

Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Crab Management Advisory Committee (CMAC) Minutes
380 Fenwick Road, Fort Monroe, VA
Wednesday, May 24th, 2023 – 4:00 P.M.

ATTENDANCE

Members Present

Ed Tankard
Mark Sanford
Tye Burns
Marshal Cox
Wayne Morris
Tom Powers
Chris Moore
Ernie George
JC Hudgins
Pet Nixon
Kenneth Diggs

VMRC Staff Present

Commissioner Jamie Green
Michele Guilford
Alexa Galván
Joshua McGilly
Brooke Lowman
Shanna Madsen
Jill Ramsey
Patrick Geer
Lewis Gillingham
Captain Chris Miller

Members Absent

Dan Dise
Johnny Graham
Donald Porter

Others Present

Dr. Rom Lipcius
Mike Seebo
Alex Schneider
Johnny Dameron
Ed Arnesi
Rich Murray
Monica Scheneman
Spencer Headley
Jay Diggs
Joshua Mcallister
Eddie Mcallister
David Wilkins
Dan Holland
Nathan Reynolds
Gabrielle Saluda
Justin Johnson
Jeromie Bonniville
Trevor Bonniville
Jacob Jule
Emory Rice

I. Introductions; announcements

The meeting was called to order at 4:08 PM. Ms. Alexa Galván announced to the committee that per the committee bylaws, all committee members need to reapply after 2 years of being on the committee if they are interested in continuing to serve. Chief Pat Geer informed the committee that Mr. Adam Kenyon has become Chief of the Shellfish Management Division and Mr. Joe Grist will be the new Deputy Chief.

II. Approval of minutes from the August 30th, 2022, meeting.

The minutes from the August 30th, 2022, meeting were approved by consensus.

III. New Business

1. Review the preliminary 2022/2023 Chesapeake Bay Winter Crab Dredge Survey results and preliminary 2022 Virginia harvest data.

Ms. Galván presented to the committee the results of the 2022-2023 Blue Crab Winter Dredge Survey, the primary survey used to assess the Chesapeake Bay's blue crab population. Most abundance estimates increased from 2021 and 2022 but remain below estimates from 2015-2020. The population is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring but the juvenile abundance estimate is low.

Mr. Chris Moore asked about distribution of crabs in the bay during the winter dredge survey and if crabs were found in areas that are unusual. Mr. Mike Seebo of VIMS said the survey found crabs in the usual areas of the Bay but did find some crabs in areas they are not always found, likely because of water temperature.

Ms. Galván also discussed that Virginia's total 2022 harvest was 16 million pounds, a 15% decrease from the 2021 harvest. Effort also decreased by 19%. Ms. Galván noted that the decrease in harvest was likely due to low availability of crabs in the spring, as observed by crabbers throughout the bay.

A member of the public asked if the decrease in female catch and lower landings has to do with the decrease in bushel limits for the 2022 season and asked about possible issues with the dredge survey collecting juvenile crabs. Ms. Galván said the decrease could be due to the low number of crabs being seen in the spring, lower bushel limits in the fall, and low prices. Dr. Rom Lipcius of VIMS discussed that VIMS has tried to get funding to create a new yearly survey looking at juvenile crabs located in shallow water and explained that the juvenile abundance has a correction to account for juveniles not seen in the dredge survey. Dr. Lipcius discussed Maryland's increasing harvest of females and these crabs not being able to make it to Virginia to spawn and possible bias of the winter dredge survey for collecting juvenile crabs. Mr. Mark Sanford asked if the increased Maryland landings could be crabbers catching crabs in Virginia and bringing them to Maryland for a higher price, members of the committee agreed that this is possible. Mr. Moore and Mr. Hudgins brought up issues with females not spawning at all or having trouble with their eggs being fertilized; Dr. Lipcius explained that there is a needed ratio of males and females needed to have viable eggs. Mr. Pete Nixon and Mr. Tom Powers

discussed issues with commercial harvesters reporting their Virginia landings and enforcement of harvesters taking crabs out of state without reporting.

