

For Immediate Release
March 29, 2018

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NC FISHERIES ASSOCIATION FILES LAWSUIT AGAINST MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION FOR LACK OF OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY

MOREHEAD CITY, NC – NC Fisheries Association today (or yesterday) filed a lawsuit against the Marine Fisheries Commission for violating open meeting laws and an overall lack of transparency and openness.

In February 2016, North Carolina State Auditor, Beth Wood, issued findings in connection with an audit of the Division of Marine Fisheries. The audit findings included, “there have been open meetings laws violated by several members of the commission.” Also included in the auditor’s findings were four separate email chains dated January 14, 2015, September 8, 2015, July 20, 2015 and February 10, 2015 that occurred between Marine Fisheries Commission Members. In each instance, the Commission’s legal counsel, Philip Reynolds, stopped the email communication and reminded the commission members about open meeting laws.

The North Carolina Fisheries Association notified regulators and legislators about the auditor’s findings in 2016. Although warned, NCFA alleges that the Marine Fisheries Commission continued violating the open meetings laws culminating with the most recent meeting in Wrightsville Beach, NC in February of 2018. The result was a 5-4 vote recommending the General Assembly change the criteria for commercial fishing licenses. The close vote came after overwhelming opposition to any changes and with all three commercial fishermen commissioners voting against the measure.

“Open meeting violations by the Marine Fisheries Commission have been an ongoing problem that is well known to many in state government including regulators and legislators. While many complain about it, nothing has been done to stop it. Anyone that believes in an open and transparent process, should applaud the action we’ve taken. It’s sad that we have to resort to such measures,” said Glenn Skinner, NC Fisheries Association Executive Director.

NC Fisheries Association (NCFA) is a non-profit organization promoting sustainable fisheries Since 1952. Commercial fishermen established the NCFA to serve fishing families by protecting their heritage and promoting seafood. To achieve this, NCFA actively lobbies local, state, and federal policymakers on behalf of the industry and engages in many outreach and education projects.