VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION
CRAB MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
380 FENWICK ROAD, FORT MONROE, VIRGINIA
VMRC COMMISSION ROOM

September 30, 2026 -- 4:00 PM

Members Present	**Members Absent**	**VMRC Staff**
Marshall Cox	Monica Schenemann	Ethan Simpson
Spencer Headley		Jill Ramsey
J.C. Hudgins	**Public**	Reece Aponte
Daniel Knott (virtual)	Rom Lipcius (VIMS)	Alexa Galván
Chris Moore	Lynnee Morris	Shakira Goffe
Bernard "Wayne" Morris		Brooke Lowman
Cory Rice		Captain Chris Miller
Mark Sanford		Lisa Pyle
Derek Tribble		

Meeting minutes were prepared by Shakira Goffe.

AGENDA

I. Welcome; Introductions

Mr. Spencer Headley called the meeting to order at 4:02 PM. Chief of Fisheries Management Ethan Simpson welcomed the committee, introduced himself and Deputy Chief Jill Ramsey. Members of the committee introduced themselves. Mr. Daniel Knott attended virtually from Assateague, MD, due to a personal conflict.

II. Approval of minutes from May 27, 2026, meeting

The minutes from the May 27, 2026, meeting were approved unanimously.

III. Benchmark Stock Assessment and Update Presentation

1. Discussion

Dr. Brooke Lowman, stock assessment scientist, presented the 2026 blue crab benchmark stock assessment and assessment update. Dr. Lowman explained how the new assessment differs from previous assessments by using a length-based model, separate male and female reference points, monthly growth, estimates of dead discards, updated recreational harvest estimates, and explicit consideration of overwintering mortality. Dr. Lowman stated the Winter Dredge Survey was shifting from being used as the sole annual stock-status indicator and is now considered an estimate of relative abundance rather than absolute abundance.

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Dr. Lowman explained that while the estimated total abundance of blue crabs increased from 2025 to 2026, it has generally declined since 2011, and the abundance of harvestable crabs declined in 2026. Dr. Lowman also noted that the overwintering mortality was higher during the 2025–2026 winter than in recent years and that larger crabs experience higher overwintering mortality than smaller crabs.

Fishing mortality on harvestable female and male crabs remained below their respective overfishing thresholds for most of the time series, including in the final year of the assessment, indicating that overfishing was not occurring. Mature female abundance was below the abundance threshold and was classified as depleted. Dr. Lowman informed the committee that the assessment team chose the term "depleted" rather than "overfished" because fishing mortality was usually below the threshold throughout the historical time series, so overfishing has not been occurring. Dr. Lowman stated that the abundance of males of all ages was not classified as depleted in the current assessment; and recruitment was above its threshold, both likely due to a large recruitment event in 2026.

2. Q & A Session

Committee members questioned and expressed concern about the declining trend in mature female and male abundance although the assessment indicated that overfishing was not occurring. Mr. Marshal Cox noted that mature female abundance had declined since 2011 and asked whether that interpretation was correct. Dr. Lowman acknowledged Mr. Cox's concern and confirmed that the general trend was accurate and clarified that the decline had not occurred every year.

Mr. Chris Moore asked Dr. Lowman if the assessment included an 8% annual mortality due to blue catfish. Dr. Lowman clarified that analyses suggested that juvenile blue crab abundance would be approximately 3% higher if blue catfish were absent. Additionally, in the most recent assessment year, blue catfish predation accounted for approximately 8% of the decline in juvenile abundance. Staff clarified that this does not mean blue catfish cause 8% annual mortality of the entire blue crab stock.

The committee was receptive but concerned about getting used to new indicators. Mrs. Alexa Galván, VMRC fisheries scientist, stated that staff can work with CMAC to make future updates easier to understand and the committee can send her suggestions or clarifications. Mr. Cox questioned why the committee had historically based annual decisions mostly on the Winter Dredge Survey and now was being asked to include additional information. Staff explained that the Winter Dredge Survey was never the only information provided for the assessment but was used as the primary annual indicator because the full stock assessment could not be conducted annually.

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IV. Recreational Terrapin Excluder Devices

Mrs. Alexa Galván presented background information regarding recreational crab pots and terrapin excluder devices (TEDs), also referred to as bycatch reduction devices (BRDs). Mrs. Galván presented examples of different TED designs and explained that recreational crab pots are more likely to be set in shallow saltmarsh areas where terrapins occur and are generally checked less frequently. Dr. Rom Lipcius of VIMS discussed research conducted by VIMS regarding terrapin interactions with crab pots. Dr. Lipcius stated that the study documented low numbers of terrapins in commercial crab pots and that VIMS would not recommend requiring BRDs on commercial crab pots. He stated that the primary concern was recreational crab pots and several terrapin hotspot areas.

Several committee members were supportive of requiring TEDs on recreational pots, however J.C. Hudgins supported requiring TEDs in recreational crab pots in designated terrapin hotspots but was opposed to requiring them in all recreational crab pots. He noted that crab pots located outside of hotspots should not be required to pay the additional cost. Mr. Mark Sanford expressed concern that documenting terrapin hotspots could eventually lead to requirements affecting commercial crabbers and could negatively affect crabbers in his area. Mr. Daniel Knott stated that testing TEDs in his commercial crab pots reduced his catch. He supported requiring TEDs on recreational pots but did not support requiring them on commercial crab pots. Committee members also discussed the need for flexibility in TED designs. Commercial crabbers may prefer to construct their own TEDs or modify entrance funnels, while recreational crabbers may prefer plastic TEDs or crab pots with TEDs already installed. Capt. Miller of the Virginia Marine Police said that homemade TEDs present a problem for law enforcement. Mr. Moore stated that if staff has the ability to write a regulation, he thinks they could write a regulation that specifies a size that doesn't have to be pre-manufactured. He feels that the committee should be making sure they discuss not only the pre-fabricated TEDs, but also watermen being able to make their own, as long as the size and height are accurate. He suggested having a more robust discussion with law enforcement in a future meeting. Mr. Moore also asked if TEDs can be required for people who fish two pots recreationally without going through the General Assembly, since the Code of Virginia establishes, they don't need a license. Mrs. Galván said cull rings are already required in those crab pots without a license, but staff would look into it.

Committee members discussed the proposed recreational terrapin excluder device requirements and the need for additional information from staff and law enforcement before making a final recommendation. Mr. Sanford expressed his concern about delaying the issue and suggested making a recommendation at the current meeting; being that the issue has been discussed multiple times and has been delayed to later meetings. He stated the possibility of the General Assembly taking action if the VMRC doesn't make changes sooner. Mr. Cory Rice suggested meeting mid-to-late October with

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the hope that more information and guidance can be provided so an educated decision could be made. The committee would then be able to make a recommendation to the Commission at the December Commission meeting.

Mr. Cox made a motion to delay this topic and to send it back to staff and law enforcement to go over the turtle excluders and enforceability and come back to CMAC with more information in an October meeting. Mr. Moore seconded. Motion was passed with 7 members in favor of the motion and 1 member opposed.

V. Public Comment

Mr. Cox asked if staff have discussed enforcement on crab pot limits as discussed at the last meeting. Mrs. Galván stated that new management measures weren't being discussed until later this fall.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:06 PM.

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