

*MFC PUBLIC COMMENT
MAY 2020*

Marine Fisheries Commission Public Comment

Submitted Time	Name:	State:	Please type your comments in the box below.
5/5/2020 10:29	Jerry James	North Carolina	Would the commission consider easing some of the restrictions and closures of flounder and trout during this pandemic as a lot of people and fisherman are not getting any income to help ease their stress of making a living and feeding their family. I recently bought flounder at a local fish market and it was \$9 per pound and trout was \$5 per pound. Please consider this proposal.
5/5/2020 10:35	Jerry James	North Carolina	100% in favor of barbless hooks. I and a lot of my fellow fishermen are already doing this.
5/6/2020 9:38	THOMAS S COLTRAIN	NC	Please stop the gill nets and shrimp trawling in the sounds of NC. You must be so proud of what you have done to protect the fish in NC. We have the lowest creel limits of any coastal state and what is different in NC and WHY? The difference is GILL NETS and INSHORE OTTER TRAWLING FOR SHRIMP and YOU are the reason this is still happening in NC. When the fish are gone for our children and grandchildren I hope you we be proud enough to say I DID THAT FOR YOU. You can catch a fish on your video game and eat fish from CHINA Thanks to NCDMF ! Be proud of what you do and do the correct thing for the FISH.
5/6/2020 9:44	Chris	NC	<p>May 2020 Marine Fisheries Commission Meeting Public Comment</p> <p>Please consider options for letting recreational and commercial fishermen purchase our fishing licenses online to promote social distancing using modern technology. This website should include a forum where license holders can discuss how our license fees will be used and vote on it.</p> <p>Please consider options for regionally stocking native larval-stage seafood that can naturally reproduce to promote recreational opportunity and food security. This solution would benefit everyone unlike the plans to let global corporations cage large concentrations of genetically sterilized or otherwise modified species in our public waters.</p> <p>Thank you, Chris McCaffity</p>
5/6/2020 9:55	Ray Peaden iii	Nc	Would like to see yall open rock season back open in October keep two fish between 18inches to 22inches and from 22inches to 27inches release. Their is plenty of rock in the waters.
5/7/2020 9:45	Jordan J	North Carolina	Disagree with any blanket requirements to use circle hooks. The largest source of dead discards in this state is inshore shrimp trawling and nothing has been done to address that. Requiring circle hooks, when not much study has been done on them, is disingenuous. Address the real problems with fisheries management in this state. Don't create further headaches for recreational fishermen who already have much lower limits on gamefish than many other states.
05/11/2020 - 9:46am	Gregory W. Judy	NC	I am asking the NCMFC to halt the gillnet closure for the upstream areas of the Neuse and Pamlico Rivers beginning with the opening of the commercial southern flounder season in the fall of 2020. This closure was based on what certain members of the MFC believed was necessary to protect native striped bass. But those commissioners ignored DMF observer studies that showed the other gillnet fisheries had very little effect on the striper population. The fall commercial season will be short, maybe the month of October, maybe not even the whole month. The water temperture will be cooler. Any stripers caught will have a higher survival rate when released. Area C has reduced total allowable gillnet yardage. The areas above the ferry docks require 3 foot tie downs and a 50 yard from shore buffer to reduce interactions with stripers and red drum. The stripers have had 2 years of complete protection during spawning season and by October will have had 1 1/2 years of complete protection; except from recreational catch-and-release. Please open the areas above the ferry docks to the use of gillnets. Local commercial fishermen and dealers have suffered enough since March, 2019.

05/11/2020 - 10:38am

Easton Edwards nc

I recently attended the Marine Fisheries Commission meeting held in New Bern, NC on Feb. 19 & 20th. Public comment was Wednesday night and Thursday morning. I sat and listened to individuals rant and rave that gill nets were the evil of all evil and that their removal from the upper Neuse river, had in just a short time, created a sanctuary like the world has never seen before. That by simply eliminating this user group from those waters, they had created a speckled trout fishery that has produced numbers, STATEWIDE, that have never been seen before. As I sat and listened to this ridiculous rhetoric, I was amazed that they are so zealous in their constant attacks on the commercial fishermen, that they can't even follow the script correctly set forth by one of their puppeteer groups, the CCA. In it's February 14th newsletter it states "Mild winters and ideal environmental conditions for successful spawns have resulted in a trifecta boom in three species: speckled trout, red drum, and striped bass. The upstream net free zones are NOT RESPONSIBLE for this boom". One would think that any sensible angler would see this and not continuously blame the commercial side for everything that happens in fishery management. The CCA is correct on this one point. The overwhelmingly mild winters we have had for the last two years, winters that we have not experienced a cold stun event in to kill off speckled trout, have been the cause of the speckled trout boom we are now experiencing.

