

DRAFT
VIRGINIA MARINE PRODUCTS BOARD (VMPB)
Board Meeting Minutes
Thursday March 19, 2026/ 1:00 P.M.
VIMS, Davis Hall
Gloucester Point, VA

CALL TO ORDER: VMPB board chair Taylor Deihl called the meeting to order at 1:03 P.M. Eight board members were present, which represents a quorum.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Monica Schenemann
Taylor Deihl
Daniel Knott
Johnathan van Senten
Beverly Ludford
Nathan Bussels
Chris Sopko
Mike Congrove

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

William Sexauer
Terri Graham Wallace
Trey Sowers

STAFF PRESENT:

Mike Hutt, VMPB
Owen Hynson, VMPB

GUESTS PRESENT:

Joe Grist, Acting Commissioner of VMRC
Kim Huskey, Cherrystone Aqua Farms
JC Hudgins, Virginia Waterman's Association
Mike Schwartz, Director of the Virginia Tech Seafood AREC
Melissa Ball, VDACS
Bill Scruggs, VDACS
Shelby White, VIMS

INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME:

Introduction of attendance at meeting.

MINUTES:

Mike Congrove made a motion to approve the minutes from December 4, 2025 & January 29, 2026, Dan Knott seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

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UNFINISHED BUSINESS

VMPB Executive Director's Position: The Executive Director of the VMPB's position was filled on 3/10/26. Rachael Peabody was selected as the new Executive Director. Rachael was in attendance at the meeting and introduced herself to the board.

Consociate Media Marketing Audit/Proposal: Rachael Peabody informed the board that she met with Stephanie Heinatz at Consociate Media earlier in the week to discuss the audit on the VMPB's current marketing and plans for their proposal to the board to make more future marketing efforts. The audit concluded that the current marketing efforts have reached a constant level and current social media and advertising is not reaching any new engagement. Consociate would like to propose a new initial campaign for \$7,500.00 taking over the VMPB's social media and working on new forms of marketing focusing on content creation and telling a cohesive story of Virginia Seafood. Beverly Ludford made a motion approving the Consociate Media marketing proposal for \$7,500.00, Monica seconded the motion and a roll call vote was held.

- Chris Sopko-Aye
- Taylor Deihl-Aye
- Daniel Knott-Aye
- Beverly Ludford-Aye
- Mike Congrove-Aye
- Nathan Bussels-Aye
- Johnathan van Senten-Aye
- Monica Schenemann-Aye

Eight Ayes and the motion passed unanimously.

SEA Grant Reception: Owen Hynson informed the board that the 2026 SeaGrant Reception was held on February 11, 2026, at the Library of Virginia in Richmond. As in the past the VMPB supplied Sabine Rodgers with the VMPB's display boats for their oyster bar during the event. Owen was unable to attend the event because of a conflict but Sabine informed Owen that this was one of the most well-attended receptions in recent years and as always, the VMPB's support for this event is greatly appreciated.

Virginia Waterman's Association Annual Membership Dinner: JC Hudgins informed the board that this event was held on February 13, 2026, at the Fairfield Volunteer Fire Department in Reedville. The event was well attended but it was slightly down from last year.

VDACS SENA 2026 Canadian Inbound Buyers Mission & Dinner: Owen Hynson informed the board that this event was set up by the VDACS international marketing team for connecting Virginia companies that would like to sign up with Canadian & Chinese buyers at SENA 2026. A dinner was originally scheduled to take place the evening before the first day of the show, but this was canceled due to limited participation from the Canadian & Chinese buyers. The international marketing team still participated in buyer introductions with Virginia companies during the show.

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Seafood Expo North America (SENA) 2026: Owen Hynson informed the board that SENA 2026 was held in Boston between March 15-17, 2026. Because of Rachael starting the same week she was unable to attend SENA 26. Brooke Castro from the VDACS international marketing team was able to attend the event to help Owen with booth setup and tear down, hand out sample Blue Catfish fillets and gather trade leads for the Virginia Seafood industry. Brooke Castro was a great help during the show and I would like to thank her and the VDACS international marketing team for their help and support during this event. Owen Hynson is still compiling trade leads from this show, but they collected at least between 50 and 60 trade leads during the event. During the event Owen met Reed, he has a large online presence and a social media channel breaking down seafood under the name Reed the Fishmonger. Owen and Rachael will follow up with Reed, he is incredibly interested in coming to Virginia watching Blue Catfish being harvested, processed and breaking down the fish himself on his channel. Owen also met Patricia Cemet during the show. She has a social media presence in the Northern Neck under the name “Rivah Sistah”. Owen and Rachael will continue to follow up with her and other content creators in the area to see if there are any future collaborations the board would like to go forward with.

Seafood Expo Global (SEG) 2026: Owen Hynson informed the board that SEG 2026 will take place in Barcelona between April 2026. Unlike in past years SUSTA will not be allowing out of region companies to participate in the SUSTA pavilion and as a result there are only two companies that signed onto the SUSTA pavilion. Because of this SUSTA will not be sending an activity manager from the US during the and will only be having an in-market consultant attend the show. The in-market consultant reached out to Owen while he was attending SENA 2026 and wanted to see if Owen would still attend the show using board funding. Because of SUSTA’s decision not to approve any travel for this event, the reduction in co-exhibitors this year and his ability to do the health/catch certificates in state he considered it best not to travel to the show and save the VMPB the travel cost.

