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Meeting Minutes

Virginia Commercial Fishing Advisory Board Meeting

Virginia Marine Resources Commission

380 Fenwick Road, Ft. Monroe, VA 23651

Thursday September 17, 2026

Members in Attendance:

JJ Minor
Lynn Kellum
Revel Walker
Richard Harding
Ross Kellum
Benjamin Johnson
Nathan Reynolds (participating remotely)

Staff Present:

Alicia Nelson
Adam Tomlin
Sheri Crocker
Lisa Pyle
Alexa Galván
Debbie Corker

Members Not in Attendance:

Jason Smith

Others Present:

Paul Bayer
Kirk Havens
Donna Bilkovic
Rachel Peabody
JC Hudgins
David Rudders
Nathan Everett
Will Harrington
Monica Scheneman

Meeting minutes were recorded by Alicia Nelson and Adam Tomlin. A recording of this meeting is available.

I. Introduction, Announcements, Comments

Alicia Nelson introduced the meeting and noted the meeting was recorded. She explained that three applications would be reviewed and shared the code sections relating to the CFAB and Marine Fishing Improvement Fund.

II. Review of the meeting minutes from the June 2026 meeting

JJ Minor asked if members had reviewed the minutes. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Lynn Kellum. The motion was seconded by Ben Johnson and passed unanimously.

III. Budget review

Sheri Crocker presented the financial report, noting that approximately \$1.3 million was available for projects.

IV. Applications for review

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- A. Virginia Beach Working Waterfront Revitalization Project, Paul Bayer, City of Virginia Beach Development Authority, \$25,000.

Paul Bayer (Virginia Beach Development Authority), Racheal Peabody (Virginia Marine Products Board), Will Harrington (Fisherman's Wharf Marina), and Nathan Everett (Still Kick'n Seafood) presented the proposal supporting a waterfront revitalization project at Rudee Inlet,

The application includes establishing seafood infrastructure at the site by leasing and revitalizing a portion of Fisherman's Wharf Marine to Still Kick'n Seafood and includes funding for commercial ice production, refrigerated storage, and seafood handling facilities. The project hopes to strengthen Virginia's seafood supply chain, reduce operating costs for producers, improve product quality, attract seafood buyers, and retain the economic value of Virginia-caught seafood within the Commonwealth.

They noted that the total project cost is \$106,000. The City of Virginia Beach Development Authority with support from the Marine Products Board is requesting \$25,000 toward the project, which will be matched by a \$25,000 commitment from The City of Virginia Beach Development Authority. The City of Virginia Beach Development Authority has also submitted an AFID Infrastructure Grant application requesting up to \$50,000. Mr. Harrington also noted that \$15,000 in electrical upgrades had also been made at the site to support the effort.

Mr. Kellum asked for clarification about the seafood handling mentioned in the application. Mr. Bayer said that the initial goal is to get the infrastructure in place and that there is hope that one of the commercial boxes can be used for local storage while there are hopes for additional capabilities in the future.

Mr. Everett noted that the goal was to aid the current fisheries for mackerel dogfish and shrimp. He also commented that a lot of work had already been completed for the zoning and building permit to get the project started. He also noted that currently, harvesters offload their truck into pickup trucks and that this new play would allow for icing and refrigeration to help improve the overall product.

Mr. Walker and Mr. Johnson asked questions about who would be allowed to purchase seafood at the site. The applicants noted that currently, the lease was for Still Kick'n Seafood but that the Marine Products Board would like to work with any business interested in obtaining an AFID grant. There was discussion about limiting this to individual business versus the total industry and comments that the seafood business has turned private versus having public working waterfronts.

There was clarification that the applicant (and payments from the agency) would be provided to the Virginia Beach Development Authority if approved.

JC Hudgins commented that the Virginia Watermen's Association fully supports funding the program noting that it was a first step in promoting working waterfronts in Virginia. Monica Sheneman echoed these comments that it was important to start somewhere to promote increases in the seafood opportunities.

