

Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Finfish Management Advisory Committee (FMAC) Minutes
2600 Washington Avenue, Newport News, VA
VMRC Commission Room, 4TH Floor
Monday February 12, 2018 – 6:00 P.M.

ATTENDANCE

Members Present

Hon. Ken Neill proxy for Jeff Deem
Denny Dobbins proxy for Jack Austin
John Bello
Meade Amory
David Agee proxy for Hon. Ken Neill
Chris Ludford proxy for Scott
MacDonald
Pete Nixon proxy for Skip Feller

VMRC Staff Present

Joe Cimino
Lewis Gillingham
Ryan Jiorle
Alex Aspinwall
Sydney Alhale
Jill Ramsey

Members Absent

Robert Weagley
Tom Powers
Andy Hall
Walter Rogers
Ernest Bowden

Others Present

John Brown
Sheldon Arey
Mike Avery
Stan Simmerman
Zachery Hoffman
Butch Eason
Jerry Hughes
Ronnie Nixon
Patrick Link
Gary Seay
Wes Blow
Jingwei Song
Susanna Musick (VIMS)
Charles Dryden
John Dryden
Alex Field
Chris O'Brien
Chris Newsome
Keith Nuttall
John Green
Andrew Wilson
Max Soistmann
George Trice
Forest Short
Kevin O'Reilly

I. FMAC Introductions; Announcements

The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm.

II. Approval of minutes for the February 27, March 27, August 28, and November 29, 2017 meetings

Due to committee member absence, the approval of minutes will be done electronically.

III. New Business:

Discussion of possible Speckled Trout recreational closure due to recent cold stun events

During the public comment period at the January commission meeting, two members from the public made a request to close the recreational speckled trout fishery. The Commission chose to defer the decision to the FMAC. Mr. Joe Cimino gave a brief background on the presence of fish kills due to recent cold stun events, including large numbers of speckled trout. The public expressed concern over the amount of speckled trout killed this winter and requested a discussion on a possible speckled trout closure. In 2014, several recreational fishermen requested that VMRC close the recreational speckled trout season after the cold snap and VMRC honored their request. The Commission also instituted a trigger that places the commercial fishery into bycatch mode when 80% of the commercial quota is harvested. Mr. Cimino explained that there is no data to suggest that this closure actually provided a higher level of juveniles in the following year.

The committee took public comments both for and against a possible closure. Gary Seay and Robert Hollowell did not support a closure, explaining that the cold stuns are natural events. Mr. Hollowell, a commercial fishermen, explained there is no shortage of speckled trout and he has been catching them throughout the winter. John Brown, Chris Newsome, Forest Short, Sheldon Arey, and Keith Nuttall expressed their concerns about the number of dead speckled trout and requested VMRC close the recreational fishery. Three members of the public specifically requested VMRC put a trigger in place to close the fishery when a cold stun occurs, similar to North Carolina's trigger system.

Mr. John Bello asked VMRC staff to make a recommendation to the FMAC and Mr. Cimino explained that staff is abstaining from taking a position due to the lack of data. Mr. Meade Amory made a motion to leave the fishery as it is and not change any regulations. The motion was seconded by Mr. Denny Dobbins. All were in favor of leaving the fishery status quo.

Discussion of Cobia Options for 2018 Recreational Season

Mr. Ryan Jiorle presented the current VMRC recreational cobia regulations and discussed the ASMFC cobia fishery management plan approved at the October 2017 meeting. To comply with this plan VMRC will need to adjust regulations for both the recreational and commercial cobia. VMRC submitted recreational options to be reviewed by the cobia technical committee, 4 of these were later approved by ASMFC's South Atlantic Board, while the remaining three were given conditional approval contingent on NOAA approving of the VMRC's alternate data set for average weight. The four approved options given establish a combination of vessel limit and season length that will achieve the predicted 2018 soft harvest target of 244,292 pounds or fewer using the accepted average weight from NOAA's Southeast Fisheries Science Center. The remaining three only achieve this when using the VMRC's average weight data.

Mr. Jiorle presented the 7 options with various season start and end dates and vessel limits, including seasons in May and September and asked the public their preference. Of the four options unconditionally approved by the ASMFC, Mike Avery, Zack Hoffman, Chris O'Brien, and Kevin O'Reilly expressed their support for the June 1 –September 30 and 3 fish option. However, Wes Blow and Patrick Link supported the May 15 through September 15 and 3 fish option, if it got approval by NOAA, stating it would be fair to have both May and September dates. Mr. Jerry Hughes asked staff what the mandatory reporting cobia data is being used for and Mr. Jiorle explained that VMRC needs more years of data before the data is useful to determine trends. Five members of the public stated that they would like gaffing reinstated.

Five members of the public also stated they would like to keep the 1 fish over 50 inches, total length, provision. Mr. John Bello made a motion to recommend June 1-September 30, 3 fish vessel limit, and 1 fish over 50 inches. Pete Nixon seconded this motion. All were in favor. Unfortunately, because there was no longer a quorum at that point in the meeting, the recommendation is an informal one.

Mr. Jiorle also presented on the changes needed to the commercial regulations to establish a possession limit of no more than 2 per CRFL-holder or daily vessel limit of no more than 6, whichever is more restrictive, to comply with the fishery management plan. Several people from the public

expressed their concerns, stating there are not enough commercial cardholders to work with for this to be economically feasible for them.

(Time Permitting) Updates from the ASMFC meeting (February):

- Black Sea Bass:

Mr. Joe Cimino gave a brief update on the ASMFC approved Draft Addendum XXX to consider alternative regional management approaches to address geographic differences in the stock.

- American Eel

Mr. Joe Cimino gave a brief update about the recent approval of American Eel Draft Addendum V for public comment. The Addendum proposes coastwide commercial landing caps and will be discussed in a public hearing at a later time.

- Striped Bass

Mr. Joe Cimino spoke about Maryland's Conservation Equivalency Proposal for its striped bass recreational fishery. The Board approved Option B (Season: May 16 - December 15; Size and Bag: 2 fish at 19" minimum with only 1 fish allowed greater than 28 inches; Non-offset circle hooks required when fishing with bait / non-artificial lures). Virginia abstained from the vote.

- South Atlantic Board

- Cobia

ASMFC updates on cobia were given earlier in the meeting.

- Black Drum

The South Atlantic Board approved Draft Addendum I, which will allow Maryland to have a commercial black drum fishery.

- Spot and Croaker

Mr. Joe Cimino spoke about the possibility of ASMFC creating a tool (ex. surveys) instead of a stock assessment to evaluate the state of the stock and the data collected throughout the region.

IV. Old Business

There was no old business.

V. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:15pm.

DRAFT