

CRAB ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

February 23, 2011

PRFC Office, Colonial Beach, VA

Members Present

Robert A. Boarman – Chairman
Elgin H. Nininger – Vice Chairman
Dean E. Bowie – Upper River Hard Crab Potter
Arthur L. Loving – Crabber-At-Large
John B. Morris, Jr. – Crabber-At-Large
James B. Berthe – Lower River Peeler Potter
George W. Smith – Upper River Hard Crab Potter
Larry W. Thrift – Lower River Peeler Potter
Mark G. Hunter – Recreational Crabber

Members Absent

Herman Delvo – Recreational Crabber

Press

None

PRFC Commissioners

Robert H. Bowes
Ida C. Hall
Dennis Fleming

Support Staff Present

Joe Grist – VMRC
Ofc. Tommy Wilkins – VMRC Law Enf.
Lt. Charles Sauter – MdDNR Law Enf.
Sgt. Joseph Riley – MdDNR Law Enf.
Ellen Cosby – PRFC Asst. Executive Secretary
Becky Butler – PRFC Staff

Others Present:

Douglas Jenkins, Dan McDougal, Nealy Little, Keith Saunders, Kenny Dent, Jr., John Dean, John Morris, III, Donald Thrift, Charles Clift, Patrick Goldsmith, Thomas Tippet, Eddie Hayden, Phil Hayden, Dennis Edwards and several others that did not sign the guest register.

Chairman Boarman called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. He welcomed and thanked everyone for attending. He took a moment to let everyone know that Herman Delvo has been sick and to please keep him and his family in your thoughts.

2010 Crab Harvest Report

Mrs. Cosby presented a crab harvest report for the 2010 season. She noted the harvest for this year was slightly up from last year. There have been 110,644 bushels of hard crabs, 31,039 pounds of peelers and 2,045 pounds of soft crabs harvested. The CPUE and the effort are also higher than they were at this time last year. She also noted that the 2010 harvest for hard crabs is close to the long-term average of 111,704 bushels harvested.

Reg. VII, Sec. 2(a) – Size Limits

The committee discussed the idea of having a 5 ½” size limit throughout the season. Currently Virginia has a 5” size limit and Maryland starts out a 5” and goes to 5 ¼” on July 15th.

Dan McDougal felt the watermen have been giving back for years and it's time the Commission does something for them. He felt the Commission is going farther than some of the other jurisdictions and he felt the size limit should be 5 ¼” year round. He crabs down river and does not see large crabs in that area. Starting the season out a 5 ½” would put watermen out of business.

John Dean, representing the St. Mary's County Watermen's Association, said everyone has done a lot of work and has put in a lot of effort to restore the crab fishery. The numbers are where they should be and he advised the committee to leave it as it is.

Nealy Little felt the season could support a 5 ¼" size limit for the season but not a 5 ½" size limit.

Doug Jenkins representing the Twin Rivers Watermen's Association demanded to know who brought this request to the Crab Advisory Committee for consideration. Chairman Boarman advised staff placed the item on the agenda, based on several requests from the industry. The reason behind the discussion is the economics of a larger crab. Mrs. Cosby stated she talked with Mr. Carpenter about this briefly and this is something that seems to be working in the second half of the season with a 5 ½" size limit. Therefore, the idea came about to see if the industry would support a 5 ½" size limit year round. The theory would be to have "big crabs" all season not just at the end of the season. Mr. Jenkins' felt that a 5" fat crab is better than a 5 ½" or 6" poor crab and that some people can't pay for large crabs. He was very displeased with the process.

Nealy Little stated a crab does not live forever and the crabs you see go down river may not make it back up this way.

Elgin Nininger stated this is purely economics and he accepts starting the season at 5 ¼" but absolutely not at 5 ½".

James Berthe stated the fishery down river is totally different than it is up here. There aren't any large crabs down river.

A motion was made by Larry Thrift, seconded by James Berthe and passed to leave Reg. VII, Sec. 2 (a) as is. The motion passed unanimously.

Mrs. Cosby advised the committee, that it would take an act of the General Assembly in Virginia to change their size limits. She asked for thoughts on having the same crab size limits in the mainstem as well as in the tributaries of the Potomac.

Dan McDougal felt the size limits should all be the same between the jurisdictions.

James Berthe stated it hasn't made a difference crabbing from one jurisdiction to another.

