



Larry Hogan, Governor
Boyd Rutherford, Lt. Governor
Jeanne Haddaway-Riccio, Secretary
Allan Fisher, Deputy Secretary

Blue Crab Industry Advisory Committee Meeting Notes

Wednesday, February 2, 2022 Virtual Meeting with Google Meets from 2:30-5pm

Attendance:

Committee Members: Blair Baltus, Rachael Dean (proxy for Simon Dean), Tim Mortus (proxy for MWA seat), Bobby Jobes, Bubby Powley, Richard Young, Jack Brooks, Logan Hammon, Mike Tarquini, Mark Kitching, Bill Paulshock, Steve Lay, , Jim Thompson (proxy for Leon Washington), Aubrey Vincent (proxy for CBCFA seat)

Maryland Department of Natural Resources: Genine McClair, Mike Luisi, George O'Donnell, Kelly Webb

Meeting materials: Agenda, tips for virtual meetings, and committee operating guidelines were emailed in advance.

Topics: Committee operating guidelines, alternative containers, vessel day off, crab pot regulation rewrite, regulatory/scoping update, other business brought to the Committee (authorized user and crew requirements for additional pot authorizations), spring female bushel limits.

Intro/Announcements:

- A committee member briefed the Committee on the H2B visa situation for the upcoming season. Currently only 1 of the local applicants were approved for worker visas. Processors will continue to work with Capitol Hill representatives to bring attention to the issue.

Committee Operating Guidelines:

- The Committee reviewed the current operating guidelines, member nominations, tenure and attendance.
- Recommended changes by the department included updating the harvest target to the current 28% and adding the industry retailer and processor seats to the operating guidelines.
- Member nominations:
 - The Committee felt that members should continue to be nominated by industry leaders as well as by county associations/region representatives instead of an application process.
 - If an industry leader seat, like a processor, would need to be filled, the group leaders would come together to nominate a replacement. It was suggested that other groups such as Chesapeake Bay Seafood Industries Association could be a good source for processor nominations.
 - A suggestion was made for nominations to be sent to the Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission (TFAC), but the timing of meetings could slow down the process, so better for nominations to be sent directly to the Department.
- Tenure:
 - There is no limit on the number of terms a member can hold, but a review is needed every 2 years.

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- There is currently a bill before the General Assembly to change TFAC terms from 2 years to 4 years. If the Committee wishes to stay consistent with TFAC and the bill passes, then the operating guidelines would need to reflect this change.
- A recommendation was made that a comprehensive review be made every 4 years or “as needed”.
- Attendance:
 - The Committee supported changing the attendance policy from 75% attendance to missing two consecutive meetings, to warrant review of that seat.
 - Some also supported the current virtual format and would like to continue with providing a virtual option even if the Department moves back to in person meetings.
- There was discussion about whether the Committee can send issues to TFAC or if TFAC must task the Committee.
 - The process was clarified that because of the timing of meeting schedules the Committee can work on issues as long as the results/discussion are presented to TFAC.
 - It was recommended that the operating guidelines reflect this two-way process.
- **ACTION:** The Department will edit the operating guidelines to reflect these suggestions and share a final draft with the Committee at the spring meeting.
- **ACTION:** The Department will work with county representatives to address attendance and vacant seats prior to the spring committee meeting.

Alternative Containers:

- The Department reviewed three options for an alternative container.
 - The crab lug was larger than a bushel, equivalent to 1.5 bushels
 - The crab box was a bit bigger than a bushel
 - The plastic tote is equivalent to a bushel but doesn't have a lid
- The Department has been talking to the manufacturers about developing a plastic bushel alternative, but so far the fishery is limited to options already available.
- The Department has concerns about using any container bigger than a bushel because the conversion for current limits would be complicated and management is dependent on female bushel limits.
- The Committee agreed that the bushel shortage was still an issue and an alternative container is necessary.
- The Committee was still interested in the 1.5 plastic crab lug option and suggested changing bushel limits to be divisible by 1.5 to make it easier for enforcement. The Department expressed that this would have implications for bushel limit allocations to license categories.

