



FINAL
VIRGINIA MARINE PRODUCTS BOARD (VMPB)
Board Meeting Minutes
Thursday February 15, 2024/ 1:00 P.M.
VIMS, Waterman's Hall
Gloucester Point, VA

CALL TO ORDER: Mike Oesterling called the meeting to order at 1:00 P.M. seven board members were present which represents a quorum.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mike Oesterling
J.C. Hudgins
Daniel Knott
Beverly Ludford
Trey Sowers
Taylor Deihl
Jonathan van Senten

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

Ann Gallivan
Nathan Bussels
Monica Schenemann
Mike Congrove

STAFF PRESENT:

Mike Hutt, VMPB
Owen Hynson, VMPB

GUESTS PRESENT:

Jamie Green, Commissioner of VMRC
Ben Stagg, Executive Director of Shellfish Growers Association
Kim Husky, Cherrystone Aquafarms

INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME:

Introduction of attendance at meeting.

MINUTES:

Beverly Ludford made a motion to approve the minutes from November 16, 2023, Jonathan seconded the motion, Mike Oesterling abstained from voting, and the motion passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Seafood Source News November 2023 Ads Activity Report: The total impressions as of the end of October 2023 were 655,456 impressions, the total clicks were 962 clicks and the click through rate was .15%. Seafood Source also gave us a free placement in their Weekly Global Newsletter the total impressions were 43,088 impressions, the clicks were 41 clicks and the click through rate was .10%.

Undercurrent News January 2024 Ads Activity Report: The total number of impressions as of the end of January 2024 were 540,440 impressions, 2293 total clicks and the click through rate is .35%.

2024 Billboard Ads:

- **Adams:** The VMPB has an eight-week run with Adams between 10/9/23-12/3/23 through the period of 10/9/23-12/3/23 we received 73,544 plays and 2,386,351 impressions.

NBC 12 News Ad Campaign: Through the period of 11/7/23-11/14/23 the NBC 12 campaign has received a total of 325,202 ads viewed, 406 website page leads, 210 likes, shares, or comments on social media, 38,760 people reached on social media, 235 Facebook page leads.

ABC 13 News Ad Campaign: Through the period of 11/1/23-11/12/23 the ABC 13 campaign has delivered a total of 626 impressions, 3 clicks, and a .48% click through rate on Site Retargeting, 15,598 impressions, 15 clicks, and a click through rate of .10% on OTT Retargeting, and 44,643 impressions, 19 clicks, and a click through rate of .04% on 13 News Now Display.

Oyster FIP Progress Report, December 2023: The Oyster FIP continues to receive A ratings and is in compliance with Environmental & Social reporting requirements. The Oyster FIP is a three-year program and should be completed next year.

Virginia Tech – Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumers Services – Virginia Marine Products Board Oyster Media Tour, December 6, 2023: This event was cancelled due to the small number of media members that had signed up. Mike Hutt is in contact with Virginia Tech, and they are interested in picking this back up in the Spring and Summer when there will be more media interest. The tours would be on oysters, clams, and crabs but they are also interested in doing tours on other seafood species.

SUSTA Winter Conference, Charleston, SC, December 11-14, 2023: Mike Hutt and Owen Hynson attended the SUSTA Winter Conference at no cost to the VMPB, travel expenses were provided by SUSTA. As Mike and Owen are both members of SUSTA it is important for them to participate in SUSTA sponsored events and to engage with SUSTA members from neighboring states. Mike and Owen's participation in SUSTA sponsored events allows them to continue to support Virginia Seafood while being able to save VMPB funds.

2024 Legislative Seafood Luncheon: The 2024 Legislative Seafood Luncheon was cancelled. Mike Hutt has informed the board that the VMPB is on the schedule to have the luncheon in 2025. It will be held on the first Wednesday of the first full week of session on January 15, 2025.

2024 Agribusiness Reception Mike Hutt was unable to attend the event this year, but Owen Hynson was working the booth for the VMPB. The VMPB received assistance shucking for this event from JC Hudgins, Dan Knott, and Jimmy Hudgins and Owen received help working the VMPB booth from Monica Schenemann and Nicole Knott from the Virginia Waterman's Association. Kim Husky, AJ Erskine, and Ben Stagg were also in attendance at the event helping engage people at the VMPB booth. The event was held at the Main Street Station in Richmond but was held downstairs this year. This event was well attended and was very successful for the VMPB with over 800 oysters served in less than two hours.