I sat and listened to this public comment and wondered, do these people really believe that no one knows the truth? Do they really believe that the commissioners sitting at the head of this room are going to swallow this propaganda verbatim? And what's worse is, do they believe that any legislator that they constantly whine and bemoaned to, is going to accept this as fact? One would hope that all the legislators, both house and senate, would ensure they know the FACTS, and not propaganda or fake news, that the various groups constantly bombard them with. In fact, if I was a legislator, I would be sickened by the constant noise directed at them and the governor's office about fishing. If you listen to them, they have never had enough fish, caught enough fish, or ever plan to have enough fish to catch again. I believe they actually believe that there should be enough fish that you could pull up to any Wal-Mart retaining pond, cast in a line baited with a marsh-mellow, and catch trout, drum and striped bass until you fill the back of a truck up. That is how ridiculous their constant claims of the commercial fishermen ruining their fun is. I sat through these claims and then I eased into the hallway as they completed their propaganda speeches. I was absolutely amazed to hear some of the discussions. How they had a new appointee on the commission who was going to set things right and eliminate all the nets and how they were going to unseat the governor, appoint a commission of their liking, and systematically eliminate commercial fishing. And as I listened to this rhetoric, I concluded that, these people do know what is right and wrong, and they simply don't care. They will do whatever they can, right or wrong, moral or immoral, to eliminate commercial fishing simply because they don't like it. Every legislator should be on guard for any fake news directed at them as facts from these malicious, agenda driven people. They present facts that are rarely, if ever accurate and true.

Case in point. This very year we have seen the most speckled trout EVER recorded in our history. Anglers have caught these trout all year. You can't go anywhere that you can't catch a limit of trout, and if you can't catch your limit this year, you need to quit fishing. I trout fish all the time. I can tell anyone and any legislator that any issues, that dare be directed at them on trout, are not a matter of the condition of the resource, it is a matter of some kind of conflict that they have had or have heard about. As I listened to discussions on the commission, I heard one commissioner put this into perspective. He began by stating that all the noise directed by these groups and individuals at the governor and legislators wasn't about a valid resource issue, it was about something that they simply didn't like. When they come down to fish, they don't want to see a net anywhere they go. Especially those that might be near of in "their spot". I heard him explain that he too was an avid speckled trout fisherman, like myself. That there are times when he goes fishing that there are nets in his spot that might make him unhappy, BUT unlike these vindictive groups and individuals, he realizes that the commercial fishermen are trying to provide for their families and they have the same right to that patch of water and he and every other recreational angler does. He then went on to say that when you consider what is "wanted" rather than needed, you need to look at other scenarios. He gave an example of how, when he started fishing 30 years ago on Bay River, there were few boats and everyone knew each other, both commercial and recreational, and always kept each other updated as to where the fish are. He stated he could fish anywhere and not be crowded. Flash forward to today. On any given day there can be as high as 20 trout rigs at the Bayboro landing and as high 60 rigs in Vandemere and Hobucken. When he goes to his "spot", there might be anywhere from 5-10 rigs taking fish near it and then 4 or 5 five rigs sitting in his "spot".

