

Joint Meeting of the Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission  
 And the Sport Fisheries Advisory Commission  
 Calvary Church  
 April 10, 2008

Commissioners Present

Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission	Sport Fisheries Advisory Commission
William Woodfield, Chairman	Richard Gaines, Chairman
Lawrence Simms	Diane Baynard
Russell Dize	David Dansberger
Glenn James	Brenda Foster
Andrea Jacquette	Mark Sampson
Richard Webster	William Windley
Karen Oertel	William Carrier
Jack Brooks	
James Gross	

William Woodfield, Chairman, Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and introduced DNR Secretary John Griffin.

Secretary Griffin thanked the Chairman and welcomed everyone. Several meetings have taken place on blue crab stock around the state. Blue crabs are a public trust resource owned by all the citizens of Maryland and Virginia. It's our duty to attempt to minimize what economic impact our actions will have on effective sectors. Tonight is a pre-regulatory scoping meeting. Two goals of the evening are, getting back to our target rate for blue crabs and protecting mature female crabs. Our data tells us this is the best approach to turn around the low population of crabs as quickly as possible.

In the days ahead we will rather comments, coordinate our work with Virginia, finalize and release the 2007-2008 Winter Dredge Survey Results. We have had meetings with our advisory commissions as we prepare to put together a formal regulatory proposal this month. The proposal will be subject to formal review and hearings before final adoption.

There has been positive change in Virginia's attitude toward crab fishery. The two governors are meeting April 15 in Colonial Beach. They will review the results of the Winter Dredge Survey. Beyond 2008 we will see additional options to better manage the crab fishery for the long term.

The Secretary introduced Tom O'Connell as the new Fisheries Director, succeeding Howard King who retired December 31, 2007. Secretary Griffin concluded, tonight we will focus on management options dealing with female crabs. We are interested in fairness and want your input. My colleagues and I are here to listen to you tonight. He thanked everyone for coming and the advisory commissions for inviting him speak tonight. John introduced Assistant Secretary Frank Dawson.

Assistant Secretary Dawson thanked the audience. One of the purposes of the meeting is to take comments on the draft management options. Harvest of the female crab fishery should be no more than 46% of the population. If we maintain 46% it will increase the crab population in the bay. We have a target abundance of spawning adults of 200,000,000 crabs. That assessment

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came from the Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee (CBSAC), a select group of scientists from the east coast.

In 2007 we had 140,000,000 spawning adults. Target abundance will increase our ability to have a healthy crab fishery. We have placed the management options on two user groups, recreational and commercial.

Draft Recreational Options - would create 3% reduction

1. Prohibition of harvest of female with the exception of soft crabs
2. Limiting catch for licensed crabber from 1 bushel to 5-6 dozen
3. Boat limit 10-12 dozen when there are 2 or more licensees on the boat
4. Sunset will be the end time for bay and tributaries.
5. Increase time difference for recreational trot liners and commercial trot liners from 1/2 hour to 1 hour.

Draft Commercial Options - 4 major options

1. Raise maximum size of mature females to 6.5 inches. This allows protection of largest females in fisheries. If implemented bay-wide it would create 16% reduction in female harvest.
2. 20% Reduction in Female Harvest:  
7 bushels a day for from April 1 to September 30.  
40 bushels for October  
18 bushels for November  
18 bushels for December
3. Early season closure for female harvest would be easy to enforce and leave more spawning females in the bay. 20% reduction in harvest if the closure were October 23, 30% reduction if closure were October 14, and a 40% reduction if the closure were October 6.
4. 10-14 day closure for female peeler crab harvest would allow females to molt to maturity and greater opportunity to spawn

Other options include limit on the length of trot line patent dippers, reduce Limited Crab Catchers licenses to current level. The next steps for 2008 are to continue to take public comment and continue coordination with Virginia.

The final regulations are subject to formal review. The 2009 management measures will be based on winter dredge survey. The goal is to maintain 46% removal level. We have been exceeding 46% for the last decade.