Seafood Expo Asia (SEA) 2026: Owen Hynson informed the board that SEA 2026 will be held in Singapore during September. There are currently a few Virginia companies that would like to participate in this event and recruiting for this will start after the global show.

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NEW BUSINESS

OFLC Prevailing Wage Survey Seminar: This seminar was scheduled to be held online on March 19, 2026. This webinar covers changes to the prevailing wage surveys that the VMPB conducts for the Virginia Seafood industry. Due to the conflict with today's meeting, Owen was unable to attend this event. AJ Erskine was able to attend the webinar, and he will send Owen any new updates to the prevailing wage surveys.

Blue Catfish Stakeholders Meeting: Owen Hynson informed the board that a Blue Catfish stakeholders meeting will be held on March 23rd at the Potomac River Fisheries Commission in Colonial Beach. This event is being hosted by Morgan State University and has a mix of stakeholders representing Maryland, Virginia and the Potomac River on both shores. Owen, Chris Sopko and Dan Knott will all attend the event and will let the board know if this is a program they should continue to participate in.

Tour of VT Seafood AREC: Owen informed the board that the VT Seafood AREC will have Rachael Peabody, Kody Kaufett from the VDACS building management team and himself tour office space that they have offsite for temporary home for the VMPB while they work out the building location. Johnathan van Senten informed the board the location is at 17 West Queens Way in Hampton, and the tour will take place on March 26th.

Eastern Shore Steering Committee Hub Assessment: Mike Schwarz informed the board that this event will take place on the Eastern Shore on March 31st. This is an onsite tour of the Bloxom agricultural facility in Melfa starting at 8:00 am. Rachael Peabody and Owen Hynson will be attending this event on behalf of the VMPB.

2026 Oyster Shucking Prevailing Wage Survey: Owen Hynson informed the board that he will be working on a 2026 oyster shucking prevailing wage survey. Depending on participation, the survey might be split into a Northeastern VA MSA and Virginia Beach MSA survey or it may need to be combined into one for both regions if the minimal participation of three has not been met by either region.

Good Friday Fish Fry: Patricia Clemet informed Owen that her Good Friday Fish Fry will be held toward the end of April. As in the past Owen will get her into contact with Chris Sopko so that she get the Blue Catfish fillets for this event.

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INTERESTED PARTY REPORTS

VIMS – Shelby White informed the board that the Young Fisherman’s Initiative had a workshop on January 5th. The latest Shellfish Outlook report should be coming out soon. The fisheries resources grant program met last week; six applications were filed for six grants.

Virginia Tech – Mike Schwarz informed the board of a few initiatives that the Seafood AREC is working on including k-12 outreach, videos of Blue Catfish harvesting and creating 3D videos for use with VR goggles. Owen informed the board that he is currently working with Tiffany Wood and Grace Duregger of the VT Seafood AREC and James Hill of Virginia State University on some of these initiatives supporting outreach at the state fair and other possible future collaborations. **Mike Congrove made a motion for the VMPB to help continue support VT’s efforts, Chris Sopko seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.**

VMRC – Commissioner Joe Grist informed the board that the new VMRC Secretary and Deputy Secretary are interested in learning more about and supporting the Virginia Seafood industry and the Virginia Marine Products Board. The current shell dredging equipment, used for annual shell replenishment on public oyster grounds, was damaged on its way back to Virginia and it might not be in use going forward. The VMRC is addressing this by serving each oyster region on a schedule, currently, Tangier and the Rappahannock will be served first. The VMRC is looking to standardize the apprenticeship program in hopes of making it more of a program for younger first-time participants and to help with more long-term planning.

Virginia Seafood Council – No report.

Virginia Waterman’s Association – JC Hudgins informed the board that the oyster season is beginning to wrap up and it had been a challenging year due to the harsh winter, not many workable day, a lot of states began to open up at the same time saturating the market, oyster quality and yield was down in Virginia and prices were up. JC wanted to have the board keep Virginia Oysters in mind during upcoming marketing events. Blue Crab season began on March 17th, but the water temp is currently too cold for them to start catching. JC also informed the board that Matthews County is starting a seafood/farmers co-op. They are currently looking into where this business would be housed, and they would like to be up and running by Summer 2026. Monica informed the board that she was pleased that the Turtle Excluder bill did not pass and that she will continue work on education and outreach to the legislature because she believes this bill might come up again in the future.

Shellfish Growers of Virginia – Kim Husky informed the board that the SGA will be looking to appoint a new Executive Director. They are working on H2B legislation to introduce and are very close to getting clams approved to be sold in the EU.

Omega Protein – Taylor Deihl informed the board that Omega’s blessing of the fleet will be held on May 17th at Ocean Harvesters headquarters at the smokestack in Reedville. Omega Protein is participating in the Science Center for Marine Fisheries (SCMFIS) funded research that will create a detailed roadmap for more informed management of menhaden in the Chesapeake Bay.

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Cooperative Programs

VDACS – No report.

Financial Report

Owen Hynson reported a carry over for FY 2025-2026 of \$449,230.26 and a balance of \$353,105.10 as of January 31st, 2026.

PUBLIC COMMENT – No report.

TRAVEL – The Board may request travel reimbursement.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 3:48 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rachael Peabody
Executive Director

Taylor Deihl
Chair