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Ms. Nelson clarified that the comments in the original application requesting that this action be made retroactive were originally requested in order to align start dates with the AFID grant, but due to the current schedule, that request is now unnecessary.

Nathan Reynolds motioned to approve this project, and Revel Walker seconded the motion. Richard Harding asked for a friendly amendment to include a report about their progress in 6 months. The friendly amendment was accepted. The motion passed with 4 in favor, two opposed, and one abstention.

B. Diamondback Terrapin Habitat Mapping, Donna Bilkovic, William & Mary Batten School of Coastal & Marine Sciences, \$81,600.

Donna Bilkovic presented her proposal for updating and expanding the current 2015 terrapin occupancy model, stating that this project will deliver a practical map viewer to identify primary diamondback habitat areas which would help waterman better avoid bycatch. She noted that they will work with commercial watermen to share their knowledge of terrapin habitat areas and volunteers to map terrapin hotspots.

Mr. Reynolds noted that DWR has already maintained the maps and asked about the return to this phone and asked about verifying which pots were active compared to which were derelict. Ms. Bilkovic answered that the current effort was based solely on observations and was limited to certain areas. She said that once locations were better understood in relation to the march, that it could be expanded to the entire area. She also noted that the volunteers identify pots based on observations, not pulling pots.

Mr. Walker asked how this project would benefit the commercial fishery, and Ms. Bilkovic answered that it benefits you in that it identifies the terrapin hot spots to help with avoidance of interactions. She noted that most of the expected interactions were primarily in the recreational fishery and that it could be used to indicate there is no interaction where the commercial fishery is operating for example.

Mr. Harding asked if this could potentially lead to closing areas to potential harvest because of this. Ms. Bilkovic replied that she is not a regulator but that her understanding is that the focus is on recreational crabbing at this time. Mr. Harding noted that it could lead to more and Ms. Bilkovic noted that most of the interaction is happening in the recreational fishery so it makes the most sense to focus there.

Ms. Kellum asked why this project was being heard by CFAB and not split funded or heard by RFAB. Ms. Nelson noted that the application was sent to this board and that management level questions would be handled by the management board and commission and noted that data described here would ultimately inform management decisions that would be important to both commercial and recreational fisheries.

Mr. Hudgins noted that he does not support this funding at this time. He mentioned a TED bill for funding, and did not feel that it was a proper use of the funding at this time. He noted that it was also on the agenda for the September CMAC meeting. He also noted that the terrapin population should be estimated in different ways than the current observations.

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Ms. Sheneman commented that she was concerned about this source of the fund for this project. She noted other funding sources and felt that this money should not come from this fund.

Mr. Kellum called for additional comments and Ms. Haynie asked staff if this could be split funded between the commercial and recreational advisory boards. Ms. Nelson replied that the recreational fishing advisory board had met earlier in the week and would not be able to meet again before the Commission meeting on Tuesday. She noted that both boards are advisory boards to the Commission and that the Commission makes final decisions on the funds.

Benjamin Johnson motioned that this be referred to RFAB, Mr. Harding seconded the motion. Mr. Minor asked for further discussion. The motion passed unanimously. Ms. Nelson clarified about the recommendations specifically for this item for the CFAB recommendation to the Commission on Tuesday. The board members noted that there was support from the project from a different funding source but that the recommendation from this fund was no.

- C. Targeted Derelict Crab Pot Removal in Important Terrapin Habitat, Kirk Havens, William & Mary Batten School of Coastal & Marine Sciences, \$144,486.

Kirk Havens presented his project on derelict crab pot removal, explaining that the program involves training watermen, providing necessary equipment, and hiring them to locate and remove derelict pots. He noted that VIMS was part of a larger national program. He noted that this program would work with the previous proposal to target pot removal in terrapin hot spots.

