

DRAFT MINUTES

Blue Catfish Work Group
Virginia Seafood Agricultural Research and Extension Center (AREC)
Room 305
15 Rudd Lane
Hampton, Virginia 23669

April 25, 2025

The meeting of the Blue Catfish Work Group (Work Group) convened at approximately 1:05 p.m. on Friday, April 25, 2025, at the Virginia Seafood AREC. Dr. Michael Schwarz called the meeting to order.

PRESENT

Jamie Green
Joseph Grist

Kenny Raiford

Gregory MacDougall
Bee Thorp

Tom Dunlap
Dr. Michael Schwarz
Jonathon van Senten
Mike Hutt

Dr. Shelby White

Tommy Herbert

Dan Knott
Meade Amory
Chris Sopko
Brian Peede
Brent Hunsinger (virtual)

Chris Moore (virtual)
Joseph Guthrie
Rachel Meyers

Clinton Morgeson

Christina Garvey (virtual)

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
Lead Farm to School Specialist, Virginia Department of Education

James RIVERKEEPER, James River Association
Director, Virginia Seafood AREC

Associate Professor, Virginia Seafood AREC
Executive Director, Virginia Marine Products Board,
Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)

Marine Business Specialist, Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences

Director of Government Affairs, Virginia Restaurant, Lodging & Travel Association

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

Advocacy and Coastal Programs Director, Friends of the Rappahannock

Virginia Executive Director, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Commissioner, VDACS

Manager, Office of Agriculture and Forestry Development, VDACS

Regional Fisheries Manager, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources

Environmental Management Staff, NOAA

STAFF PRESENT

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

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Schwarz began the meeting by drawing attention to the public comment sheet and clarifying that public comment signup would end thirty minutes prior to the end of the meeting. He then asked any new members of the Work Group to introduce themselves. Bee Thorp, Lead Farm to School Specialist at the Virginia Department of Education, Tom Dunlap, James RIVERKEEPER at the James River Association, and Clinton Morgeson, Regional Fisheries Manager, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources each introduced themselves. Brent Hunsinger, Advocacy and Coastal Programs Director at the Friends of the Rappahannock and Christina Garvey, Environmental Management Staffer at the Chesapeake Research Consortium both joined the meeting virtually.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Dr. Schwarz noted that Commissioner Jamie Green was incorrectly listed as “Deputy Commissioner” and “byproduct” should be referred to as “coproduct” in the meeting summary for the March 13, 2025, Work Group meeting. Gregory MacDougall noted a misspelling of his name in both the draft minutes and meeting summary.

With these issues addressed, Mr. Amory moved that the draft meeting minutes be approved. Mr. Knott seconded the motion. The Work Group voted unanimously to approve the minutes.

DISCUSSION

Dr. Schwarz revisited key points from the previous meeting before inviting Work Group members to engage in new discussion topics. Following a robust exchange, several points emerged regarding the identification and exploration of potential sectors for the blue catfish market:

Institutional Markets

Virginia correctional facilities and K–12 schools were identified as immediate sectors for expanding the blue catfish market. However, budget constraints present challenges. State budget appropriations or collaboration with USDA programs could help facilitate food procurement efforts. The strong nutritional profile of blue catfish offers a significant marketing advantage for these sectors, and the development of value-added products — such as blue catfish cakes — is key to increasing marketability.

Certification

Establishing a *Virginia Verified Wild Blue Catfish* certification, modeled after the *Virginia Verified Beef* program, was discussed as a promising opportunity to enhance marketing opportunities.

Infrastructure and Research Needs

Members emphasized the need to acquire mincing equipment in Virginia to process blue catfish coproduct into usable forms for value-added products, such as fish cake. Addressing this infrastructure gap is essential to supporting market growth. Additionally, Virginia Tech and other partners could play a key role in conducting market research to assess consumer demand for these products.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The Work Group did not receive any public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

At approximately 3:08 p.m. the Task Force adjourned.