

Members of the Marine Fisheries Commission

Thank you for the opportunity to express my opinions.

My name is Gregory W. Judy. I am a retired DMF technician with more than 40 years of biological survey experience. From plankton nets, to gillnets; from Rotenone (fish poison), to shrimp, crab and flynet trawls, I've done it. I was deeply involved in the development of BRDs during the 1990's. I know what is out in the Pamlico Sound, lots of young of the year (YOY) fish, crabs, and shrimp. The proposal of North Carolina Wildlife Federation to declare the sound a secondary nursery is a cover for putting a dagger in the heart of commercial shrimp trawling in NC. There are millions of small fish in the sound, there can be no denying that. But the emphasis needs to be on creating more effective BRDs and trawls that are better at NOT catching juvenile fish. It is easy to point a finger at trawling as the culprit for low numbers of adult spot, croaker and gray trout, because that's who we see on the water. I think a large part of the problem is the global warming trend. Fish populations are shifting to waters farther north. NC produces the young, but the adults don't return the following years.

In regard to a shrimp season, when the MFC can control tides, winds, temperatures, and rainfall, I'm all for it. But until then, let the trawlers decide when to go to work. The Division does not have, nor will it ever have, the staff and equipment to accurately monitor the shrimp population in the sound. The Division has one of the best, if not the very best, primary nursery area sampling programs in the nation. Yet they still struggle to accurately predict juvenile shrimp numbers. All you have to do is look at the numbers from this year, 2016. Survey numbers indicated a dismal shrimp crop, but it turned out to be an extremely good year. Normally, shrimp season is a very short period of a few weeks during which commercial fishermen have to make the bulk of their living. Allow the fishermen to choose the season, not one or two DMF sampling crews.

Shift gears. I am a part-time commercial fisherman. I have been since the late 1970's. That income is important to my budget. With closures due to quotas and interactions with turtles and sturgeon, almost every gillnet fisherman out there has been shuttled into the role of a part-time fisherman. Leave the license system alone. Participation is in a long term decline anyway. When the commercial fishermen come to the commission and ask for a change, then do something, not before.

I am categorically opposed to the prohibition of gillnets within 200 ft. of docks and piers in the Currituck Sound area. This would have nothing to do with me or my fishing initially; but it would spread like a flu virus in day-care. I fish in the Pamlico River and if a similar rule were put in place there, net fishing would be over with. Riparian rights are one thing, but this proposal appears to be using those riparian rights as another tool to diminish commercial fishing. Limiting contiguous net length might be an alternative.

Look at these proposals brought to the commission during this session. Each one is a direct assault on the viability of the commercial fishing industry. From shrimping, to gillnetting, to a direct attack aimed at the participating commercial fisherman; the commission is asked to abandon biology-based management and cripple the commercial fishing industry through these politically motivated proposals.