

FINFISH ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

November 10, 2005

PRFC Office, Colonial Beach, VA

Members Present

Phil Angle – Charles County Rec. Fisherman
James A. Bowling – Charles County Comm. Fisherman
Harry Boyden – Charles County Waterman's Assoc.
Robert T. Brown, Sr. – St. Mary's Waterman's Assoc.
Charles Davis – Maryland Charter Boat Captain
John W. Dean – St. Mary's Comm. Fisherman
Tom Evans – Rec. Fisherman At-Large
Mark Gares – Middle/Upper River Rec. Fisherman
Marvin L. Harley – Upper River Comm. Fisherman
Dennis R. Newton, I – Upper River Comm. Fisherman
David Purcell – Rec. Fisherman At-Large
Richard Schmactenburg – St. Mary's Rec. Fisherman
Robert F. Stoner – VA Charter Boat Captain
Kenneth Wicker – Westmoreland Comm. Fisherman
Thomas L Lewis – Northumberland Comm. Fisherman
Steve Scala – Lower River Rec. Fisherman

PRFC Commissioners

Ida C. Hall
Robert H. Bowes

Support Staff Present

Lewis Gillingham – VMRC
Capt. M. Ray Jewell – VMRC Law Enforcement
Sgt. Charles Sauter – MdDNR Law Enforcement
Kirby A. Carpenter – PRFC Staff
Rebecca H. Butler – PRFC Staff
Claudette Okrasinski – PRFC Staff

Others Present:

Diane Newton, Michelle Scala and Bill Whisenant

Chairman Gares called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. He welcomed Commissioner Hall, Commissioner Bowes and the support staff.

Order 2006-01 – 2006 Recreational and Commercial Striped Bass Seasons and Restrictions

Mr. Carpenter explained that the proposed order has a couple of changes. He noted the ASMFC has informed us that the spring striped bass quota for 2005 was exceeded on a bay-wide basis. There will be discussions with Maryland and Virginia on how to deal with this issue. Some options, for paying back the overage, may be a shorter season or a larger size limit.

The Committee was asked to consider what they would like if the fishery were penalized, either a shorter season or a larger size limit.

Mr. Davis stated as a charter boat captain, he does not want a shorter season. If the size limit has to be raised then we'll just have to try to catch a larger fish because shortening the season will hurt the charter boat industry. He suggested if there had to be an increase to try going to a 30" size limit before jumping to a 34" size limit.

A motion was made by Charles Davis, seconded by Robert Stoner and unanimously passed to adopt Order 2006-01 as presented and accept a possible size limit increase to 30" for the upcoming 2006 spring season.

Order 2006-02 – 2006 Recreational & Charter Fishing Season, Size and Catch Limits

Mr. Carpenter noted the only change to this order is the addition of the Black Sea Bass tail filament description. **A motion was made by Mr. Purcell, seconded by Mr. Davis and unanimously passed to adopt Order 2006-02 as proposed:**

Order 2006-03 – 2006 Commercial Striped Bass Seasons & Size Limits

Mr. Carpenter noted there have been no changes for the hook and line, pound net and miscellaneous gears but staff is recommending a January 16th start to the 2006 gill net season. The reason for doing so is to allow a break between seasons since the 2005 season does not close until December 31, 2005.

Kenneth Wicker questioned what the time frame is for removal of gill nets from the river. Staff advised that the regulation states 10 days for removal, therefore staff stated they would support a January 10th starting date. Mr. Carpenter also noted the fall season of November 1st through December 23, 2006 for the record.

A motion was made by Mr. Wicker, seconded by Mr. Bowling and unanimously passed to adopt Order 2006-03 with a gill net season starting January 7 through March 25, 2006 and November 1st through December 31, 2006 and all other gears as staff recommended.

Order 2006-04 – Gill Net Fishery

A motion was made by Mr. Wicker, seconded by Mr. Dean and unanimously passed with the same changes to complement the previous order.

Order 2006-05 – 2006 Commercial Striped Bass Catch Limits and Restrictions

Mr. Carpenter explained that MD/VA/PRFC operate under a bay-wide quota and that quota is divided between the three jurisdictions. He noted the changes from last year stating the quota was slightly increased from last year and the numbers of tags are constant. He called the committee's attention to the gill net quota of 482,431 pounds. He reviewed some previous years of harvest and explained there is a concern of exceeding the quota. The committee is going to have to address this issue by issuing fewer tags, having a smaller mesh size (7" to 6") or a possible shorter season in March.

Kenneth Wicker explained he has seen the problems of wanting to wait to tag a larger fish, but the price drops. He suggested if anything has to be done it would be to reduce the amount of tags issued.

