

**Maryland Aquaculture Coordinating Council
Minutes – March 13, 2014**

Members Attending:

Tony O'Donnell	Erin Butler	Terry Witt
Don Webster	Chris Sherman	John Farrington
Andrew Buck	Stacy Kubofcik	Johnny Shockley
Karl Roscher	Kathy Brohawn	

Guests:

Samantha Paskal	Pat Mahoney, Sr., Wild County Seafood
David Yeatman	Jill Buck, Patuxent Seafood
Rob Witt, Leaseholder	Anna Priester, UMD
Kim Coulbourne, DHMH – CFP	Daniel Strain, MD Sea Grant
Steve Schneider, DNR	David Pasnik, Chesapeake Aquatic Vet Services
Alyssa Cranska, DNR	Susan Ford
Chris Judy, DNR	JD Blackwell, Industry
Maude Livings, DNR	Jill Parisi, ORP
Kelley Cox, PWEC	Katie Busch, DNR
Carol McCollough, PWEC	Rebecca Thur, DNR
Kristi Shaw	John VanAlstine, Industry
Steve McHenry, MARBIDCO	

Call to Order:

Chairman Webster called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

Administrative:

Approve January Minutes

A motion was made to approve the January meeting minutes as written (Butler/O'Donnell). This motion was unanimously approved by the members.

Announcements (Chairman Webster and Members)

- Chesapeake Bay Seafood Industries Association (CBSIA) sent a letter to DNR Marketing Director, Steve Vilnit recognizing and thanking Mr. Vilnit and his staff for their efforts to promote Maryland wild-caught and farm-raised seafood.
- Chairman Webster thanked leaseholders for responding to the recent survey requesting industry input on ways to improve upon the remote setting training program, disease testing and financing programs that are currently offered to these producers.
- Aquaculture and Fish Tech 101, University of Delaware, will take place April 7 – 10th. Workshop hosted by The Delaware Sea Grant College Program to help seafood professionals with fish and shellfish issues.
- East Coast Shellfish Growers Association (ECSGA) program on best management practices, handling mortality and marketing has been rescheduled for March 20, 2014 in the C-1 conference room at the

Tawes Building. Pre-registration is requested if you are planning to attend so the sponsors have adequate materials available. Chairman Webster will send information to those interested.

- DNR is aggressively working to catch and punish those conducting illegal oyster harvesting using the Department's new technology and targeted enforcement. This effort has been successful in catching and prosecuting a number of oyster poachers so far this year. The Council commends the NRP for these activities.
- 66th annual Interstate Seafood Seminar will be held in Virginia Beach April 16th-18th. The seminar brings together regulators, public health professionals, researchers and the seafood industry to discuss current and emerging issues facing seafood regulatory programs and stakeholders.

Reports:

Aquaculture Division Report (Mr. Roscher)

Mr. Roscher provided Council members with a summary of the Department's shellfish aquaculture leasing and permitting activity. The Department received 8 new shellfish aquaculture lease applications between January and March of 2014. Two new, two revised and reinstated lease agreements were issued and one new lease is pending issuance. One Public Information Meeting was held for a lease under protest in Calvert Bay, St. Mary's County. Two lease protest mediation meetings were held. Two protests over submerged land leases in the Nanticoke River and Tangier Sound were withdrawn. Four lease applications are currently under various stages of protest. Hydrographic surveys are pending for ten lease applications. Three public notice periods concluded with no comments received. Those lease agreements have been mailed out for signature. There is also one other agreement awaiting applicant signature. Ten new lease applications packets were prepared to be forwarded to the Corps of Engineers for review.

From September 2010 through March 12, 2014, the Department received 209 lease applications with 147 received since August 1, 2011 when the Department began accepting applications for water column leases. The State has issued 93 new commercial shellfish leases totaling 1,657 acres. An additional 62 lease applications are in process, with four currently incomplete. So far in 2014, the Department has issued 270 Shellfish Aquaculture Harvester Permits (SAHP) and 714 SAHP Registration Cards resulting in a total of 984 individuals that are authorized to work on shellfish aquaculture leases. Out of 329 active leases and 3680 total acres, St. Mary's has the greatest number of active lease sites at 78 with Dorchester having the most acreage at 856.11.

The Department currently has 11 applications in the St. Mary's River Oyster Sanctuary that were previously put on hold. These applications can move forward with the new regulations in place. Four of the applications can move forward as proposed, three of which are currently on public notice. Out of the seven remaining applications, four need modifications and 3 need to be relocated

Terminations - After completion of the annual mailing, the Department sent out 58 termination notices because of non-payment of rent. 48 of these terminations have been reversed, six have been terminated, one surrendered, and three are outstanding.

Mr. Roscher reported that the Aquaculture Division began requiring lease holders to submit harvest numbers in June 2012 and the Department now has a full year of comprehensive data that accurately reflects the harvest. In 2013, Maryland leaseholders harvested 16,100 bushels of oysters and 1,887,000 individual oysters.

