

Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Finfish Management Advisory Committee (FMAC)
Special Public Hearing on Striped Bass
380 Fenwick Road, Fort Monroe, VA
VMRC Commission Room,
Wednesday, September 18, 2019 – 6:00 P.M.

ATTENDANCE

Members Present

Jeff Deem
Honorable Dr. Ken Neill
John Bello
Ernest Bowden
Scott MacDonald
Michael Lightfoot
Tom Powers
Bob Sinclair

VMRC Staff Present

Pat Geer
Jill Ramsey
Alex Aspinwall
Lewis Gillingham
Adam Kenyon
Somers Smott
Olivia Phillips
Hank Liao

Members Absent

Meade Amory
Andy Hall
Walter Rogers
Robert Weagley
Honorable James Minor

Others Present

Charles Dryden
Donnie Porter
Donnie Louis
Cole Porter
Brandon M.
Dailey Vandergriff
Buddy Carson
Joseph Robins
Ronald C. Burroughs
Chris Pritchett
John Balderson
Ernie George
Bev Ludford
Mike Gurley
Mark Snook
Christine Snook
Stan Simmerman
Wayne Carter
Donald Hart
Ben Burbic
W.C. Tice
Buddy Newell
Danny Whittaker
Jerry Hughes
Ronney Reid
Eddie Brady
Ian Brady
Tom Mooney
J.R. Mills
A. Harrison
Crystal S.
Melanie Bailey
Bill Bailey
J.C. Viar
Mike Avery

Others Present

Billy Reid
Elgin Nininger
Elijah Lee Wilson, Jr.
Elijah Lee Wilson III
Gordan Ford
Kenny Mills III
Bobby Gritcher
Charles Dryden
George Trice
Lewis Whittaker III
David Johnson
Clinton Lessard

YouTube

16 viewers

Others Present

Christa Peachy
Kelly Place
Donald Clark
Donny Thrift
Scott Bloxom
Bill Papa
Daniel Burke
Johnny Dameron
Lewis Taylor Dameron
Charles A Buchanan
Daniel Howlett
Robert Hollowell
A.W. William

Some names might be incorrect or missing due to illegible signatures.

Minutes were prepared by Somers Smott.

I. Introductions and Meeting Protocol (P. Geer)

Mr. Jeff Deem called the meeting to order at 6:00pm. Chief Pat Geer laid out the agenda for the night including some basic ground rules. This meeting was strictly about the three emergency measures on striped bass that were approved at the August 27 Commission meeting: a recreational possession limit of one fish per person per day, a recreational maximum size limit of 36” total length, and a commercial gill net maximum mesh size of 7” in the Bay and 9” on the coast.

II. Presentation of Emergency Measures for Virginia (A. Aspinwall)

Mr. Alex Aspinwall explained why the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) is moving forward with votes on the Addendum VI of Amendment 6 of the striped bass Fishery Management Plan (FMP). He described how the fishery is overfished and overfishing is occurring (spawning stock biomass and fishing mortality reference points exceed threshold levels). He described how there would be at least an 18% recreational harvest cut coastwide mandated by ASMFC. He explained the difference between the new Addendum VI and future Amendments that will be coming in the future. He finished by showing the benefits of Virginia taking action now versus waiting until the vote on Addendum VI and/or possible future Amendments. These include improving the stock status, protecting the above average year classes (fish at lengths 14”-15”) coming through the fishery, enhancing future recruitment to the stock, and achieving the reductions required under Addendum VI.

III. Questions Regarding Emergency Measures for Virginia

A verbatim record of all questions asked by FMAC and the public is available on the agency website at mrc.virginia.gov. Questions from FMAC members were taken first after the presentation. Mr. Tom Powers wanted to know if these measures were going to be counted