2024 Sea Grant Legislative Seafood & Wine Reception: Mike Hutt and Owen Hynson will attend this event at the Library of Virginia in Richmond on February 28, 2024. Sabine Rodgers will be using the VMPB display boats during the event.

SENA 2024: SENA is the largest seafood expo in North America. Mike Hutt and Owen Hynson will be attending this event for the VMPB. At the 8/17/23 board meeting the VMPB approved using board funds to allow Ben Stagg to travel and assist Mike and Owen during SENA 2024. They will be serving Wild Blue Catfish fillets, have a display of Virginia Seafood products for potential buyers, and gather trade leaders that they will send out to industry members after the show. SENA 2024 will be March 10-12, 2024, in Boston. Little River will not be attending the show this year, the VMPB equipment for the show will be consolidated and shipped Devin Smith owner of Full Measure Oyster Company.

2024 VA Food & Beverage Expo: This event is held every other year and will be at the Richmond Convention Center on March 27, 2024. This is a one day show that VDACS provides the VMPB exhibition space for at no cost. Mike Hutt and Owen Hynson will be working the VMPB booth for this event with a display of Virginia Seafood products, serving Blue Catfish, and gathering trade leads for the industry. VDACS is interested in having a room at this event showcasing Blue Catfish. This will be no cost to the VMPB, and the Governor is interested in participating in this.

SEG 2024: This event will be held between April 23-25, 2024, in Barcelona, Spain. Mike Hutt and Owen Hynson will be attending this event representing the SUSTA region. Mike Hutt will be going under SUSTA funds and Owen Hynson travel is being provided by VMPB funds. SEG is the largest seafood expo in the world and SUSTA provides the VMPB with the ability to showcase Virginia Seafood at the SUSTA Pavilion and Mike Hutt and Owen Hynson can gather trade leads for the Virginia Seafood industry during the event. Mike Hutt is a SUSTA co-activity manager for this event so he will be helping co-exhibitors at the pavilion, gathering trade leads during the show, setting up a seafood display including Virginia Seafood products, and working with the chef to provide samples for the attendees. Owen Hynson is not a co-activity manager this year but will be assisting Mike Hutt with his role during the show. In between putting in travel approval paperwork and purchasing airline tickets the cost of Owen Hynson's airline tickets increased. Johnathan made a motion to increase the amount allocated for Owen Hynson's SEG 2024 travel from \$3,000.00 to \$5,000.00, Taylor Deihl seconded the motion, and after discussion a roll call vote was held.

- J.C. Hudgins-Aye
- Dan Knott-Aye
- Beverly Ludford-Aye
- Trey Sowers-Aye
- Mike Oesterling-Aye
- Jonathan van Senten-Aye
- Taylor Deihl-Aye

Seven Ayes and the motion passed unanimously.

Southern Association of State Department of Agriculture (VDACS) Hosting, June 2024: VDACS will be hosting this event for the other southern region agriculture departments. VDACS is interested in highlighting the Virginia Seafood industry during this event. They are looking to take a tour group to Hampton during the event and have them tour the new VT Seafood AREC, catfish processing at Amory Seafood, and crab picking at Graham & Rollins. VDACS will be paying the cost for this event.

SEA 2024: Mike Hutt is a co-activity manager for this event. Mike Hutt and Owen Hynson are still looking for interested co-exhibitors to sign up for this show. This show will be held September 4-6, 2024, in Singapore.

NEW BUSINESS

Catfish Processing – VA Tech – Marel, Hannon Fry, November 29, 2023: Mike Hutt and Owen Hynson participated at the discussion at the VT Seafood AREC where the topic was addressing the Blue Catfish issue. Hannon Fry and Marel are interested on working with Virginia Tech on creating a machine that could process Blue Catfish after rigor mortis has set in. Part of the discussion was also on other ways to extract value from Blue Catfish either as a value-added product or a product with valuable derivatives.

H2B Visas – Cowart Seafood, December 4, 2023: AJ Erskine put this event together discussing the issue passing the H2B Visa bill. Mike Hutt and JC Hudgins were in attendance for this event. At the moment it looks like this will not be able to go through as a stand-alone bill but might be able to pass attached to another bill.

VDACS Catfish Grant - \$250,000.00: Appropriation & Finance cut the original bill co-sponsored by Delegate Keith Hodges and Senator Richard Stuart from \$4 million to \$2 million dollars, and when the state budget was passed and signed by the governor that total was reduced to \$250,000. Sea Farms was the company that was awarded this grant. There is talk of further grants being created to help with catfish processing in the future.

