

The

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*Current Issues in Coastal Ocean and Estuarine Science*

## NOAA Opens Chesapeake Bay Office in Virginia at VIMS

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) recently selected VIMS as the site for a Chesapeake Bay Office in Virginia. Virginia Coordinator Ms. Paula Jasinski arrived at VIMS in August to open the new workplace.

The NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office (NCBO) was established in 1992 to manage NOAA's activities in Chesapeake Bay and to coordinate with the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP). The NCBO's main office is co-located with the Chesapeake Bay Program in Annapolis, Maryland.

According to NCBO Director Dr. Lowell Bahner, the idea to establish a lower Bay office first appeared in the NCBO's 2002 Biennial Report. "We'd been getting feedback that we needed a greater presence in Virginia to open up communication pathways and provide a better return on the state's investment," says Bahner.

The idea was supported by Virginia legislators on Capitol Hill, who shared the vision of increased coordination between the NCBO and Virginia programs and agencies. Following congressional authorization

in 2003 and several site-selection visits to Virginia, NCBO staff selected VIMS in spring 2004.

"We realized that a physical presence in Virginia would greatly benefit our office," says Jasinski. "VIMS was an obvious choice—it's a very productive marine research center, presents a good base for us to access current research and product-driven science, and already has several NOAA resources, including CBNERRVA [the Chesapeake Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve], Sea Grant, and CMER [Cooperative Marine Education and Research]."

Jasinski also notes that VIMS is one of NCBO's largest grant recipients. In 2004, VIMS researchers received about one-third of the



Dave Jasinski (Chesapeake Bay Program, L) joins NCBO staff members Paula Jasinski (C) and Walter Priest (R) in front of their new offices in VIMS' Center for Coastal Resources Management.

## VIMS Team Discovers Probable Cause of Croaker Deaths

A team of VIMS researchers led by fish pathologist Dr. Wolfgang Vogelbein was kept busy this summer investigating the cause of death for countless Atlantic croaker (*Micropogonias undulatus*) along the coastlines of New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and Florida. Several million adult croaker died and washed ashore along the U.S. East Coast during July and August.

Although available evidence suggests a bacterial infection of the gills was responsible for the deaths, the exact cause remains unknown, and may perhaps never be known, notes Vogelbein. Research into the cause of the mortality ended in September when the outbreak ceased and newly dead fish were no longer available for study.

"I've never seen anything like this in my 15 years at VIMS," Vogelbein says. "It may have been a one-time occurrence brought on by an unusual combination of storms and wet weather."

Vogelbein notes that infectious diseases in fishes are almost always modulated by environmental factors.

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NCBO's \$15 million grant funding.

VIMS researchers use NCBO funds for a wide variety of research, monitoring, and restoration projects in Chesapeake Bay. These include efforts

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## *Croaker*

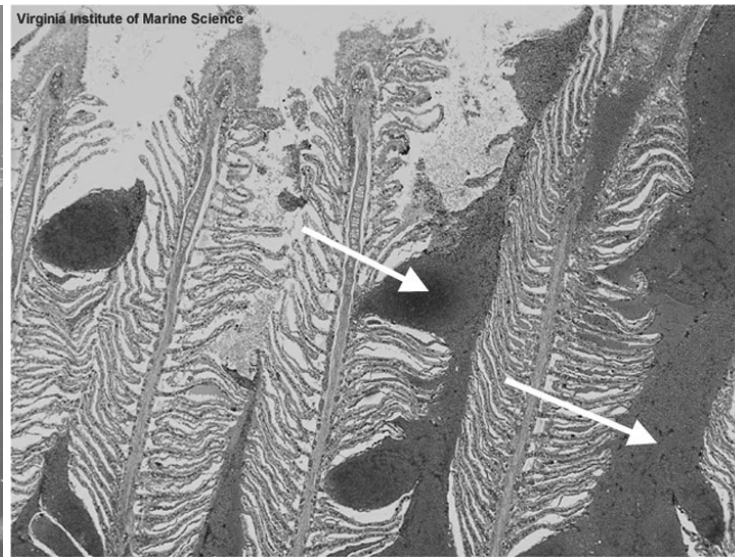
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“Microbial organisms capable of causing disease in fishes are always present in the environment. Only when fish become stressed by a changing environment will they generally break out with disease.

According to Vogelbein, dying croaker submitted for evaluation to the Aquatic Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory at VIMS appeared healthy externally except for extensive bleeding from the gills. Microscopic evaluation of the gills showed degeneration of the respiratory tissues associated with a bacterial infection.



Large numbers of dying and dead croaker periodically appeared in offshore surface waters during July and August. All fish were large croaker estimated at 4-years old and older. The fish were bleeding extensively from the gills but otherwise appeared healthy.



A magnified thin-section of affected gill tissue showing widespread damage to the gill filaments and lamellae and severe bleeding (white arrows).