Lesney Miller
James Ashburn Sr.
Rob Brumbaugh

I. Introductions, Announcements

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM by Lake Cowart. It was noted that there was no quorum. Mr. Travelstead explained that Commissioner Pruitt was planning to re-organize the CMAC membership, with mandatory attendance and use of proxies. A letter will be sent to all current CMAC members.

II. Approval of minutes

No action.

III. Old Business

A. Continued discussion of crab license transfer provisions

Mr. Travelstead reminded members of current crab license transfer provisions, and noted

that the boat transfer requirement is the sticking point. Instead, we could make sure that the license has been active, because we don't want to create additional effort in the fishery. Tables, illustrating the number of crab gear licenses and the amount of crab harvest over the last five years, were distributed to members.

Pete Nixon was concerned about false reporting or forcing people to work to keep their license active. Mr. Travelstead responded that we could consider harvest over a five-year period. Tom Powers asked if it could be retro-active? Mr. Travelstead commented that we are just trying to find a better method than selling a boat. Mr. Nixon said he was involved since 1991, and remembers the intent to allow any transfer was to allow someone a "final out". Someone who has been inactive will now be forced to harvest crabs in order not to be stuck with the license.

Wayne Abbott stated that someone may want to keep their boat, or in other cases, people may not want an old wooden boat.

Roy Insley asked if we are talking about a fixed or revolving time frame? He noted that in the Gloucester paper, he saw an ad for someone selling crab pot licenses for \$5000 to \$7000. In addition, you will encourage false reporting. It is not fair to lock people out of the fishery; they need flexibility to move from one fishery to another.

Mr. Travelstead said we can go back and look at transfers already processed and see where they fit; the other solution is to do away with the boat provision.

Rom Lipcius requested that the committee not recommend any changes that would affect the reporting program.

Mr. Nixon reported that effort has shifted from the Bay into the rivers. He noted that latent effort is a concern, but the fishermen are having trouble getting rid of their product now.

Mr. Travelstead stated that if that is the way it is, then we will just do away with the vessel provision. Mr. Powers inquired what will be the impact on the 15% reduction? From the standpoint of economics, the fishermen will want to try to make money. Mr. Nixon responded that if crabbing came back like it was about 20 years ago, it would be very cheap. It happened this year with North Carolina crabs, and many people shifted to something else. With the foreign meat coming in, no more picking house will be started up.

Mr. Travelstead reminded members that this will not happen right away, because a new stock assessment is coming out at the end of the year and after that, we will take a package to the Commission.

Lake Cowart suggested that we limit the number of transfers per year and there may be some other options. Mr. Powers said to consider the average number of annual transfers.

Rob O'Reilly responded that we can provide you with the number of active licenses and use a historical basis.

B. Discussion: Use of license agents

Mr. Travelstead described a problem where a person procures licenses for relatives and then uses multiple licenses as their agent. This is creating additional effort and one person is fishing more than 300 pots. There is a law on the books for a 300 or 500 pot limit. Kenny Oliver commented that if you have multiple numbers on a buoy, we will check on it because a person cannot fish more than 300 pots. Mr. Travelstead stated that the system is out of whack.

Marshall Cox said that it is impossible to count a man's pots.

Mr. Nixon mentioned that he knew of one family that has three or four licenses and nobody in the family even goes out on the boat; they just hire a crew.

Mr. Travelstead reminded members the original purpose for use of an agent was when the license holder was incapacitated for a temporary time. Now it is the standard operating procedure for some license holders. Mr. Nixon added, that under the old law, the operator of the vessel had to hold a license. Now, people have taken advantage and it's out of hand. Mr. Travelstead asked members if they thought use of agents was a problem.

Mr. Powers noted that in some cases, foreign crews were working rigs and asked if it was a hardship or just a convenience for people. He suggested to have people call the 800# to report who will work your gear for a few days, or go through the administrative process and submit a doctor's report for longer periods of agent usage.

Mr. Nixon suggested that you require the license holder be on the boat. Mr. Cox was opposed to this idea. He commented that it was a geographical problem and noted that there was no problem with agent usage in his area.

Pete Freeman proposed that a committee be set up to look at the problems and to go with a pot tagging system.

C. Update on field study of sponge crab mortality

Christie Erikson from VIMS, explained the design and protocol of the study. She said they wanted to look at both small and large crab operations. The objective was to assess effects of handling mortality on mature females and sponge crabs by determining mortality of eggs and females after crabbing. She said they needed about 60 crabs for the study.

Mr. Powers asked about using control crabs not caught in pots, if you are looking for a method with the least stress.

Mr. Nixon stated that he retails live crabs. He reported that mature females with no sponge are weaker and die quicker than the orange sponge crabs.

Mr. Cox remarked that in shoal water, crabs are weaker.

Mr. Freeman agreed to be a participant in this study.

IV. New Business

Mr. Travelstead announced that there will be a public hearing at the July 27, 2004 Commission meeting to establish provisions for medical hardship exemptions to the eight-hour workday requirement.

V. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 pm.