Assistant Secretary Dawson turned the meeting over to Commissioner Woodfield who introduced State Senator Richard Colburn. The Senator's father was a life-long waterman and Mr. Colburn has always fought for the rights of the waterman. He emphasized that any new regulations must be fair to all watermen.

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Commissioner Woodfield asked for questions from Commission.

Commissioner Larry Simms inquired how the Department arrived at a 20% to 40% reduction and if there is science to back these percentage.

Lynn Fegley, Crab Biologist responded. The dredge survey of abundance and the harvest is how we predict what the next year's harvest will be within 9%. This year 46% of that abundance can be harvested. 2007 there was low level of abundance, 60% of the crabs were removed from the population. We have been exceeding the threshold for quite a few years. Scientists have found that if you keep the harvest at 46% you will see the population grow. If you don't keep it at 46% there will be no gains.

Commissioner Dansberger stated he has seen many fisheries over the years too closely micromanaged. He suggested a 40% harvest to allow for some breathing more so no further reductions have to be taken next year.

Commissioner Dize stated if you went to the severity of a 40% reduction, you would get the fishery back in one year. We did not get in this predicament in one year. Lower it over a three year period otherwise you will put packing houses and crabbers out of business.

Commissioner Brooks said Russell and David brought up some very good points. We waited for the proposals to come online. The Department gave very short notice and the proposals are very different than anticipated. It's very hard to prepare for a meeting when you get the proposals shortly before the meeting.

Commissioner Gaines asked how does increasing the recreational crabbing start time 30 minutes to 1 hour after commercial start time conserve crabs. Lynn Fegley answered it's not a conservation issue, it's a conflict issue.

Commissioner Oertel asked for an explanation regarding the release of peeler crabs.

Lynn Fegley responded, when an animal is released back into the water it is accessible to the fishery. It is hard to say what the return to the population will be. The sex ratio of the peeler population in May might be 50% female. You are not going to get 50% back to the spawning population. If a peeler is released in May she is going to be subject to forces of fishing mortality and natural mortality between the time of release and time she spawns.

Lynn Fegley was asked to go back to Russell Dize's question on percentages from year to year. Percentages are not cumulative from year to year.

Assistant Secretary Frank Dawson stated the problem is to get to 46% harvest. If you conserve females the fishery will increase.

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Commissioner Dize commented that the female crab lives for two years, why do we need a 1 year time limit. I am trying to keep the commercial guys working. I understand we have a problem. I want get the crab fishery back where it should be.

Commissioner JR Gross stated this is a nightmare for commercial guys. The numbers keep changing. We are going to be out of business. Can you spread it out over 5 years?

Commission Simms stated that email notices to the watermen are not effective. Most of the watermen do not have email. The watermen get their information from either Larry or Russell.

#### Summary of Comments from Public

1. Keep recreational limit at 1 bushel per day.
2. Department is reallocating harvest to recreational crabbers.
3. Give something back to commercial watermen.
4. Raise the size limit to 6 inches. It would be easier to regulate the fishery.
5. Scrapers are destroying rivers.
6. Let's protect the habitat.
7. 40% is wrong. What will you (DNR) do to fill the gap?
8. Eliminate harvest of female crabs.
9. Everyone will be out of business with these restrictions.
10. Recreational crab catch should be reported to DNR.
11. Recreational crabbers will not catch females.
12. Use a bushel rather than 5-6 dozen.
13. Not in favor of recreational crabbers giving up 1/2 hour.
14. Lower Bay is taking the biggest hit with the proposals, putting crabbers and packing houses out of business.
15. St. Mary's county's commercial seafood industry will be wiped out because of new regulations.

Chairman Woodfield stated the commercial watermen are facing a devastating situation. We need to protect the resource and the community.

Secretary Griffin said everyone is struggling with conservation of the resource. It's a tough thing to deal with. We are working with the University of Maryland, trying to predict the economic impact, and Virginia is cooperating. We have 64,000 miles of watershed to protect. Thank you all for coming tonight.

Chairman Woodfield adjourned the meeting at 9:35 pm.