Chairman Webster asked if DNR collects data on employment and Mr. Roscher responded that the Department does not collect data specific to employment but the agency does permit lease workers through the Shellfish Aquaculture Harvester Permit (SAHP) process. This information tells us how many individuals are permitted to work on Maryland's leases.

Delegate O'Donnell commented that while these harvest numbers are considered low, the industry will see a significant increase in harvest in the near future as product that was planted over the last few years enters the market.

Lease Coordinate Data Sharing Survey

Mr. Roscher summarized the results of the Lease Coordinate Data Sharing Survey. He indicated that a majority of leaseholders would prefer that the Department not share the coordinates of their lease(s) in any format. However, further discussion will take place and a decision will be made in time for publication of next year's closure book. Leaseholders are divided on the question of whether or not the Department should include leases in the Shellfish Closure Book. About half want leases in the book while the other half does not. Those in support of putting leases in the closure book feel it would assist the NRP with enforcement actions taken against oyster theft on leases. Those against disclosure suggest that poachers will have a printed list of leases to steal from if they are placed in the closure book.

Discussions continued between Council members and leaseholders in attendance. Delegate O'Donnell suggested the Department receive additional feedback from the industry. Mr. Shockley stated that poachers will find oysters no matter what is done with the closure book. Mr. JD Blackwell pointed out that the issue is different for bottom versus water column leases as it is easier to steal from bottom leases. Chairman Webster commented that Department has agreed to take a more in depth look at the data before making a decision on how to proceed.

Shellfish Aquaculture Financing Programs (MARBIDCO)

Mr. McHenry provided an update for the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO). For fiscal year 2014, they received 13 total requests of which eight have been approved and five are pending. He reported that for all 54 aquaculture projects in 10 counties there are 34 loans fully drawn with 45 TFL holders having taken advantage of the funding. To date \$1,985,167.89 has been disbursed in the regular Shellfish Aquaculture Financing Program and \$60,000 in the Remote Setting Program. Seven EQIP assignments totaling \$123,000 have been contracted with the NRCS as of 03/13/14. Delegate O'Donnell requested information about available national grant money that industry could access.

2014 General Assembly Report

Delegate O'Donnell reported that things went well with respect to aquaculture in the 2014 session. He commented that there was not a lot of activity during the session pertaining to aquaculture and highlighted pertinent aspects of the following legislation:

- SB935 – Would transfer the duties and responsibilities of Natural Resources Police to the Department of State Police

- HB913 – Food Fish and Shellfish – Labeling and Identification Requirements (Maryland Seafood Authenticity and Enforcement Act) Would require point of sale identification of species of fish and/or shellfish as well as the country and state of origin of all seafood sold to consumers.
- HB118 – Establishing a Task Force to study the impact of ocean acidification on State waters.
- HB910 – Requiring MDE to conduct a 3 year study on effects of sediment build up at Conowingo Dam.

Active Use Requirements Workgroup

Mr. Roscher reported on the active use requirements discussed in the workgroup meeting on March 6, 2014. Additional meetings will be organized for broad input from all leaseholders to focus on their issues of concern and the questions that were discussed at the organizational meeting. These include:

- How to verify natural spat set on a lease?
- How much of a lease must be worked and what timeline should be required for a phased in approach?
- Identifying appropriate planting densities that do not limit industry growth
- Active use requirements for nurseries and leases used for relay
- Water column versus submerged land leases - should they be treated the same?
- Clams vs. oysters - should planting densities be different?

He indicated that follow-up meetings will be set to get answers to these issues from existing leaseholders to support modifications to current active use requirements.

Unfinished Business:

Mrs. Brohawn gave a very detailed description of a wide variety of proposals presented at the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC) held in San Antonio, Texas. She let the Council members know that they could contact her if they had any questions regarding the specific proposals.

New Business:

Chairman Webster reminded Council members of the responsibility to submit an annual report to the Governor and Chairs of the House Environmental Matters and Senate Health, Education and Environmental Affairs Committees with recommendations for advancing Maryland Aquaculture. This report is now due at the end of May so it can be distributed before agencies finalize budgets for the next legislature. He stressed that suggestions for these recommendations need to be presented at the May meeting and will constitute a major agenda item.

Public Comments:

John VanAlstine stated that if lease coordinates are to be published in the closure book, the information must be ready in January or February the year before in order to be accurate for the 2015 growing season.

Kristi Shaw from the Cooperative Oxford Lab provided information on *Vibrio sp.* research. Ms. Shaw is developing a proposal to sample oysters and water quality to determine environmental conditions leading to increased *vibrio* prevalence and the potential for development of disease outbreaks. The research will require the collection of two years worth of data from the Eastern and Western shores and within different salinity ranges. She asked for assistance from cooperating growers for the project.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 8:34 pm with the next regular meeting to be held on Thursday, May 8, 2014 at 6:30 p.m. in the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, C-1 Conference Room.