



North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission Annual Legislative Report



Phased-In Mandatory Commercial and Recreational Reporting of Certain Fish Harvests May 1, 2024

Each year, the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF) and North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) are required to report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Agriculture and Natural and Economic Resources on mandatory reporting of the harvest of certain fisheries, per Session Law 2023-137, Section 6. The following is a report covering the activities from October 10, 2023, through April 30, 2024.

The NCDMF and NCWRC continue to make progress on strategic planning, technical implementation, and stakeholder outreach as the NCDMF develops the reporting process for certain fish harvests. Since Session Law 2023-137 became effective on October 10, 2023, the NCDMF and NCWRC established an internal work group to fulfill the requirements of this law, including:

- identifying data elements that are important to collect from stakeholders for resource management, and the frequency of that reporting;
- addressing compliance and enforcement concerns related to adding requirements for over a million recreational stakeholders;
- conducting outreach to stakeholders; and
- identifying incentives to encourage reporting, such as expanding existing reporting systems and building new reporting systems that are easy for stakeholders to use.

The NCDMF and NCWRC have drafted proposed temporary rules and developed a timeline for those rules to be in effect by the first phase-in of the requirements that will start December 1, 2024.

To initially meet the December 1, 2024 reporting mandate, North Carolina Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) staff have begun development of an online service as a means to collect recreational harvest data. This service will be linked on the NCDMF website and accessible by computer, smart phone, or tablet. Commercial harvest data, including any personal consumption, will continue to be reported using the N.C. Trip Ticket Program. The NCDMF is also collaborating with the NCDIT staff to establish a "Touchdown Project" to enable work to begin on the development of a more robust application-based data collection system. A robust application will eventually be critical to ensure that as many stakeholders as possible are able to efficiently access the reporting system. This will be essential as we work to make the new practice of recreational reporting routine. The \$5 million allocated by the General Assembly for this project has been transferred to the project account to ensure the funds remain available throughout the development process, which will take time to ensure the NCDMF can comply with the State's purchasing requirements and can continue to communicate with stakeholders about the phased-in implementation of the harvest reporting requirements.

The NCDMF and NCWRC continue to place particular emphasis on the importance of informing recreational and commercial stakeholders about the new law and pending regulations. These educational efforts are crucial, as this is the first time that any comparable recreational reporting mandate has been implemented in

North Carolina. The agencies anticipate most recreational stakeholders will need time to understand the importance for fisheries of accurately and timely reporting of harvests and the related impacts to management of the resources. Efforts to inform stakeholders will include social media posts, news releases, and a variety of outreach materials including posters and flyers with QR (quick-response) codes directing people to more information about reporting their harvest.