How dare they do this when it's his and no one else's? How dare they use his water? He then stated how ridiculous these people act because of something they want or don't want and that is someone having a net in their "spot". The commercial fisherman has every right to provide for their families, under proclamations set forth, as anyone else to that patch of water, like it or not. The TRUE FACTS are this. In 2019, the catches of Speckled Trout were as Follows:

Recreational Landings: 3,555,702 lbs

Commercial Landings: 344,342 lbs

*NC Division of Marine Fisheries

The Recreational sector caught 91% of the total capture of Speckled Trout, or OVER 10 TIMES GREATER than the amounts landing by commercial fishermen. The fact they have the audacity, gaul, or for a better word greed, to complain to anyone with numbers like these is absolutely sickening. If legislators take their verbiage for fact, they should be ashamed. If a legislator pushes this agenda, he should be investigated. The worst injustice occurs from actions like this to people not even considered by these individuals and groups. I heard remarks at the meeting that explained this. When you attempt to eliminate the commercial fisherman from the resource, you are depriving the consumers of the opportunity to purchase and enjoy that product also. Most citizens / consumers do not have the means to purchase \$25,000 to \$75,000 trout boats and trailers. Take off and go fishing when they want to get their trout. Most work Monday through Friday and when the weekend comes do the family thing around the house. These people have the same right to enjoy that product as anyone else and can only get it through a fish market who is provided to by commercial fishermen. Most of these people are minority by nature and do not have the means to afford expensive boats. What group of elitist, with full pockets, or legislators have any right what-so-ever to deny these citizens their right to a cheaper protein? No one has that right.

I'll close by saying this. I am sickened when I hear these groups and individuals rant and rave at any user group, whether it be fishing, hunting, or whatever when they either don't know the facts, or worse know the facts and blatantly lie, spread false propaganda, and fake news, to push an agenda that is "want" rather than needed or fact driven. I deplore any group such as the CCA, Coastal Reform group, and even blog sites, that have the same vindictive rhetoric that only wishes the elimination of the commercial fisherman. They never stop pressure on the legislator's and the governor to eliminate a hard-working group of people that they don't like. I even saw one blog's sites comments that they were going to push to vote Governor Cooper out simply because he didn't do exactly what they want him to do. I would hope that any Governor, would look at the facts and listen to the people in charge to manage fisheries fairly, rather than succumb to these minions that only want their agenda and the elimination of an industry and the consumers it provides. They will not stop. Every citizen of this state that loves to eat seafood, fishes for a living, or just doesn't believe that entitlement gives you the right to dictate against those that have less, needs to make your voice known. You need to contact your legislators. Let them know you are beyond sick and tired of these big donors making policy that can deny you seafood. That your vote is the same as theirs and that you have friends to. Let the governor know you are just as much a citizen as they are. Only through a positive, constant, and loud message can we hope to keep fisheries fairly regulated for ALL citizens of North Carolina.

05/11/2020 - 9:35pm

Stuart Creighton NC

Good evening all,

I am sure that these comments will sound familiar, but I will continue to ask for significant reforms to North Carolina's fisheries management policies until both the commission and division acknowledge that changes are needed, and have been for a very long time. It is well past time for the trawlers to be removed from the Pamlico Sound and for gill nets to be taken out of our rivers, creeks, and sounds. How many more fish stocks must be severely depleted before we address the elephant in the room? River herring, sturgeon, striped bass (twice), southern flounder, spot, croaker, gray trout, redfish (recovering??), oysters, and more continue to be overfished to the point that recovery becomes so difficult that it will take multiple years for the stocks to become healthy. As division staff members develop management plans to recover the stocks, one option is NEVER considered: permanent removal of the destructive gear that has not only caused the problem, but continues to prevent sufficient recovery. As a commission and division, you can no longer allow maximum harvest to be what drives policy.

Recent events and their results should be all that you need to see to prove that the continued harvest of fish and shellfish by unsustainable means is the culprit behind our struggles. Do water quality issues and habitat loss play a role in depleted fish stocks? Of course, but they are not the primary issue. Using wasteful and destructive gear is the problem and that is why change is necessary.

Starting with a winter closure in 2017 that was followed by hurricanes in 2018 and a striper closure in the CSMA that included a gill net ban in parts of two major river systems, speckled trout populations have exploded. Responsible limits, mild winters, and REDUCED EFFORT have allowed this species to spawn and grow to the point where "trout fever" overtook these regions this fall and winter. Recreational anglers concentrated their efforts upriver because of the STABLE trout population above the ferry lines. Heavy netting pressure downriver (much heavier than the division will acknowledge) led to localized depletion in the downriver creeks as the calendar moved deeper into winter, as always happens.

