



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Marine Resources Commission

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Stefanie K. Taillon
Secretary of Natural
and Historic Resources

Jamie L. Green
Commissioner

JOINT REPORT TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON SEAFOOD INDUSTRY WORKFORCE IN 2025

Report Submitted By:

Jamie L. Green, Commissioner,
Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Liaison for the Seafood Industry Workforce for the Commonwealth of Virginia

To:

The Honorable Jeion A. Ward, Chair, House Committee on Labor and Commerce
The Honorable Alfonso H. Lopez, Chair, House Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake, and Natural Resources
The Honorable R. Creigh Deeds, Chair, Senate Committee on Commerce and Labor
The Honorable David W. Marsden, Chair, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Natural Resources

Legislative Requirement:

In 2022, SB 358 enacted Chapter 406, an Act aimed at addressing the workforce needs of the seafood industry. As part of this Act, the Governor was directed to designate the Secretary of Labor or his designee as a liaison for this purpose. Taking effect in July 2023, Commissioner Green was appointed as the Secretary of Labor's designee. The requirements of the appointed are as follows:

- i. Promoting and protecting the interests of employees and employers in the seafood industry
- ii. Assisting employees and employers in understanding the rights and processes available to them, including rights and processes available pursuant to the laws and regulations governing temporary worker visas.
- iii. Answering inquiries by telephone and electronic mail.
- iv. Upon request, providing an employee or employer with referrals to public and private agencies offering assistance in using the procedures and processes available to such employee or employer from the federal government, including all appeal procedures.
- v. Reporting annually on the activities of the liaison to the House Committees on

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Commerce and Energy and Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources and the Senate Committees on Commerce and Labor and Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources by December 1.

Accordingly, this report is being provided to fulfill Commissioner Green's responsibilities under this Act.

Virginia's Seafood Economy and Industry

Virginia is a prominent seafood producer on the East Coast, as stated in the 2020 Annual Fisheries Economics of the United States report by the National Marine Fisheries Service¹. In 2020, it achieved the highest seafood landing revenue in the Mid-Atlantic region, reaching an impressive \$214.4 million. Virginia also ranks as the country's fourth largest producer of marine products, reporting a substantial total of 362.5 million pounds of landings in 2018. This places Virginia just behind Alaska, Louisiana, and Washington. The seafood industry is a critical economic driver for many communities, particularly in rural and historically underserved areas, where it provides stable employment and dependable economic opportunities. These communities often face higher poverty rates, greater minority and tribal populations, and limited capacity to adapt to changes, such as unemployment or educational challenges².

Virginia's commercial seafood industry provides direct employment to approximately 24,880 individuals who are involved in the harvest, sales, or processing of seafood. These jobs are spread across 62 firms, generating an annual payroll of approximately \$62 million. Moreover, the industry significantly impacts the marine transport and support sector, which encompasses businesses like shipbuilding, deep sea freight transport, port and harbor transportation, and marinas. Within this sector, 249 firms directly benefit from Virginia's seafood industry, resulting in an annual payroll exceeding \$2.5 billion. In terms of specific ports, Hampton Roads stood out as the nineteenth wealthiest seafood port in the United States in 2019, further highlighting Virginia's significance within the industry. A recent economic analysis conducted by Virginia Tech estimated the value of the Virginia seafood industry to be nearly \$1.3 billion. It is important to note that this valuation does not include contributions from the retail or restaurant sectors, emphasizing the even greater economic impact of Virginia's seafood industry.

Promoting and Protecting the Interests of Employees and Employers in the Seafood Industry

The Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) is steadfast in its mission to promote and protect the interests of employees and employers in the Commonwealth's vital seafood industry. Under the leadership of Commissioner Jamie Green, the Commission works tirelessly to ensure that the needs of the commercial sector are understood, addressed, and prioritized.

¹ National Marine Fisheries Service. 2023. Fisheries Economics of the United States, 2020. U.S. Dept. of Commerce, NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-F/SPO-236, 231 p.

