

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

May 27, 2026 -- 4:00 PM

Members Present

Marshall Cox
Kenneth Diggs
Spencer Headley
J.C. Hudgins
Chris Moore
Bernard “Wayne” Morris
Tom Powers
Cory Rice
Mark Sanford

Members Absent

Nathan Reynolds
John “Ed” Tankard III (chair)
Pete Nixon

VMRC Staff

Alexa Galván
Catherine Wilhelm
Brooke Lowman
Shakira Goffe
Lisa Pyle
Ethan Simpson
Adam Kenyon

Public

Rom Lipcius (VIMS)
Lynnee Morris
Richard Costin
Rochelle Seitz
Gabrielle Saluta
Gina Ralph

Meeting minutes were prepared by Catherine Wilhelm.

AGENDA

I. Welcome; Announcements

Mr. Spencer Headley was acting Chair, as Mr. John Tankard was unable to attend. Mr. Headley called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM. Deputy Chief of Fisheries Management Ethan Simpson introduced himself to the committee and reminded those assembled of the May 31st deadline to reapply for committee seats.

II. Approval of minutes from December 3, 2025, meeting

The minutes from the December 3, 2025 meeting were approved unanimously.

III. Review 2025/2026 Chesapeake Bay Winter Crab Dredge Survey results

Mrs. Alexa Galván provided updates to the committee about the ongoing stock assessment. Mrs. Galván then presented the bay-wide winter dredge survey results. The survey exhibited an increase in crab abundance of 46%, due to an increase in adult male crab and juvenile abundance. Adult female crab abundance

decreased but still remained above the abundance threshold. There was higher overwintering mortality in 2026 in the Chesapeake Bay region.

Members expressed concern about the positivity of the media release and that it did not provide associated information about the decline in adult female crabs. Mr. Marshall Cox asked why crab harvest from the seaside was not included. Mrs. Galván responded that this was a bay-wide survey and only included crabs in and harvest from Chesapeake Bay and the tributaries. Members also stated they would like the meeting materials before the meeting begins for their better understanding of the discussion topics. Mr. J.C. Hudgins expressed concern regarding female population recovery under current regulations. Dr. Rom Lipcius stated that the average female abundance is still higher than it was before the 2008 management changes and closure of the winter dredge fishery. He also stated that the surveys are showing an increase in juvenile abundance in 2025 and stressed his belief that the sanctuary and other measures have helped. Mr. Hudgins then asked about the lack of crabs in the spring on the western side of bay. Dr. Lipcius replied that the movement of the juveniles back into the bay is dependent on the currents coming in and the currents could be directing juveniles elsewhere. Mr. Tom Powers expressed curiosity about the correlation between submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) and larval crabs. Dr. Lipcius replied that the VIMS SAV survey takes place earlier in the year than larval crabs recruit and SAV will die off during the summer so the distribution of SAV can vary greatly between the survey and when larval crabs move into the area. He then stated that his lab is currently working with NOAA on a study relating wind and current to crab abundance.

IV. Review 2025 Virginia harvest data

Mrs. Galván then presented the Virginia commercial harvest data for 2025. Virginia harvest increased 4% to 15,941,125 lbs, alongside a 4% increase in dockside value, 4% decrease in harvesters, and a 6% decrease in number of trips. In 2025, only 54% of hard crab pot eligible licensees were active, having reported harvest. Mr. Chris Moore asked if the licensees who were not active were those with lower pot limits; Mrs. Galván did not have the information differentiated by license type but could look into it.

For the 2026-27 season, staff will recommend status quo for season and bushel limits, with the exception of closing the hard crab pot season on Saturday, December 19, since CMAC has asked to close on Saturday in the past. Mr. Mark Sanford inquired about a March 15 start date instead of March 17 so as to have the season start on Monday. Committee members then asked why the season starts on March 17, to which Mrs. Galván responded it has been like that most years since the dredge fishery closed. Mr. Cory Rice agreed with Mr. Sanford about a March 15 start date, and stated he liked the fact the season ends on a Saturday this year. Mr. Moore pointed out that this is for 2027, and by then the stock assessment results will be out which may change things. Mr. Sanford stated he would rather do it now, so it is not forgotten at a later date.

Mr. Sanford moved to start the season on March 15 and keep all other measures at status quo. Mr. Rice seconded and the motion passed, seven in favor, one against, with no abstentions.

Mrs. Galván provided information on the University of Maryland study that attached acoustic trackers to crabs to monitor movement and said the VMRC has received questions from crabbers who have caught these crabs. Mr. Powers asked if there was a preference to release the crab or just return the devices. Dr. Lipcius replied that the scientists do not care what is done with the crabs or the devices. Mr. Moore asked if staff or the lab running the experiment could provide pictures or information about it to the public. Mrs. Galván stated that staff will ask the lab.

V. Public Comment

Mr. Cox asked staff to look into enforcement of pot limits, specifically for out-of-state licensees, and stated his discontent with non-residents not complying with regulations. Mr. Sanford brought up the discussion about the sponge law and sanctuary, and Mrs. Galván confirmed the intention on waiting on the results of the stock assessment before further discussion. Mr. Powers asked for a copy of the stock assessment report to be provided for all members when it is released.

Dr. Lipcius requested any information or pictures of stone crabs seen in Virginia waters to be passed along to him. Mr. Moore asked how far north in the bay stone crabs have been seen, to which Dr. Lipcius replied the mouth of the James River. Mr. Hudgins then asked Dr. Lipcius if the color change in sponge crabs was temperature related. Dr. Lipcius replied that it was.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 PM.