

DRAFT MINUTES

Blue Catfish Work Group
Oliver Hill Building
Board Room, 220
102 Governor Street
Richmond, Virginia

Thursday, March 13, 2025

The meeting of the Blue Catfish Work Group (Work Group) convened at approximately 1:08 p.m. on Thursday, March 13, 2025 at the Oliver Hill Building. Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services Joseph Guthrie called the meeting to order.

PRESENT

Jamie Green
Joseph Grist

Kenny Raiford

Gregory Macdougall
Dr. Michael Schwarz

Mike Hutt

Dr. Shelby White

Dan Knott
Meade Amory
Chris Sopko
Brian Peede
Hon. Shelley A. Simonds
Joseph Guthrie
Rachel Meyers

Jesse Phillips
Mike Benarski

REPRESENTING

Commissioner, Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Deputy Commissioner, Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Agricultural Manager III, Virginia Department of Corrections
Science Specialist, Virginia Department of Education
Director, Virginia Seafood Agricultural Research and Extension Center
Executive Director, Virginia Marine Products Board, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)
Marine Business Specialist, Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences
Vice President, Virginia Waterman's Association
Chief Executive Officer, L.D. Amory Seafood
Vice President of Operations, Sea Farms Inc.
Plant Manager, Wanchese Fish Company
Virginia House of Delegates
Commissioner, VDACS
Manager, Office of Agriculture and Forestry Development, VDACS
Director of International Marketing, VDACS
Chief of Fisheries, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources

ABSENT

Nathan Thomson
Tommy Herbert

Carleigh Starkston
Bailey Robertory

Policy and Legislative Analyst, James River Association
Director of Government Affairs, Virginia Restaurant, Lodging & Travel Association
Communications Manager, Friends of the Rappahannock
Restoration Coordinator, Chesapeake Bay Foundation

STAFF PRESENT

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

INTRODUCTION

Commissioner Guthrie began the meeting by introducing himself and asked each member of the Work Group to do the same. He then provided an overview of the Work Group and the Work Group's mandate from the General Assembly pursuant to Chapter 218 of the 2024 Acts of Assembly. Commissioner Guthrie also asked Delegate Simonds to provide introductory comments.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Commissioner Guthrie presided over the election of the Chair and called for nomination from the Work Group. Mr. Raiford nominated Dr. Michael Schwarz. There being no other nominations, Mr. Knott moved that Dr. Schwarz be named Chair. Commissioner Green seconded the motion. The Work Group elected Dr. Schwarz as Chair by a unanimous vote.

Dr. Schwarz presided over the election of Vice Chair. Hearing no nominations, Dr. Schwarz moved that Dan Knott be named Vice Chair. Commissioner Green second the motion. The Work Group elected Mr. Knott as Vice Chair by a unanimous vote.

ELECTRONIC MEETING POLICY ADOPTION

Dr. Schwarz called on Commissioner Guthrie to present a draft revised electronic meeting policy for the Work Group's consideration.

Mike Hutt moved that the Blue Catfish Work Group adopt the electronic meeting policy as presented by staff. Commissioner Grist seconded the motion. The Work Group voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

DISCUSSION

Dr. Schwarz invited the Work Group members representing current blue catfish processors to begin discussion by sharing their thoughts. Following a robust conversation between all Work Group members, the following concepts emerged as points of consensus regarding the past and ongoing efforts to promote the creation of a market for blue catfish:

- There is a clear and immediate need to address blue catfish overpopulation to preserve the sustainability of Virginia's ecosystems and seafood industries.
- Processors do not currently have the labor or automation machinery capacity to maintain a consistent flow of processed blue catfish and investment in the necessary equipment is not viable without steady preexisting supply from watermen and demand from buyers and consumers.
- In order to differentiate blue catfish from other catfish on the market, there must be a sustained central and comprehensive strategic marketing initiative.
- There is opportunity to make blue catfish a more viable commodity for processors and watermen by exploring the utilization of waste biproduct.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The Work Group did not receive any public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

At approximately 3:10 p.m. the Task Force adjourned.