² <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/socioeconomics/social-indicators-coastal-communities>

Commissioner Green consistently meets with representatives and business owners in the commercial fishing industry across Virginia, creating an open dialogue to understand the unique needs of their businesses and workforce. These regular interactions allow him to gather valuable insights into the challenges facing the industry, from workforce development to regulatory concerns, and to craft solutions that ensure the sustainability and prosperity of this vital sector for the future.

Under the leadership of Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources Stefanie Taillon and the Youngkin Administration, VMRC has implemented specific actions to promote and protect the seafood industry, advancing its mission of responsible stewardship. A key initiative reflecting this commitment is the Waterman's Apprentice Program³. This program equips individuals with the technical skills, hands-on experience, and mentorship necessary for a fulfilling career in the seafood industry. With 52 active apprentices in 2025 and 48 new applications for 2026, the program has seen remarkable growth and success, empowering participants to enter the workforce with confidence and ensuring the next generation of skilled watermen is prepared to meet the challenges of the future.

Virginia also completed a major environmental and economic milestone with the restoration of oyster habitats in six tributaries as part of its commitment to the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement⁴. These efforts directly benefit the seafood industry by improving water quality, bolstering oyster populations, and creating a healthier, more sustainable marine ecosystem that supports both current and future watermen.

Through these initiatives and ongoing efforts, VMRC remains steadfast in its mission to advocate for the interests of the seafood industry's workforce and businesses while ensuring the sustainability of Virginia's natural resources for generations to come.

Assisting Employees and Employers in Understanding the Rights and Processes Available to Them, Including Temporary Worker Visas

The fishing industry in Virginia has faced a significant challenge over the past decade due to limited availability of H-2B visas and an increase in visa applications from other industries. Seafood processing companies have traditionally depended on these visas to sustain a thriving crab and oyster industry. For every H-2B worker employed in Virginia, 2.1 additional jobs are supported. However, the state has not been granted any H-2B visas in recent years, resulting in a critical shortage of crab meat and affecting the industry's viability.

Commissioner Green has engaged with Virginia seafood businesses affected by workforce shortages related to the federal H-2B visa program and has monitored federal legislative efforts aimed at addressing those impacts. These efforts have included legislation introduced by Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine and Congressman Rob Wittman to modify or exempt the seafood industry from the H-2B visa cap.

Congressman Wittman introduced H.R. 614, legislation intended to exempt the seafood industry from the H-2B cap. The bill was referred to the House Committee on the Judiciary and did not

³ <https://mrc.virginia.gov/apprenticeship/>

⁴ <https://www.chesapeakebay.net/what/what-guides-us/watershed-agreement>

advance further during the 118th Congress. Efforts to include similar language in the National Defense Authorization Act were unsuccessful after the House Judiciary Committee did not grant the required waiver for inclusion of immigration-related provisions.

Separately, Congressman Wittman worked with Congressman Andy Harris through the federal appropriations process to advance a seafood industry exemption and a returning worker exemption. While returning worker language was initially included in draft appropriations text, it was later removed prior to final passage.

In addition, the federal government has authorized up to 35,000 supplemental H-2B visas above the statutory cap. At this time, it is not known whether or to what extent Virginia seafood businesses will receive access to these supplemental visas, as allocation decisions are made at the federal level.

VMRC continues to monitor federal actions related to the H-2B program and remains engaged with industry stakeholders regarding potential impacts on Virginia's commercial fishing and seafood processing sectors.

Answering Inquiries and Providing an Employee or Employer with Referrals for Assistance

Commissioner Green and VMRC did not receive any requests or communications from the migrant labor community in Virginia's Commercial Seafood Industry in the preceding 12 months (CY 2025).

Annual Reporting Obligation

This report is respectfully submitted to fulfill the requirements outlined under SB 358.

Respectfully Submitted,



Jamie L. Green, Commissioner, Virginia Marine Resources Commission Liaison for the Seafood Industry Workforce for the Commonwealth of Virginia