

**VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION**  
**FINFISH MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
380 FENWICK ROAD, FORT MONROE, VIRGINIA  
VMRC COMMISSION ROOM  
February 10, 2025, 5:00 PM

Members Present

- Jeffery (Jeff) Deem
- Alex Aspinwall
- Alexander Perez
- Ernest Bowden (virtual)
- Will Bransom
- Michael (Mike) Lightfoot
- Chris Ludford
- Scott MacDonald
- George Trice
- Skip Feller
- Mark Sanford
- Marcus Simes
- John Bello (virtual)
- Tom Powers

Members Absent

- Meade Amory

VMRC Staff Present

- Pat Geer
- Shanna Madsen
- Alexa Galván
- Brooke Lowman
- Shakira Goffe
- Jill Ramsey
- Catherine Wilhelm
- Chris Davis
- Joshua McGilly

Others Present

- John Balderson
- Vivian Fulkerson
- Jacob Jewell
- Nathan Everett
- Travis Aigner
- Christian Moore
- Olivia
- Chris Von Hatten
- Deven Simmerman
- ~7 other members of the public

Minutes prepared by Shakira Goffe

**I. FMAC Welcome**

Vice Chairman Will Bransom called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

**II. Approval of minutes from the November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024, meeting**

The November 12, 2024, meeting minutes were approved by consent.

**III. Extended Drift Gill Net Management Discussion**

Mr. Chris Davis presented data from an experimental Spanish mackerel extended gill net fishery that occurred in Virginia from 2022 through 2024.

Deputy Chief Shanna Madsen presented proposed regulatory changes to accompany the establishment of a new extended drift gill net license. These suggestions consist of

- Limiting these gill nets to the mainstem of the Chesapeake Bay and coastal Virginia waters, up to three miles.
- Season of June 1 to September 15
- Daily time limit would be from Sunset to 8am
- Licensees must stay within 100 yards of the net
- Gill nets must be marked as per 4VAC20-430-20
- Adding additional safety measures: two all-around lights on the vessel in a vertical line with the upper being red and the lower being white; and the end marker flag must have a light; which was suggested by the fishery and consistent with Coast Guard commercial fishing law.
- VMRC Observers being able to sample.

**a) Committee Discussion**

Vice Chairman Bransom questioned the length of the net and if these experiments were taken place in the upper peninsula off the middle of the bay and asked for clarification about the floating gill nets. Vice Chairman Bransom expressed concern about potential of conflict with unmarked nets, especially with recreational traffic. Mr. Davis assured them that there have been minimal issues with boat traffic.

**b) Public Comment**

Mr. Jacob Jewell suggested the season start May 1<sup>st</sup>. Mr. John Balderson and Mr. Nathan Everett expressed concern with the proposed daily time limit. The committee suggested extending the time limit to 9:00am; however, some noted that if the fishermen were behind in pulling up the net by the suggested time, they could call Marine Police Operations to avoid being penalized. Mr. Everett expressed concerns with the 500 pounds bycatch limit and asked that it be increased. Deputy Chief Madsen clarified that the bycatch rule is federal, and states were asked by ASFMC to implement this regulation. Mr. Scott MacDonald asked if there needs to be a season for this fishery. Deputy Chief Madsen responded that the season may be an area to seek compromise, given the functionality of the fishery; however, the final decision rests with the Commission.

**c) Committee Recommendation**

Mr. Mark Sanford made a motion to get rid of the season, to change the hours to a half hour before sunset until 9am, and to have an option of either a Radar reflector or a light on the end buoy. Motion was seconded by Mr. Marcus Simes. Motion passed unanimously.

**IV. Blue Catfish Management Discussion**

Ms. Alexa Galván presented changes being proposed for the catfish electrofishing fishery. Those changes include:

- Expanding the number of licenses from 3 to 10
- Expanding areas by adding the Chickahominy River as a separate harvest area and adding the Mattaponi to the area that includes the Pamunkey
- Removing the maximum size limit for harvesting blue catfish by electrofishing.

- Removing eligibility constraints for applicants
- An increased buffer around boat ramps, all public and private piers and where people are in the water from 100 yards to 300 yards
- An increased buffer around fixed gears to 300 yards, while keeping the buffer around other marked fishing gear at 100 yards

#### **a) Committee Discussion**

Mr. Michael Lightfoot wanted to know the reasoning for not considering the Potomac tributaries as an expansion area for the fishery. Chief Pat Geer and Ms. Galván explained that the tributaries have been excluded to prevent user conflicts. Mr. Tom Powers expressed his concern about the 300-yard buffer around popular shore-based areas that may or may not have piers and user conflict. Ms. Galván explained that popular places are expected to have boat ramps or piers, and she gave the updated definition of pier. Mr. Jeffery Deem asked if the maximum or minimum size limit would be removed. Ms. Galván explained there is no minimum, just a maximum currently and that would be removed. Mr. Deem also asked about consumption health regulations. Ms. Galván said there are consumption advisories by the Virginia Department of Health on blue catfish, which vary by location and size of fish. Mr. Lightfoot mentioned how he felt all catfish needed to be caught and this seems to be a step in the right direction but seems restricted due to the area limits and would like to open the tributaries.

#### **b) Public Comment**

Mr. Christian Moore asked why the size limit would be lifted given that there isn't a large market for the large fish. He also does not support all the fish being removed. Ms. Olivia mentioned that after lots of research, she didn't feel it would make sense scientifically to remove all the fish. Mr. Chris Von Hatten stated he feels there should be a limit on the large catfish being caught. He stated that he is one of three electro fishers and doesn't feel the need to take the large fish which, therefore, can spawn and keep him in business. He felt if more permits were given, others may not catch many fish due to low activity from fish that were shocked before.

#### **c) Committee recommendation**

Mr. Michael Lightfoot made a two-part motion to recommend:

- 300 yards from where staff defines a special pier which includes campgrounds, swimming areas, public fishing pier
- Remove the size limit to match the current legislation in the General Assembly

There was no second to the motion, so the motion did not move forward.

Mr. Tom Powers made a motion to expand the licensing from 3 to 6. Mr. Michael Lightfoot seconded the motion. This motion passed with seven in favor, three opposed, and three abstentions. Mr. Powers made another motion to support expansion of Chickahominy and Mattaponi. Mr. Michael Lighthouse seconded the motion. This motion passed with six in favor, zero opposed, and seven abstentions. Mr. Powers made another motion to expand buffer to 150 yards and include public commercial campgrounds and fishing piers and 300 yards from fixed fishing gears. This motion passed with four in favor, zero opposed, and nine abstentions.

## **V. Public comment for items not on the agenda**

Mr. Powers asked if staff would keep an eye on the cold stun kills on speckled trout and possibly change the season to give fish a chance to spawn. Chief Geer showed a chart of water temperature from the Yorktown Coast Guard station indicating waters exceeded the criteria of 8-days below 42°F used by North Carolina to manage their fishery, with the Coast Guard station below that criteria for 28 consecutive days. However, he stated Virginia has no fishery independent surveys that can help determine the overall mortality associated with a cold stun event.

## **VI. Other Business**

Ms. Galván stated that the recreational February black sea bass season had started and wanted to know if the committee supported extending the mid-season closure to make up for February landings, as has been done the last two years, if the landings are similar to previous years. The committee was in favor of this plan.

## **VII. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:46 p.m.