

**VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION  
CRAB MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
380 FENWICK ROAD, FORT MONROE, VIRGINIA  
VMRC COMMISSION ROOM**

**May 29, 2025 -- 5:00 PM**

**Members Present**

Tye Burns  
Marshall Cox  
Kenneth Diggs  
Spencer Headley  
J.C. Hudgins  
Chris Moore  
Bernard "Wayne" Morris  
Pete Nixon  
Nathan Reynolds  
Cory Rice  
Mark Sanford  
John "Ed" Tankard III (chair)

**Members Absent**

Tom Powers

**VMRC Staff**

Jill Ramsey  
Alexa Galvan  
Catherine Wilhelm  
Brooke Lowman  
Shakira Goffe  
Pat Geer  
Lisa Pyle  
Danielle Recco  
Joe Grist

**Public**

Rom Lipcius (VIMS)  
Richard Costin  
Tim Wivell  
George Mapp  
Gabrielle Saluta (VIMS)  
Bren Miles  
Gina Ralph  
Ty Ferrington  
Michael Seebo (VIMS)  
Lynnee Morris  
2 other members of the public

Meeting minutes were prepared by Catherine Wilhelm.

**Opening Remarks and Announcements**

5:05 PM

The meeting was called to order at 5:05 PM and minutes from the August 20, 2024, meeting were approved by unanimous consent.

**I. New Committee Meeting Policy**

Alexa Galván (VMRC Fisheries Management Specialist) informed the committee of changes to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act policy for virtual participation and all-virtual meetings, which the committee bylaws would be amended to include. Motion to amend the by-laws was passed unanimously.

**II. Winter Dredge Survey and Preliminary Commercial Harvest Presentation**

5:14 PM

Mrs. Galván presented the 2024-25 winter dredge survey results to the committee. The adult female abundance estimate (108 million lbs) decreased 19% while remaining above the abundance threshold but below the abundance target. The adult male

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abundance estimate (26 million lbs) decreased 43% and the juvenile abundance estimate (103 million lbs) decreased 23%, with the overall abundance estimate (238 million lbs) decreasing 25% from 2024. The total Bay-wide commercial harvest was 42.5 million pounds, an increase of 9% mostly driven by a 15% increase in Virginia's harvest. Female blue crabs are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring.

Committee members voiced concerns about the methodology employed by the winter dredge survey and the difference between what they are observing in their pots and the abundances calculated by the survey. There were also some concerns regarding the efficiency of the dredge. These concerns were addressed by Dr. Rom Lipcius and Michael Seebo from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), who stated that the uncertainties and efficiency rates of the dredge are accounted for when calculating the abundances and biological reference points, which continue to show that the stock is not overfished, and overfishing is not occurring. Mr. JC Hudgins inquired about the observed shift in the range and behavior of the female crabs in the Bay, and how this might affect the survey results. Dr. Lipcius responded that in the last two years they have seen a shift of females into the lower part of the Bay, but the random stratified survey design needs to remain consistent and clarified that the survey team also takes water temperature while at each station. Mr. Mark Sanford, on the subject of changing water temperatures, stated that he caught five live Florida Stone crabs.

Mr. Marshall Cox stated he doesn't believe temperature caused the abundance to decrease this year, citing historic ranges in weather. Mr. Pete Nixon asked if water currents and wind could be affecting the abundance of larvae going in and out of the bay. Dr. Lipcius stated they are working with physical oceanographers to incorporate that data into the stock assessment. A few committee members had questions about calculations in the winter dredge survey. Several committee members expressed concern that the ongoing regulations have not been able to return the population to previous abundance, with several citing increased predation as a possible cause. Mr. Cox predicted that in 2026 the entities involved in the stock assessment are going to say the catfish, drum, spot, croaker, and other predator populations, as well as anthropogenic effects, are the reason the crabs aren't doing well.

Mrs. Galván then presented Virginia's preliminary 2024 commercial harvest data. In 2024, 745 harvesters reported 15,415,122 pounds of blue crabs. This represents a reduction in harvest and effort from 2023.

### *Discussion of Management Responses*

Mrs. Galván said the staff recommendation is status quo for 2025-26, to avoid preempting the stock assessment results coming in spring of 2026. Members stated concerns over continued usage of negative headlines about the crab population by the press, which affects the market. Mr. Tankard asked for motions. Mr. Spencer Headley made a motion recommending status quo, seconded by Mr. Hudgins. Mr. Sanford asked to amend, for the crab pot season to close on December 20, 2025. Mr. Headley agreed to amend motion. Motion passed unanimously.