Catfish Marketing – Mark Kaplan – Wholechain – SENA/SEG Catfish Promotion: Mike Hutt informed the board that he met with Mark Kaplan at SENA 2023 and that they have been discussing showcasing Blue Catfish at SENA and SEG 2024. Wholechain will be presenting a program on the first night of SENA 2024 at the Boston Aquarium and SEG 2024 at the Barcelona Aquarium discussing current issues facing the seafood industry and possible solutions to address them. Mike Hutt has been lined up to discuss the issue of Blue Catfish in the Chesapeake Bay during the event. The total cost from sponsors for this event is \$25,000.00, Tillman Island Seafood has pledged to cover the entire amount if no other sponsor has been found. JC Hudgins made a motion allocating \$2500.00 to sponsor this event with the stipulation that VDACS marketing commits matching funds, Dan Knott seconded the motion, and after discussion a roll call vote was held.

- J.C. Hudgins-Aye
- Dan Knott-Aye
- Beverly Ludford-Aye
- Trey Sowers-Aye
- Mike Oesterling-Aye
- Jonathan van Senten-Aye
- Taylor Deihl-Aye

Seven Ayes and the motion passed unanimously.

Virginia Waterman’s Association Banquet – Omega Protein, February 16, 2024: Mike Hutt and Owen Hynson will be attending this on behalf of the VMPB. This event will be held at Omega Protein and between 150 and 200 people should be in attendance.

SUSTA Spring Conference – New Orleans, April 9-10, 2024: Mike Hutt informed the board that Owen Hynson and himself will not be able to attend this SUSTA conference due to their preparation for SEG 2024.

Virginia Tech – Sustainability Summit, May 3, 2024: Johnathan informed the other members of the board that this event will be held at the Virginia Seafood AREC.

Virginia Beach Restaurant Association – Meeting/Call, May 8, 2024: Mike Hutt informed the board that he has a call/meeting with the Virginia Beach Restaurant Association on May 3, 2024. They are looking to showcase Wild Blue Catfish.

VMPB/VMRC Joint Card with QR Code: The VMRC provided these cards to the VMPB at no cost. The cards are of good quality and have QR links to the VMPB website and Phase 1 of the Economic Impact Study. Zachary Widgeon from the VMRC created the designs and Mike Hutt and Owen Hynson are in contact with him on future projects.

A Guide to the Flavors of Virginia Oysters – Map Design: Mike Hutt informed the board that some members of the Virginia Oyster Trail organization have suggestions for changes on the oyster region map. They will discuss it at their next board meeting and then will create a proposal to present at the next VMPB board meeting.

INTERESTED PARTY REPORTS

VIMS – No report.

Virginia Tech – Jonathan informed the other members of the board that the Seafood AREC has hired K-12 Tiffany Wood full time, they will be having a STEM Day at the Hampton Convention Center for all local high schools in the area. The update on Phase 2 of the Economic Impact Study is that Fernando has started work on Phase 2 of the Economic Impact Study, he will be getting information on tax expenditures from the restaurant association and will be reaching out to sellers in March to figure out which restaurants to talk to.

VMRC – Jamie Green informed the board that the VMRC Apprenticeship Program is still open, since this program is still getting its footing, he explained they occasionally close the application process so that they can accommodate the current membership. Jamie also let the board know that the VMPB has exhibition space at Environment Virginia if they are available for this event.

Virginia Seafood Council – No report.

Virginia Waterman's Association – JC Hudgins informed the board that it was a very good public oyster season. The oyster season will be ending in March, there were a lot of extension this year that led to a 5 ½ month oyster season. The warm winter is probably one of the reasons for the good oyster season. Crab pot season starts on March 17, 2024.

Shellfish Growers of Virginia – Ben Stagg informed the board that the SGA has spent time battling some of the new legislation being proposed. He also informed the board that the SGA's membership is growing.

Omega Protein – Taylor Deihl informed the board that Omega Protein was happy to accommodate the board for the last meeting and was glad to be able to provide the opportunity for a tour. Omega Protein spent some time at the General Assembly this year in support of the bill Hillary Pugh Kent's sponsored against harassing commercial watermen.

Cooperative Programs

VDACS – No report.

Financial Report

Mike Hutt reported a carry over for FY 2023-2024 of \$592,308.42 and a balance of \$498,664.08 as of November 30th, 2023.

PUBLIC COMMENT - None

TRAVEL – The Board may request travel reimbursement.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 3:06 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,



Mike Hutt
Executive Director



Mike Oesterling
Chair

