

Blue Ribbon Oyster Panel Meeting Summary
July 24, 2026
9:30 – 11:30 AM
VMRC Main Office, 380 Fenwick Road, Hampton, VA

The meeting was called to order by the Chair at 9:30 a.m.

I. Introductions

Panel Members Attending:

Joseph Grist, Commissioner and Chairperson	Roger Mann, VIMS
Tommy Kellum	Jamie Brunkow, JRA
Ben Johnson	Jackie Shannon, CBF
Kim Husky	AJ Erskine, Associate Commissioner
Beverly Ludford	Keith Lockwood, USACE
Andy Lacatell	Jennifer Sagan, FOR
Richard Harding	

Panel Members Unable to Attend:

Rachael Peabody, MPB
Colonel Matthew Rogers, VMRC
Kevin Schabow, NOAA

I. Introductions

The Chair welcomed panel members and attendees. June 12, 2026, meeting minutes were approved.

II. Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) Presentation

Representatives from Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution provided a presentation on their Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) technology, with emphasis on the NEMO unit and its potential application to Virginia's oyster fishery.

Discussion highlighted several features of the technology, including:

- Suitability for use by small commercial fishing fleets.
- Integrated safety and emergency alert capabilities.
- Successful implementation within Connecticut's oyster fishery and Gulf snapper fisheries.
- Real-time vessel tracking with color-coded track lines to identify fishing activity and operations within designated management zones.

Following the presentation, the panel discussed potential applications for Virginia. Topics included implementation strategies, the possibility of pilot testing, funding mechanisms for deployment, incentives to encourage participation, and challenges associated with voluntary compliance and potential non-participation by some harvesters. Members also discussed alternative technologies

and methods that could complement or achieve similar management objectives.

III. Shell Dredging Update

Commissioner Grist provided an update regarding recent discussions with H&L Contracting concerning the shell dredge that has historically operated in Virginia to produce shell for oyster restoration and replenishment activities.

Commissioner Grist reported that H&L informed him the dredge had sustained significant damage and may not be expected to be operational for at least two years. H&L indicated that repairs would be considered if future work and contracts were available to justify the investment.

The panel discussed the implications of the loss of the dredge on Virginia's shell replenishment program and explored alternative shell dredging options that may help address future shell needs.

III. Substrate Alternatives

VMRC staff provided an overview of alternative substrate materials that could supplement traditional oyster shell for restoration and replenishment projects.

The panel discussed the advantages, limitations, availability, and potential future role of various substrate options as Virginia continues evaluating long-term restoration strategies.

IV. Committee Roundtable on Prioritizing Topics

The panel reviewed the long-term planning topics identified during the June 12 meeting to discuss priorities for future work. Members were asked to review the materials and share their perspectives on the issues they considered most important to the long-term sustainability and growth of Virginia's oyster resource. The panel's feedback and priorities will help guide future meeting agendas and recommendations.

V. Public Comments

No formal public comments required action were presented.

VI. Next Meeting

The panel agreed to hold its next meeting on Friday, August 28, 2026.

Summary of Key Themes

- Evaluating Vessel Monitoring System technology and implementation options.
- Addressing the loss of Virginia's shell dredging capacity and exploring alternatives.
- Reviewing alternative substrate options to support future oyster restoration.
- Prioritizing topics to guide the panel's future work and recommendations.

The meeting was adjourned by the Chair at 11:32 am.