### III. Terrapin petition

6:30 PM

Chief of Fisheries Pat Geer presented a petition on bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) to protect diamondback terrapins, which will be heard by the VMRC at their June 24, 2025 Commission meeting. The petition would require BRDs in all licensed crab pots in water less than 150 yards from shore. Chief Geer summarized public comments received during the public comment period, which was open from March 10-31, 2025. VIMS sent a statement in support of the petition, with an additional suggestion for regulations to apply to just the recreational fishery. Chief Geer said staff could present the committee's opinion to the Commission or someone could come and speak on behalf of committee. Numerous committee members were unhappy with the distance from shoreline requirement and asserted the shoreline type was more important than the distance. Mr. Cox moved for CMAC to support BRDs in recreational pots but not commercial. The motion did not receive a second. Mr. Headley made a motion to recommend denying the petition, Mr. Sanford seconded. Motion was passed unanimously, with one abstention by Mr. Chris Moore.

### IV. License Waitlist

6:51 PM

Mrs. Galván presented a history of the crab pot license waitlist established in 2008 to reduce the number of crab licenses available annually in response to the population disaster. The original waitlist had 867 harvesters on it in 2008, which has since decreased to 88 licenses. This reduction is due to harvesters selling the license during the 2008 license buyback, passing away, no longer holding the commercial card (CFRL), or transferring back into the crab fishery. Mrs. Galván said two watermen on the waiting list asked the Commission for their licenses to be reinstated, and the issue was recommended to be discussed by CMAC. Mr. Ken Diggs stated that people who want to fish aren't waiting for the waitlist to open, as there are licenses available for sale. Some potential options given were to reinstate licenses but make them untransferable, or to reinstate those who purchased their licenses from 2004-2007 but didn't fish (still untransferable). Some committee members did not approve of opening the waitlist while the crab fishery is in a decline. Mr. Headley commented that he felt for some of the people on the waiting list, but it should be revisited after the stock assessment comes out. Mr. Diggs wanted the current crabbers to be able to have their full pot allotments reinstated before opening the waiting list. Mr. Wayne Morris asked for confirmation that those on the waitlist can buy someone else's license or be an agent. Mr. Diggs confirmed this. Mr. Headley motioned to table the issue until after the stock assessment, Mr. Diggs seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

### V. Dark Sponge Law

7:03 PM

Mrs. Galván presented the rules of the dark sponge law, which requires crabs with brown or black egg masses to be returned to the water March 17 through June 15. Mr. Headley asked if 90% of the black sponge crabs die when thrown back. Dr. Lipcius stated this mortality occurs only above a certain water temperature. He stated that during May – June most will survive (up to 90%), but in late June – August a lot more will die due to higher temperatures. Mr. Nixon asked if the number of crabs in a pot effects the condition of

the crabs when pulled out, as they have a hard time keeping crabs alive by the time they get to shore. Dr. Lipcius replied they did not detect a difference in death between black sponge crabs and other crabs. Mr. Headley asked if the dark sponge law was removed would it be detrimental to fishery. Dr. Lipcius stated the field studies from 2007 and 2010 showed high mortality from June 15 through September 15. Dr. Lipcius said that moving the end date in the dark sponge law to June 1 would be supported by VIMS as high mortality does not usually start until late June. Mrs. Galván suggested continuing this discussion at a future meeting, with the committee asking now for data they would like presented at that time. Mr. Headley asked if they make this decision before the season opens next year, to which Mrs. Galván replied yes. Mr. Tankard said they would save this topic for a later discussion. Mrs. Galván asked the committee members to reach out to her with what information they would like to see.

## **VI. Public Comment**

7:22 PM

Mr. Sanford requested consistency in the buffer zones of the sanctuaries. He wanted Sanctuaries 3 and 4 to remain open in waters less than 35 ft along the coastline to relieve congestion around Lynnhaven Bay and allow for more fishing opportunities when the sanctuaries close. Mrs. Galván stated that some of this requested zone is within a Naval restricted area. Mr. Sanford said that many other gears were working there already and there wouldn't be any conflict. Mrs. Galván replied that the federal law prohibits fishing, dredging, and crabbing in the naval area. Deputy Commissioner Joe Grist proposed the staff would look into the code and bring it back up at a future meeting. Mrs. Galván said opening the waters up to crab pots further down Virginia Beach might be possible. Dr. Lipcius stated VIMS wouldn't oppose an open strip on the ocean side.

## **VII. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:32 PM.