

Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Menhaden Management Advisory Committee (MMAC)
Conducted via electronic means using WebEx
Tuesday, November 17, 2020 – 4:00 P.M.

ATTENDANCE

Members Present

Dr. Rob Latour (Chair)
Shanna Madsen (Vice Chair)
Steve Atkinson
Monty Diehl
AJ Erskine
Daniel Knott
Mike Leonard
Chris Moore
Ken Schultz (call-in only)

Members Absent

Mark Federici

VMRC Staff Present

Pat Geer
Olivia Phillips
Somers Smott
Lewis Gillingham
Alexa Kretsch
Jill Ramsey
Jennifer Farmer

Others Present

Mike Waine
Thomas Lilly
David Rose
John Bello
Taylor Deihl
Ben Landry
Bill Dunn
Peter Himchak
R. Crockett

Minutes were prepared by Somers Smott.

I. MMAC Announcements – P. Geer

Due to the COVID-19 office closure, this meeting was conducted via electronic communication means (WebEx). The meeting was called to order by Chief of Fisheries Pat Geer at 4:05 P.M.

II. Approval of minutes from the from April 20, 2020

The motion to approve the minutes from the April 20, 2020 meeting was made by Mr. AJ Erskine, seconded by Mr. Monty Deihl. The minutes were approved by consent.

III. New Business:

A. Election of a Chair and a Vice Chair

Chief of Fisheries Pat Geer called for nominations for a Chair and Vice Chair for the MMAC. Mr. Deihl nominated Dr. Rob Latour, and Mr. Chris Moore seconded. The motion to elect Dr. Latour as Chair was approved by consent. Mr. Erskine nominated Mr. Deihl for Vice Chair. Mr. Deihl instead nominated Deputy Chief Shanna Madsen. Mr. Erskine yielded and seconded the

nomination for Deputy Chief Madsen. The motion to elect Deputy Chief Madsen as Vice Chair was approved by consent.

B. Reference Point and TAC Update

Vice Chair Shanna Madsen began with a presentation on the history of menhaden management within the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). In 2010, the ASMFC Board tasked the Ecological Reference Points Workgroup (ERP WG) to explore modeling approaches to incorporate menhaden's importance as a forage species. Historically, the menhaden stock assessment used the Beaufort single-species assessment model (BAM). The ASMFC technical committees generated the MSVPA-X model to create a natural mortality matrix to be input into the BAM. However, in order to generate true ecological reference points, a multispecies model needed to be developed. After several years of work, a selection of models ranging in complexity were presented for peer review at ASMFC in December 2019. The models used a subset of prey and predator species that had recent benchmark stock assessments to try to model the effect of predation on menhaden. The final model recommended by the ERP WG was the NWACS-MICE model in combination with the single species BAM model. Using this combination, the ERP WG created a fishing mortality target and a threshold for menhaden based on striped bass fishing mortality. Vice Chair Madsen finished the update of menhaden management by reminding the committee that these models and ecosystem approaches to management are not the panacea for all fisheries issues, especially given the status of the striped bass stock. They will need to be used in conjunction with controls on fishing mortality.

Next, Vice Chair Madsen described the recently set Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for menhaden at the October 2020 ASMFC meeting. She explained how the TAC options were based on the risk of exceeding both the newly accepted ERP target and the ERP threshold for menhaden. The ASMFC Board approved a TAC of 194,400 metric tons, which is a decrease of 10% from previous years. Virginia receives 78.66% of the TAC, and after the 1% set aside, this equals around 333 million pounds for 2021. This is further broken down into Virginia's three menhaden sectors, and further more into gear types. Vice Chair Madsen explained that some states relinquish quota, so the final quota may change for 2021. The final numbers will be discussed at VMRC's December 8, 2020 meeting.

Following Vice Chair Madsen's presentation, questions about the ERPs and the TAC were taken from the committee. Chair Latour and Mr. Erskine asked about the timelines with updating the ERPs with new analyses, and Vice Chair Madsen explained that changes could only be completed when full benchmark stock assessments are done, not just updates. She further explained that larger changes to integrate seasonal and spatial components into the model are necessary but won't occur for five to six years. The ERP model requires that the single species models for each ERP species also be updated so ASMFC must work to coordinate a lot of moving data parts. Mr. Erskine asked if the TAC may change in 2023, and Vice Chair Madsen responded that it was a possibility with the stock assessment update in 2022. Mr. Moore asked about the bycatch revision in reference to the quotas, and Vice Chair Madsen assured him that the provision still stands. Mr. Moore continued by asking how much additional catch the bycatch provision accounts. Vice Chair Madsen explained it is not a significant amount. Mr. Daniel Knott expressed the importance of the bycatch provision and his appreciation that it was still in place.

C. Disaster Relief Update

Chief Geer updated the committee on how staff was handling the application process for relief funds due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a formula created by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act granted around 4.5 million dollars to VMRC for fisheries relief. Chief Geer explained that staff had hoped for more funds. He explained how both NOAA and ASMFC took some funding for administrative costs, but that the rest of the funds will go directly to qualified applicants in Virginia. Chief Geer explained that the spend plan was open for public comment, sent to NOAA, and finalized after some minor edits. Round One of the application process targeted VMRC ID holders, and it was estimated that 2,200 people would have qualified. Round One closed last week, with 615 applications approved. Round Two of the funding process opened yesterday and targeted those who do not hold a VMRC ID (mates, fish house workers, etc.). Chief Geer commented that low application numbers were being seen in states coastwide. He closed the update by thanking staff for their tireless work on this program. There were no further questions.

IV. Other Business

A. Timing of Meetings

Chairman Latour opened the floor for discussion on when the committee should meet throughout the year. Vice Chair Madsen recommended a November meeting for the discussion on the TAC set by ASMFC, and this was agreed upon by the committee. Chairman Latour suggested a March meeting in preparation for the season opening in May, which was also agreed on by the committee. Mr. Chris Moore suggested having a third meeting in early summer in order to tackle some of the bigger agenda items. Chief Geer agreed and added that the committee is obligated to meet twice per year but can meet more often if issues make it necessary. Most advisory committees meet no more than 4 times per year.

B. Agenda Setting

Chairman Latour explained his preference for setting agendas for MMAC meetings. He explained how topics need to be treated comprehensively so interested parties can come prepared for items instead of overloading the "Other Business" section of the agenda. If members of the committee are interested in adding items to the agenda, they need to approach the Chair, Vice Chair, and VMRC staff at least a month in advance. He further explained that the interested committee member needs to have information prepared and distributed to the rest of the committee at least two weeks in advance. Some members of the committee expressed disappointment that agenda items discussed at the April meeting were not on the agenda for this meeting, including the changes to the demarcation line for the Chesapeake Bay. Chief Geer responded to this indicating that it was much larger than VMRC adjusting regulation, and would require much more work to coordinate ASMFC and NOAA. The advanced notice and preparation of materials were consented upon within the committee.

Mr. Atkinson asked for clarification on the duties of the committee, including how recommendations to the VMRC Board work. Chief Geer explained that MMAC was an advisory

committee, and staff would present the committee recommendation as well as their staff recommendation at the VMRC meetings. The Commission would have the final say as to what is approved for regulations.

V. Public Comment

Mr. Ben Landry made a public comment asking about how best available science contributes to menhaden management at VMRC. Chief Geer responded, assuring him that science will always be at the forefront of VMRC staff recommendations. Chairman Latour added to that, explaining why he wants more organization in agenda setting to make sure staff and responsible parties can present the best available science.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:25 P.M. by Chairman Latour.