Another example, and perhaps a more pointed one, is that of the puppy drum. I primarily fish the Neuse River, so my comments will be based on my observations from that system. Late this summer, and into fall, a huge number of juvenile fish entered the creeks of the Neuse and Trent Rivers, something I had also noticed in 2015.

However, unlike 2015, the puppy drum that made it to the creeks above the ferry lines were not subject to removal by nets. In 2015, as the calendar moved from October to March, those reds simply disappeared. In 2019, the reds upriver survived and now are all over the shorelines upriver. Below the ferry lines, they have been taken out as bycatch and either tossed in the marsh grass or fed to the pelicans or crabs. Excessive strike netting in the creeks has caused localized depletion of redfish, as it does every year.

With the lack of shad/striper netting this spring, river herring populations made an uptick in the Neuse River. The population is still not where it needs to be, but this was an encouraging sign brought about because the nets were not allowed.

Trawling pressure in the Pamlico Sound continues to devastate the populations of spot, croaker, gray trout, southern flounder and blue crabs. All of these fisheries continue to be depleted with no signs of recovery in sight. The current amendment being considered by the division takes small steps in the right direction, but it is not enough. The trawlers HAVE TO BE TAKEN OUT OF THE SOUND!!!

North Carolina has a long history of mismanaging its marine resources, especially the nursery areas of its rivers, creeks, and sounds. Much of this state's commercial effort is directed in these areas, and the consequences of the policies that have allowed that to occur for so long have now been brought to the forefront. The ONLY way to fix these problems is to remove all gill nets and to put the trawlers offshore.

It is time for this state to bring sustainable methods of commercial harvest into widespread use. Skimmer trawls, hook and line, small scale aquaculture (especially with oyster farms), and other such harvest methods have already been shown to be just as profitable. These are the opportunities that should take our commercial fishermen into the future, and it is long past time for this division and commission to require our watermen to employ these methods.

5/12/2020 9:17:31am

Joe Romano

North
Carolina

Dear Commissioners: My comment is in reference to the proposed Diamond Back Terrapin Management areas in the Cape Fear Region. My background puts me square in the center of this controversial proposal. As a crabber who has worked in the [REDACTED] for over 13 years and has helped graduate students and professors study this turtle, I am disgusted by how little science or collaborative management has gone into this proposal. This solution merely feels like a fast-tracked capitulation to an out of state lobbying group that has no skin in the game for NC fisheries management.

The proposed management areas are arbitrarily defined and likely illegal. How can the state dictate that a specific group of crabbers use an excluder device without having any population studies in other parts of the state. There is no reason why Terrapins in Masonboro Sound or the Cape Fear River should be "protected" while Terrapins in other parts of the state should not. This puts an arbitrary and capricious burden on the crabbers in the Cape Fear Region.

What is also particularly tone deaf about the timeliness of this issue, is that domestic food security is front and center right now and these untested excluders will do great harm to harvest and harvester. The poor design of this excluder will cut large blue crab harvest in half, eliminate whelk and Stone Crab Claws harvest, and likely force most crabbers in my area to quit. Why at a time when local seafood is critical to domestic food security would we put untested hardships arbitrarily on Cape Fear Crabbers? It makes no sense and will single out our local community access to fresh local seafood.

What is most frustrating to me is that my brother and I have been experimenting with a modified funnel design in our traps to exclude Terrapins while minimizing harvest loss, and it works. The frustrating part is that we can't find a simple cost-effective route to scientifically test the design. It doesn't take rocket science to test this funnel but the proposals that came in were ludicrously expensive. It is absurd and comical that it costs more to study a new funnel excluder than many crabbers can make in a season without one. What is even more absurd and comical is that the lobbying groups and academics advocating for crabber regulation could buy a pile of Terrapins for a breeding and re population program with the money they use to advocate for more regulation. They are for sale on the internet here <https://www.tortoisetown.com/product/diamond-back-terrapin-for-sale/>

There are so many better ways to address this conflict. Please bring some uncommon sense to the conversation, so that we don't add another hardship to fisherman bringing seafood to the table. Many thanks for your time and consideration.

Joe Romano