against us at any future ASMFC meeting and what would happen if 2019 became the new target year. Mr. Aspinwall assured him he would not let that happen and, as a technical committee member, he would remind ASMFC of the preemptive measures Virginia took for striped bass. Mr. Michael Lightfoot brought up the commercial fish size limit of 28" using gillnets in the Bay starting March 26 so most commercial fishermen have those larger mesh sizes out of the water before then. He believes if the mesh size was phased in over a period of 6 months to a year, more people would be able to comply. He wanted to have better understanding of why we wanted to do this, to which Mr. Aspinwall described the benefits. Mr. Lightfoot also wondered what other states have taken preemptive action, and Mr. Aspinwall said Massachusetts and Maine. Mr. Ernest Bowden wanted more clarification on how these measures reduce discard mortality. Mr. Aspinwall explained that minimum size limits increase dead discards, and reducing the possession limit should also reduce dead discards. Mr. Scott MacDonald asked if there was a way to save tournaments by removing that maximum size limit, and Mr. Aspinwall explained the relationship between larger fish and more viable eggs and year classes. Questions were then taken from the general public. Public questions ranged from clarification on CPUE pertaining to commercial landings, dead discards, recreational boat limits, and an economic impact on charter captains if they can only have 1 fish. Some members of the public asked about a moratorium. A few charter captains asked if it was possible to cut the maximum size limit out but reduce their season, even as far as removing the spring season altogether and reducing the fall season to just November 1 – December 31.

IV. Public Comment on Emergency Measures

A verbatim record of all public comment is available on the agency website at mrc.virginia.gov. Several members of the public expressed interest in implementing a tagging program for recreational striped bass (Mr. Mike Avery, Mr. Clint Lessor, Mr. Donald Thrift, Mr. Charles Dryden). Staff informed them we are working on a program but cannot have it implemented by the beginning of the season in October. Mr. Kelly Place expressed worry about how ASMFC doesn't give state's credit for proactive motions. He also expressed concern about the accuracy of MRIP. A few members of the public said they believed bringing back the crab dredge fishery would improve the stocks of striped bass (Mr. George Trice). Several members of the public want the commercial mesh size change to happen gradually over a 6 month to a year period, not immediately. They need time to switch out their gear and rehang the nets (Ms. Beverly Ludford). Multiple comments were made that 7" mesh was not readily available to all areas and would have to be ordered. There was some support for cutting the recreational fall season to November 1 through December 31 and getting rid of the maximum size limit (Mr. Clint Lessor and other charter boat captains). Mr. Jerry Hughes worried about how long it is taking him to find the larger fish. Mr. Robert Hollowell spoke on how striped bass wait until spiny dogfish leave the area to enter the Bay.

V. Motions and Polls on Measures

Committee members had several discussions of how to find less severe measures to present to the commission pertaining to the striped bass fishery. Mr. Bowden feels as though the fishery should have collapsed if it has been overfished for so long. He also worried about the fish we save going up to New England to meet their demise. He expressed concern about the charter boat industry and about how commercial fisherman cannot change out their gear quick enough. Mr. Bob Sinclair wondered about the implementation of the tagging program, and Chief Geer assured him it would take at least until next summer to get going. Mr. Lightfoot reminded everyone about the charter captains at the last meeting who asked for a shorter season in return for two fish per person. Mr. MacDonald agreed and wondered how it changed the reduction numbers if charter boats could keep two fish instead of just one. Mr. Powers expressed concern over the James River fishery if the fall season is cut to just November and December. He also worried about how much of a reduction the tagging system would actually create since there are so many anglers and so many tags. He wondered if we should change the laws pertaining to the types of bait used with striped bass. He expressed the need to do something different so we can protect the resource.

The public was then polled on results of the meeting. 13 people were in favor of a recreational possession limit of one fish per person per day. 33 people were in favor of charter boats being allowed two fish per person per day and private recreational fisherman allowed one fish per person per day. None were in favor of a recreational maximum size of 36". 46 people were in favor of a bonus fishery/tagging program for larger fish beginning in summer of 2020. None were in favor of a commercial gillnet maximum size of 7", but if it was implemented over a period of time, 6 were in favor.

Committee members then proceeded with motions. Mr. Bowden made a motion: one fish per person per day; no 36" maximum size limit; charter boats get: one fish per person per day during October 4-October 31 with a maximum size of 36" and two fish per person per day during November 1-December 31 with one being over 36" during the fall season, and the captain and the mate do not count towards the possession limit; and finally no maximum mesh size for commercial gillnets unless it's phased in at a later date. Mr. John Bello made a substitute motion for a 36" maximum size limit that applies to all recreational fisherman including charter boats, and the rest of the motion remains the same. This substitute motion fails due to a lack of a second. **The original motion by Mr. Bowden was then seconded by Mr. MacDonald. The motion carries 4-1-2, with Mr. Sinclair and Honorable Dr. Ken Neill abstaining.**

VI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:26pm.