Harry Boyden does not want to see the tags cut.

James Bowling does not agree with that idea. He is issued tags and should have the right to use them. If someone else is catching fish that's causing the fishery to be over the quota that's not

my fault. Robert Brown said it's everybody's problem that fishes and if we exceed the quota then ASMFC will penalize the fishery next year.

Marvin Harley explained he only has about 10 to 12 days to fish up river and does not want to see the season shortened.

Harry Boyden explained this year we're not close to the quota, so are we trying to fix a problem that hasn't occurred yet. Mr. Carpenter noted he is trying to get the attention of the committee so that the situation can be addressed before it happens.

Kenneth Wicker suggested, not hurting the upper river gill netters, but to put the river in sections and close it in the sections where the fish are saturated. Mr. Carpenter noted the gill netters would not be allowed to move their stands if certain areas were closed. Mr. Wicker agreed there would be no moving of stands if areas were closed.

James Bowling stated we are trying to fix a problem that has not occurred. He does not know what the answer is but agrees that it needs to be looked at realistically. It may come down to along with the reduced tags there's a certain amount of poundage that goes with it.

Mr. Carpenter suggested reducing the maximum mesh size from 7" to 6" to help lower the average size of the fish.

Lewis Gillingham from Virginia Marine Resources Commission stated Virginia has dealt with the same problem knowing that the average size fish is getting larger but if you increase the minimum size limit then the quota will go down.

Chairman Gares suggest if the tags were to be cut could the season be reviewed and if there's a fall season, could the tags be issued later in the season based on the quota and how close we are to it.

Eddie Davis suggested watching the upcoming spring season and review it during the summer and if it looks like we're going over the quota then we'll have to take drastic measures at that time. Mr. Carpenter stated it's too late to do it then. Mr. Davis stated all fisheries are going to be penalized if the gill netters go over their quota and that's not fair.

Harry Boyden suggested going to 2 stands from March 16th through March 25th. Mr. Brown stated that's a good start but not good enough. It's going to have to be monitored.

Charles Davis suggested a gill net sub-committee needed to be formed in order to resolve the situation.

A motion was made by Charles Davis, seconded by Marvin Harley to form a commercial gill net sub-committee to resolve the issue.

Order 2006-06 – 2006 Commercial Fishing Season, Size and Catch Limits

A motion was made by Kenneth Wicker, seconded by Thomas Lewis and unanimously passed to adopt order 2006-06 as proposed.

Committee Membership Vacancies

Chairman Gares explained several members' terms were due to expire on March 31, 2005. All current members whose terms are expiring agreed to accept another term except for Phil Angle who is undecided at this time.

New Business

Phil Angle questioned what the committee's thoughts were about eliminating the recreational season for striped bass below the 301 Bridge. The recreational fishery does not come close to its quota. Mr. Carpenter said with a two fish daily limit it would not exceed the quota, however a concern is attracting more attention from outside the area to come fish here.

The committee had no further comments on the issue.

The meeting adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Gares, Chairman

**Gill Net Committee Meeting
November 10, 2005**

Chairman Gares appointed all of the commercial representatives as a sub-committee to review the potential gill net overages per the motion made at the Finfish Advisory Committee meeting. He appointed the following members:

Marvin L. Harley – Virginia Upper River Commercial Fisherman
Dennis R. Newton, I – Virginia Upper River Commercial Fisherman
Robert T. Brown, Sr. – St. Mary's County Watermen's Association
John W. Dean – Maryland Commercial Fisherman (St. Mary's County)
James A. Bowling – Maryland Commercial Fisherman (Charles County)
Kenneth Wicker – Virginia Commercial Fisherman (Westmoreland County)
Harry M. Boyden – Charles County Watermen's Association
Thomas L. Lewis – Virginia Commercial Fisherman (Northumberland County)

After the Finfish Advisory Committee meeting adjourned, the sub-committee members held a meeting to address the possibility of exceeding the gill net quota. Their meeting lasted 20 minutes and they made the following recommendations:

Issue 90 tags per stand to start the winter season and to set the season and number of nets as follows:

January 7th through February 28th – all stands, and;
from March 1st through March 15th – 4 stands, and;
from March 16th through March 25th – 2 stands.

If the quota is not exceed by the end of the winter fishery, the Commission may establish a fall season and the Commission will issue 10 additional tags per stand.

In practice, all 100 tags per stand will be given to the licensees when renewing their 2006 license(s), but they will be limited to using no more than 90 tags during the winter fishery. If the season is not extended into the fall, each fisherman is responsible for returning at least 10 tags per stand plus all other 2006 unused tags. Anyone unable to return the 10 tags per stand will be penalized 20 tags per stand for the 2007 fishing year.