Vessel Day Off:

- The Department presented on removing the day off requirement for commercial crabbers.
- Some committee members were concerned that female bushel limits could be lowered to account for potential increased harvest.
- It was noted that the day off requirement was put in place to protect the resource.
- The Department clarified that the day off requirement was set to achieve a harvest reduction when the resource was managed with combined sex reference points (both male and female). Since 2008, management has been female specific and the day off requirement can now be counter balanced with adjustments to female bushel limits.

- Many committee members expressed that they would like to only remove the day off for the vessel, not the license holder, but initial guidance from the Natural Resource Police (NRP) advised that this scenario would be hard to enforce.
- The Committee was not in favor of a 7 day work week.
- **ACTION:** Staff will reach out to NRP for more clarification on why dropping the vessel day off requirement but keeping the license day off would be hard to enforce.
- **MOTION:** A motion was made for support of the Department “removing the requirement for the vessel to take a day off.” The motion was amended to include, “while maintaining the day off requirement for the license”(Vote: 11 yes, 1 no and 1 abstain – motion passed).

Crab Pot Line Regulation Rewrite:

- The Department presented a plan to update the current crab pot line regulations.
- The plan is to replace the large polygon explained in COMAR with an individual list of crab pot lines for each tributary, cove, inlet, etc.
- Modeling the process used for the Elk and Sassafras pot line changes, the Department would like to host a series of four regional meeting in February and March so local watermen can provide input on locations, fishing habits and landmarks related to the crab pot lines.
- There was some discussion on the format of these meetings with some expressing interest in a virtual option being available, and others expressing interest in the Department coming to the regions for in-person meetings.

Regulatory and Scoping:

- The Department briefed the Committee on upcoming regulatory changes and scoping topics.
- Changes effective for the 2022 crabbing season
 - Clarified handlines should not be buoyed.
 - Clarified eel pots can be used to catch bait, not intended for catching crabs.
 - Modified the commercial trotline time restrictions in the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries for the months of April, October, November, and December to ½ hr before sunrise to 9 ½ hrs after sunrise.
- Currently scoping
 - Remove redundant clause about commercial crabbing license requirement.
 - Directly referencing the points of land at the mouth of St. Jerome Creek in the crab pot line regulations.

Other Business – Authorized User and Crew Authorizations:

- A committee member brought an issue concerning authorized users to the Committee.
 - The current limitations of selecting an authorized user once a year and needing to do that in person at a service center is restrictive.
 - A recommendation was made to have an online option for changing an authorized user.
- **ACTION:** The Department will look into the issue in detail and bring it back to the Committee at the next meeting.
- The topic of the additional crew needed for the CB6 and CB9 authorizations was also brought to the Committee.
 - The Committee commented that they had already discussed the issue in the past and there was concern about going through the legislature to drop the crew requirement.

- Some options were presented such as the use of a departmental bill or using the visa system to help with a worker shortage.

Spring 2022 Bushel Limits:

- The plan for the spring 2022 bushel limits(see below) and the sponge crab importation window is status quo.
 - Proposed Sponge Crab Importation Dates: May 11, 2022 through July 20, 2022.
- The bushel limits were presented to the Committee and public notices will go out in March if there are no additional comments (no comments).

Daily Mature Female Bushel Limits by License Type				
Date	LCC	TFL or CB3	TFL with CB6 or CB3 with CB6	TFL with CB9 or CB3 with CB9
April 1-May 31	2	6	9	13
June 1- June 30	2	9	13	16
The above acronyms stand for: LCC – Limited Crab Harvester License 50 pots; CB3 – Crab Harvester License 300 pots; CB6 – 600 pot authorization; CB9 – 900 pot authorization; and TFL – Unlimited Tidal Fish License				