Members of the audience asked Dr. Lipcius what part of the presentation concerns him the most. Dr. Lipcius said the several years of low recruitment is the main thing he finds alarming and would like the committee to look at a reallocation for Virginia's catch to allow more females to spawn.

2. Discussion of possible management responses

Ms. Galván said managers recommend keeping similar management measures as last year but presented possible changes to the 2023 bushel limits that address concerns about unequal cuts when bushel limits are reduced in spring and fall. Recommended new low bushel limits would be 8 bushels for 85 pot licenses, 11 bushels for 127 pots, 14 bushels for 170 pots, 22 bushels for 255 pots, and 36 bushels for 425 pots. Mr. Tye Burns asked how long the agency wants to see increased crab numbers before bushel limits do increase back to the "high bushel limits". Chief Geer mentioned that each year bushel limits are up for discussion and increases can be considered as abundance increases.

Mr. Powers asked the agency to consider extending the recreational 5-pot season for 2 more weeks to match the increased bushel limits for the 2023 commercial season. Mr. Cox asked the agency to look into a more flexible starting date for the season to account for water temperature from year to year. Mr. Sanford agreed, citing the massive dip in prices for crabs when the market gets flooded with crabs from multiple states. Chief Geer discussed the agency looking into changes for the start and end dates of the season.

Mr. Powers made a motion for staff to look into the possibility to extend the season then for staff to call a meeting this fall, seconded by Dr. Moore. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Powers made a second motion to support increased bushel limits proposed by staff, seconded by Dr. Moore. The motion passed unanimously.

Committee members discussed protecting the egg-bearing females, Dr. Lipcius and his student Ms. Alex Schneider brought up that the most fecund females are newly matured and about to spawn for the first time.

IV. Other Business

Mr. Sanford asked if the sanctuary off Virginia Beach can be opened, Ms. Galván said it cannot be opened for this year but can be up for discussion at a later meeting. Mr. Nixon asked about the ability for crabbers to have 3 baskets of crabs to be culled later but heard recently that the law now requires crabbers to cull right after pulling pots; he asked when this came into effect and if this can be up for discussion to allow culling as crabbers fish. Mr. Nixon also asked about agents and looking at black sponge crabs, both were brought up in previous meetings but were never discussed. Chief Geer explained there is a new state-wide process for changing regulations and agencies are being required to decrease regulatory burden on our constituents. This has meant addressing agents and transfers has been put on hold.

V. Public Comment.

Mr. Jacob Jule from Reedville brought up the yearly changes to bushel limits and the committee and agency staff should consider setting target numbers for females to be used for future cuts. Mr. Jule also would like explanations at future meetings of how any possible cuts will benefit the fishery. Chief Geer mentioned that CBSAC is looking into setting targets and how they will be used to set seasons and bushel limits for future seasons.

Ms. Monica Scheneman agreed with Mr. Jule's statement and had hoped the committee would have brought alternative 2023 bushel options instead of just accepting staff recommendations.

Mr. Emory Rice from Reedville agreed up that the committee should have offered another option instead of accepting staff recommendations. Mr. Rice also mentioned that the Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee's Annual Report on the winter dredge survey states that the fishery is not overfished, and overfishing isn't occurring and asked why there have still been cuts in previous years. Chief Geer explained that the fishery has not been overfished and overfishing isn't occurring, but this fishery is managed using precautionary measures to prevent the fishery from reaching levels it was in during the early 2000's.

Mr. Ed Mcallister from Warsaw brought up a previous VMRC bulletin he found online outlining the bushel limits for the 2014 crabbing season and feels no other cuts should be taken from the fishery.

Commissioner Jamie Green thanked the members of the public, VMRC staff, and committee members. Commissioner Green discussed the need for targets and using them to set future measures and that the fishery needs to be managed to benefit the fishery and the harvesters.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:59 PM