The committee felt there were more important topics to discuss and had no further comments on this issue.

Reg. VII, Sec. 3(b) – Identification of Pots

Mrs. Cosby explained this item has to do with issuing PRFC crab pot identification decals to all watermen who hold crab pot licenses. There would be a fee of \$50 and the decals would be required to be placed on each crab pot buoy. Any crab pots that were not identified with a decal would be considered as a violation. This is an accountability measure to assist law enforcement with crab pot identification. For longline crab pot licenses, during renewal the crabbers would

have to declare how many pots they will fish with longlines, and special decals would be issued for those.

Dennis Edwards asked how the Commission would handle lost crab pots. Mrs. Cosby explained it would work similar to the decals issued for two crab pots on one boat, explaining there is a percentage of extra decals provided when the permit is issued.

John Morris, III stated more crab pots are lost than the number of decals issued for that. He said the decals don't stick as well as the Commission claims they do.

Most of the audience gave similar comments with regard to lost pots, replacement decals and how well the decals work. Concern was expressed that the decals would not stay on when the pots were power washed. Most felt it would be a hassle to deal with the decals and also had concerns with providing enough decals for crab pots and/or peeler pots.

A motion was made by Larry Thrift, seconded by Arthur Loving to leave it as it is and not have decals on crab pots. The motion passed unanimously

Reg. VII, Sec. 5(b) – Crab Pot Longlines

Mrs. Cosby advised that industry had made a request to change the depth restriction, which is currently set at 20' MLW.

John Morris, Jr. stated he would like to see the depth changed to 10' MLW so that longlines could be set upriver. Above the Rt. 301 Bridge there are not many places where the water depth is over 20' and he would like to try it in the upper river. Also, in the summer he has encountered bad water at 20'. He stated there have not been any issues with using the longlines and would like the opportunity to try them up river.

Mrs. Cosby stated the 20' restriction was placed on the longlines to avoid conflict with the recreational fishery.

Dennis Edwards stated he knows several people who use the longlines and he agrees it should be set at 10' MLW.

A motion was made by John Morris, seconded by Larry Thrift to change the depth restriction for longlines from 20' to 10' MLW all season. The motion passed unanimously.

Male Crab Bushel Limits

Mrs. Cosby advised this issue is to find out if the committee would be interested in male bushel limits during the season, which would involve culling the catch and providing a better product.

Patrick Goldsmith felt the market already sets the bushel limit. The buyers will limit the watermen as to what they can catch on a daily basis.

Chairman Boarman stated this is all about economics and trying to get a better product and the most money for it.

John Morris, III, felt with the size limits imposed in the Potomac River, there is already a bushel limit placed on the fishery. He stated the size limit should be 5" until Labor Day and after that, there's no market for crabs.

Joe Grist from VMRC stated Virginia has a 51 bushel limit during the spring of the year.

Elgin Nininger agreed that the market dictates the bushel limits on the watermen.

John Morris, Jr. said if a bushel limit was imposed it could cause more harm than good.

A motion was made by John Morris, seconded by James Berthe to not impose a bushel limit. The motion passed unanimously.

Female Harvest Closure

Mrs. Cosby noted that a copy of the Order with last season's female harvest rolling closures was provided to members, and asked for the committee's thoughts on what they should be for this coming season.

Dennis Edwards stated he had an idea of two area closures instead of three, with the break at Blackiston Island. They would be from Sept. 15th to Oct. 1st from Blackiston Island up river and from Oct. 1st to Oct. 15th from Blackiston Island down river. He also added that there should be 15 days added to the end of the season to allow female harvest and to pull pots. Economically this works better.

Dan McDougal stated Virginia has a 51 bushel limit during the spring time and until something is done in Virginia, he felt the closure should be done away with in the Potomac River.

Doug Jenkins stated Virginia has sacrificed a whole lot more than Maryland or the Potomac River. He felt it should stay like it is.

A motion was made by Mark Hunter, seconded by Dean Bowie to leave the female crab harvest closures as is. The motion passed unanimously.

Committee Membership Vacancies

Chairman Boarman stated there were several members' whose terms were due to expire in March. He asked each member if they would like to serve another term and James Berthe, John Morris, Jr., Larry Thrift, and Arthur Loving all agreed.

The meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Robert A. Boarman, Chairman