

DRAFT MINUTES
Blue Catfish Work Group
Virginia Marine Resources Commission
380 Fenwick Road
Fort Monroe, Virginia 23651

June 12, 2025

The meeting of the Blue Catfish Work Group (Work Group) convened at approximately 10:09 a.m. on Thursday, June 12, 2025, at the Virginia Marine Resources Commission in Fort Monroe. Dr. Michael Schwarz called the meeting to order.

PRESENT

Jamie Green

Joseph Grist
Kenny Raiford

Gregory MacDougall (virtual)
Dr. Michael Schwarz
Dr. Shelby White
Tommy Herbert (virtual)

Dan Knott
Meade Amory
Brian Peede

Chris Moore
Rachel Meyers

Mike Bednarski

Hon. Shelly A. Simonds

Brent Hunsinger

REPRESENTING

Commissioner, Virginia Marine Resources Commission
(VMRC)

Deputy Commissioner, VMRC
Agricultural Manager III, Virginia Department of
Corrections

Science Specialist, Virginia Department of Education
Director, Virginia Seafood AREC
Marine Business Specialist, VIMS
Director of Government Affairs, Virginia Restaurant,
Lodging & Travel Association

Vice President, Virginia Waterman's Association
Chief Executive Officer, L.D. Amory Seafood
Plant Manager, Wanchese Fish Company

Virginia Executive Director, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Manager, Office of Agriculture and Forestry Development,
Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
(VDACS)

Director of International Marketing, VDACS
Chief of Fisheries, Virginia Department of Wildlife
Resources (VDWR)

Virginia House of Delegates
Environmental Management Staff, NOAA

Advocacy and Coastal Programs Director, Friends of the
Rappahannock

STAFF PRESENT

Stacy Metz, Administrative Coordinator, VDACS
Nicolas Robichaud, Policy Assistant, VDACS

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Schwarz called the meeting to order and introduced the draft minutes of the previous meeting for approval by the Work Group. Commissioner Grist moved to approve the minutes and Mr. Knott seconded. The Work Group voted unanimously approved the draft minutes.

DISCUSSION

The Work Group began its discussion by considering a draft set of the recommendations that the Work Group will present in its final report to the General Assembly.

Efforts to promote the creation of a market for blue catfish

The Work Group recognized that there are, or may be, multiple different efforts, groups, and sources of funding to promote a blue catfish market. The Work Group discussed recommendations

to consolidate these efforts by establishing a full-time employee (FTE) position within Virginia to help discover and coordinate these efforts. Although the Work Group had considered housing the FTE position in different agencies, Commissioner Guthrie suggested that the FTE should be housed within the Virginia Marine Products Board. The Work Group also discussed whether a single FTE would be sufficient to handle the level of marketing necessary to promote blue catfish or whether some of the marketing should be outsourced. Some Work Group members suggested that the FTE position should be focused less on managing marketing efforts and more on managing grants and federal funding to support outsourced marketing efforts.

The Work Group also discussed the labeling or branding of potential blue catfish products from Virginia in order to promote its sale and consumption. The Work Group considered whether products should be labeled as “wild harvest” as well as whether they should be labeled as “Virginia” or “Chesapeake.” The Work Group settled on leaving the issue open and recommending these alternative options in the final report.

Potential sectors for blue catfish market

The Work Group discussed specific options for promoting and spreading the word about blue catfish, such as social media campaigns, sponsored events such as cookoffs, and recreational activities.

The Work Group also considered options for educating the public about blue catfish. Delegate Simonds suggested removing the reference to the Department of Education in this recommendation from the final report to avoid any confusion because this recommendation is focused on consumer education and public awareness, not school curriculum. Other members of the Work Group suggested that the Department of Wildlife Resources could have instructional videos and diagrams on their website about how to catch and clean blue catfish.

Actions the Commonwealth can take to promote a market for blue catfish

The Work Group discussed potential funding options from the General Assembly that would help achieve the goals of promoting a blue catfish market. Delegate Simonds drew attention to a recommendation that the General Assembly fund an apprenticeship program. Other members of the Work Group explained that an apprenticeship program is helpful for providing the labor for the production of potential blue catfish food products. Especially for individuals coming out of incarceration or military service, apprenticeships can help train them and put them in skilled labor jobs needed for the industry. Commissioner Green pointed out that VMRC already has an apprenticeship program, and the Work Group suggested that the recommendation should be that the General Assembly increase funding for this program.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The Work Group did not receive any public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

Before adjourning the meeting, Dr. Schwartz requested that the members provide any additional comments or feedback that had not yet been addressed by the meeting’s discussion.

At approximately 11:45 p.m. the Work Group adjourned.