

**VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION
FINFISH MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
380 FENWICK ROAD, FORT MONROE, VIRGINIA
VMRC COMMISSION ROOM
August 28, 2025 – 5:00 PM**

Members Present

- Ernest Bowden
- Jeff Deem
- Alex Aspinwall
- Will Bransom
- Michael Lightfoot (virtual)
- George Trice
- Skip Feller
- Mark Sanford
- Marcus Simes
- John Bello
- Tom Powers

Members Absent

- Meade Amory
- Chris Ludford
- Alexander Perez
- Scott MacDonald

VMRC Staff Present

- Adam Kenyon
- Alexa Galván
- Brooke Lowman
- Shakira Goffe
- Jill Ramsey
- Catherine Wilhelm
- Chris Davis
- Ethan Simpson
- Max Kleinhans
- Lisa Pyle
- Allen Marshall – Marine Police
- Joe Grist (virtual)
- Jack Dearstine (virtual)

Others Present

- Shanna Madsen
- Johnny Wood
- Barbara Bowden
- 2 other members of the public

Minutes prepared by Catherine Wilhelm

I. FMAC Welcome

Chairman Ernest Bowden called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm. Acting Chief Adam Kenyon announced Pat Geer’s retirement and introduced himself to the committee as the Chief of Shellfish Management and Acting Chief of Fisheries Management.

II. Approval of Minutes from the February 10, 2025, Meeting

The minutes the February 10, 2025, meeting were approved unanimously.

III. Bluefish Reporting

Ms. Shakira Goffe presented the current status of the 2024 and 2025 bluefish landings. Bluefish landings exceeded the Virginia commercial quota in 2024, an event which has produced the need to more closely track landings. The 2024 quota was 225,380 lbs, from which 50,000 lbs were transferred to other states as Virginia is usually under quota. The 2024 Virginia landings were 244,473 lbs.. Currently, commercial harvest must be

reported monthly, online or on paper. Delays from processing paper reports create a lag in reporting for quota monitoring.

Staff requested input on implementing weekly online reports from June 1st to October 31st for bluefish. Mr. Sanford notes that reporting weekly is a big burden, and that the gear with the highest catch should be the ones subjected to frequent reporting. Mr. Bowden then asked about the 50,000 lbs transfer in 2024, and Acting Chief Kenyon said the overage is being discussed with the other states, stating that Virginia can get paid back by the states who were transferred to. Mr. John Bello asked who the quota was transferred to; Mrs. Ramsey responded Rhode Island, Massachusetts and North Carolina, and it is unknown if it was fully used. Mr. Bransom put to the committee the idea of trip limit once a certain percentage of the quota was landed. When a percentage of the quota is reached a weekly reporting requirement for certain gears would be triggered.

Mr. Mike Lightfoot questioned that if the reporting occurs and quota is reached, would all extended gill net have to stop (impacting the Spanish mackerel fishery) to not go over quota. Acting Chief Kenyon said possibly. Mr. Bowden stated that the mackerel people want to stay away from the bluefish when fishing.

Acting Chief Kenyon summarized the suggestions of the committee into the following: adding a trigger, specific gear reporting, and the need to look at the consequences of shutting down other fisheries to avoid bycatch.

IV. Catfish Commercial Hook and Line License

Mrs. Alexa Galván presented the commercial catfish hook and line proposal. This proposal came about from the growing interest of watermen and the public in selling their caught catfish.

The current commercial hook and line license is limited entry (200 licenses) and cannot be mixed with recreational trips. The proposed commercial catfish hook and line license would only allow harvest of blue and flathead catfish with no possession or size limits and would have no eligibility requirements except for a Commercial Fisherman Registration License (CFRL). The license would be limited to rivers and tributaries between the saltwater/freshwater boundaries and fall line, and commercial trips could not be mixed with recreational trips. Mr. George Trice asked about the possibility of adding channel catfish as one of the target species. Mrs. Galván said other species can be considered, including snakehead. Mr. Lightfoot supported the idea but stated that the waterman's card (CFRL) is hard to get and there should be an experimental program just for the catfish hook and line. Mrs. Galván said there is not a big experimental aspect to this proposal, and there are two ways for an individual to obtain a CFRL. Mr. Bransom stated that the commercial watermen he knows don't have enough time in the day to hook and line, and so this license may not be useful to most commercial watermen. Mr. Bowden agreed with him, and stated that it's really recreational guys, who don't know about reporting requirements, who would want to get into this. Mr. Powers stated that

part-time commercial watermen are a concern for the market. Acting Chief Kenyon stated that it is difficult to say if people can legally limited based on the “part time” definition. Mr. Lightfoot stated that he believes a lot of people would be interested in this license proposal. Mrs. Galván gave information about the new USDA grant funding for blue catfish processing.

Mr. Bowden suggested moving forward with the proposal, but with safeguards. Mr. Trice suggested moving license lines to throughout the James River. Mr. Powers and Mr. Lightfoot said that the license water areas should be all areas downstream of the fall line.

V. Shrimp Update

Mr. Chris Davis presented an update on the recent shrimp license expansion. The Virginia Marine Resources Commission voted to begin the season on September 15th, expand the number of licenses to 17, amend methods of reporting bycatch, and modify the dimensions of the shrimp trawl gear to increase the height to 5 ft. Mr. Deem asked about regulations for recreational, and Mr. Davis said only commercial regulations have changed.

VI. Spiny Dogfish Update

Mrs. Ramsey gave an update on changes to Chapter 4VAC 20-490, “Pertaining to Sharks”, regarding spiny dogfish. The new regulatory language prohibits specific-sized gillnet overnight soaks during November 1st through March 31st for anyone possessing a spiny dogfish permit. Mr. Sanford asked what the status of the sturgeon stock assessment is; Mr. Davis replied that the process has begun but it is due in 2028.

VII. Striped Bass Update

Mrs. Goffe presented results of the 2024 stock assessment for striped bass, which states the stock is not experiencing overfishing but is overfished. The stock remains in a rebuilding plan, target of 111,892 metric tons by 2029. The ASMFC striped bass management board has approved for public comment the Draft Addendum III to Amendment 7, which aims to increase the probability of meeting the rebuilding target. Comments can be submitted to ASMFC in person at the September 9, 2025, public hearing at VMRC, by mail, by email with the subject line “Striped Bass Addendum III,” or by fax.

VIII. Comment for Items not on the Agenda

Mr. Bransom brought up the presence of tarpon on the Eastern Shore (seaside), stating that people are seeing them in Chesapeake Bay. He suggested establishing regulations on tarpon, as Virginia currently does not have any. Mr. Powers supported a catch and release recreational regulation and asked staff to put something together by May 1, 2026.

Mr. Lightfoot brought up the dock offset for electric shocking for blue catfish and that it has essentially shut down the fishery.

Mr. Feller brought forward the idea of increasing speckled trout commercial quota, and Mr. Sanford brought up the cut between recreational and commercial quota, and stated the quota needs to be reallocated. Mr. Bransom wondered how the change in size limits changed the speckled trout harvest. Mr. Bowden asked for the landings from last 10 years for both recreational and commercial at the next FMAC meeting.

IX. Adjourn

Meeting was adjourned at 6:52 pm.