



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Marine Resources Commission

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Secretary of Natural
and Historic Resources

Jamie L. Green
Commissioner

Blue Ribbon Oyster Panel (BROP) Meeting Summary August 27, 2025

Opening

Secretary Stefanie Taillon delivered opening remarks, followed by introductions of panel members.

Presentations & Discussion

Chief of Shellfish Adam Kenyon presented an update on the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement Beyond 2025 Revision (Draft)*, which was released for public feedback from July 1 to September 1, 2025. He reviewed progress on rotational harvest and management strategies and noted the formation of a subgroup to evaluate strategies beyond a 5–10-year horizon. Kenyon also reported that 50 apprentices are currently active in the Watermen's Apprenticeship Program, with an expansion planned for November. He provided an overview of the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) using the Woods Hole NEMO platform and emphasized the system's enforcement and compliance benefits.

Dr. Jim Wesson reported that rotational harvest strategies have proven sustainable and countered the belief that "working the bottom" benefits production. He shared stock assessments indicating harvestable levels in several management areas and recommended a continued rotation approach—harvesting Areas 7 and 10 in successive years and allowing Area 8 to recover. He noted that the James River remains unique, with rotation unnecessary due to its natural productivity, and that recent spat sets may result in a 20 percent yield increase.

Dr. Roger Mann highlighted Virginia's longstanding ability to project oyster yields through joint VMRC–VIMS surveys dating back to the 1990s. He explained that live survey data are uploaded daily and fully collated by December 1 for management planning.

During open discussion, members inquired about spat timing, recruitment success, and the impacts of pollution and stormwater runoff on oyster productivity. Discussion also included the potential expansion of the Watermen's Apprenticeship Program to address workforce aging, the need for additional mentors, and the ongoing importance of rotational harvest strategies in maintaining sustainable public stocks.

Commissioner Jamie Green voiced strong support for rotational management, referencing Virginia's warm-water harvest safeguards and previous mortality events. He reiterated the need

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to strengthen mentor recruitment within the Apprenticeship Program. Commissioner Green also noted that the Rappahannock Area 1, Mobjack Bay, and Piankatank River will remain in the rotation and volunteered to serve on the newly formed VMS Subgroup.

Panel members discussed industry observations, shell substrate sourcing, and ongoing projects between Virginia and Maryland for substrate planting and Potomac River restoration. Future exploration of fossil shell surveys and Virginia-specific data collection efforts was encouraged, though funding remains uncertain.

Panel Actions & Decisions

- The Panel **endorsed continued implementation of rotational management strategies** for public oyster grounds.
- The Panel **supported reinstating Area 1 of the Rappahannock River, Mobjack Bay, and Piankatank River** into the official rotation.
- The Panel **supported the rotational harvest recommendation proposed by the Shellfish Management Advisory Committee (SMAC)** and confirmed alignment with its guiding philosophy.
- The Panel **supported establishing a Chesapeake Bay Patent Tong Area** expanding authorized patent-tong use along the western shore.
- The Panel **affirmed the need to continue evaluating Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS)** for improved oyster resource management.
- A **VMS Subgroup** was formed, consisting of Commissioner Green and select members, to refine implementation recommendations and provide a report at an upcoming Commission meeting.