Ms. Kellum asked about how the watermen were selected that worked with the program and wondered if it was a lottery. Dr. Havens noted that it was not a lottery, that they had a group of watermen that they have been working with that had approached them, but that there was also some criteria such as having appropriate licenses, being primarily watermen, and location.

Ms. Kellum asked if he would be open to having an application process for watermen who would like to participate and then having a lottery service for selection. Mr. Havens said that a lottery is problematic because there is a need in specific areas. Once they met all those other criteria there could be a selection process, but there generally aren't that many interested. He noted that with the current contractors they generally have watermen contact them about a certain area, but he said that if they had multiple people available in needed areas that there could be some sort of lottery but that experience was also important to consider as well.

Mr. Ross Kellum asked what happens to the sonar units after the program ends. Mr. Havens said that the units generally come back and they are occasionally loaned back out to watermen to help find lost pots. He said that generally, technology moves so quickly that new units are purchased every few years.

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Mr. Harding asked if this would be done throughout the whole bay, and Dr. Havens said that target locations would be determined by terrapin hot spots. He noted that it could be the whole bay, but it would be focused on the identified areas.

Mr. Walker asked about the full time requirement and Dr. Havens explained that they utilize full time watermen (versus hobbyists) and that their requirement was 15 days over the 3 month period.

Mr. Reynolds asked clarifying questions about the recovery program and if there would be observers on board (where VIMS staff was involved) to clarify benefits considering the terrapin populations and the existing ghost pot programs. Mr. Minor also described the budget listed in the CFAB application. Dr. Havens explained the benefits of removing derelict pots for the commercial harvesters because they continue to fish and clarified that terrapins continue to be listed as a species of concern in Virginia. There was discussion on zinc versus pvc coated pots. Mr. Havens noted that there were not observers, but that the contracted watermen used an application to track data.

Mr. Johnson asked about the facilities and personnel costs listed in the budget. He noted that there were several staff associated with the project for about a month of time each. They train the watermen and do the data assurance on the information and map maintenance. Ms. Nelson also explained that with this program we limit applicants to a 25% indirect cost rate.

Mr. Hudgins noted that he supports the removal of derelict crab pots but does not support the use of this fund for that purpose. He noted an 8 million dollar allotment for derelict crab pot removal. He noted that the watermen's association had not been contacted about the application process. Ms. Scheneman echoed Mr. Hudgins comments and also noted that it was difficult to find the application process online and thought that it should be more easily accessible to watermen. She made similar comments about previous funding for derelict pot programs. Dr. Havens explained that the \$8 million fund noted was a nationwide program. Portions of those funds go towards the Virginia efforts; however, that program ends this year. He noted that there are 10 watermen who have been contacted for that work. He said that watermen were welcome to call in to inquire about being included in the program. He noted that the funding requested here was for the following season after this program ends.

Ms. Haynie asked about funding this program from the recreational fund. Ms. Nelson clarified that this board can't make a recommendation to the Commission on expenditures from the recreational license fund.

Mr. Minor noted that he would like to see some sort of lottery system for selection.

Mr. Reynolds asked for the names of the 10 watermen contracted. Ms. Nelson commented that Dr. Havens can describe this information within his comfort. She suggested that we needed to be careful with personally identifying information. Kirk Havens offered to provide the chairman and Mr. Hudgins with the list of names as well as their working area.

Mr. Minor asked for recommendations. Mr. Walker motioned to approve the project. Lynn Kellum requested a friendly amendment to include a lottery to select harvesters. The

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motion was amended to recommend approving the project with the stipulation of using a lottery system or placing a bounty on pots. The motion failed for a lack of second.

There were no additional motions or action on this item.

V. Waterman's Internship Program Update

Due to the length of the meeting, this update was deferred until the next CFAB meeting.

VI. Additional Business

Ms. Nelson noted that the next board meeting would be virtual and is expected to be held in November or December of this year. The meeting ended at 12:46 pm.