

WEEKLY UPDATE: 2/20/2017
NORTH CAROLINA FISHERIES ASSOCIATION
"Serving the Commercial Fishing Families of North Carolina since 1952"
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MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION:

by Jerry Schill

Disappointing is not quite the word to use to describe my reaction to the MFC vote, but neither is shocking. For anyone that is familiar with this particular commission, the vote to accept the petition isn't shocking. When the previous governor reappoints a former CCA Board member and bully that has been documented to violate our state's open meetings laws, and also appoint two CCA sympathizers to at-large seats, you know the deck is stacked. However, if you're an optimist you still believe that most abide by rules of law and fairness so there is always that ray of hope.

Any optimism was fed by the huge January turnout in New Bern for the deliberations of nearly 50 folks that are members of 5 advisory committees to the MFC. All 5 of those committees voted overwhelmingly (84%) to recommend to the Commission to deny the petition. There were resolutions and letters from many towns and county commissions to deny, including our N.C. Department of Agriculture, N.C. Farm Bureau, and N.C Restaurant Association.

While the vote last week in Wilmington wasn't a huge surprise, the other side's tactics astonished even the most seasoned observer of this process. Defenders of commercial fishermen have been vilified publicly and university researchers are denigrated to the point of a sitting Commissioner and former CCA Board member actively working to deny those researchers funding for their projects! (Note the reference to the bully above.)

Former Governor McCrory stacked the deck with his appointments to the Marine Fisheries Commission, made even worse by reappointing 2 individuals known to have violated state open meetings laws! Even the state's GOP Chairman, Robin Hayes, was part of the effort as a Senior Advisor to petitioner, the North Carolina Wildlife Federation. Then again, not a surprise as he was a co-sponsor of a net ban bill in the mid 90s when he was in the North Carolina General Assembly. The primary sponsor of that bill was Democrat Billy Richardson with Republican Robin Hayes as a co-sponsor. Now as he sits as the head of the Republican Party he continues by sitting as a senior advisor to the Wildlife Federation. (Please don't make the mistake of confusing the Wildlife Federation with the Coastal Federation.)

And to be non-partisan, where has Governor Cooper been in all this? True, he hasn't been on the job very long but he and Secretary Michael Regan of DEQ have been briefed.

Bottom line? Science be damned and full steam ahead for special interest agendas that would decimate North Carolina coastal communities.

What the commission did does not implement the draconian regulations in the petition right away. It starts a process. Nonetheless, what they did was cause continued worry for thousands of families and a huge waste of taxpayer resources.

Where to from here? It's too early to consider legal action on the shrimp petition as the MFC has not adopted any new rules. At least yet. What we can do is continue to educate the general public on issues like this and let the Governor know how important it is to get fairness and balance back on the Marine Fisheries Commission.

In addition to the talk on the street about legal action, there's a lot of chatter about protests, meetings, legislation or a combination. All of those possibilities are on the table with some getting more emphasis than others. Be assured we are covering those bases, but aren't about to publicly announce them where the other side can read it.

We are going to have some t-shirts and other materials made for those who are proud to show their support for commercial fishermen!

In closing, I attended the funeral of Jimmy Nobles yesterday in Greenville. He and Wanda owned a seafood market in Greenville and Jimmy was a commercial fisherman and a long time member of NCFA. He was a great man who was quick to voice his opinions in a very passionate way. After he offered his prophetic remarks to the Marine Fisheries Commission last Wednesday in Wilmington, he walked to the back of the room and collapsed. Please keep Wanda and their family in your prayers. The memorial service was very emotional and uplifting. It was good to see the Division of Marine Fisheries represented at the funeral and ECU researchers as well.

With all the “stuff” that has gone on over the past week, it’s sometimes hard to keep the faith, but keep it we will. It’s a good time for our affiliate groups to meet and rally the troops. Let us know in advance so we can attend to provide updates.

God bless,

Jerry

CARTERET COUNTY FISHERMAN'S ASSOCIATION PLANNING FISH FRY:

CCFA is looking for sponsors and memorials. They will be raffling a print from Core Sound Museum called “Core Sound by Firelight” by Alan Cheek. The date has not been finalized but it will be in May.

SOUTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL TO MEET:

The Council will meet March 6 – 10 at the Westin in Jekyll Island, GA.

Issues on the agenda include:

Mackerel Cobia Committee:

Cobia - Update from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission on development of an interstate fishery management plan for cobia and discussion about the 2017 recreational fishing season and closure.

Snapper Grouper Committee:

Red Snapper & Recreational Reporting - The Council will review public hearing comments for ideas for managing red snapper and approaches for reporting in the private recreational sector that are being proposed in Snapper Grouper Amendment 43.

Visioning Amendments - The Council will review public hearing comments for both recreational (Amendment 26) and commercial (Amendment 27) management measures in the snapper grouper fishery. Items being considered were identified as priority action items in the Council's 2016-2020 Snapper Grouper Vision Blueprint.

For-hire Limited Entry:

The Council will review a white paper outlining approaches for developing a limited entry system affecting federal for-hire permits in the snapper grouper fishery.

Items scheduled for final approval by the Council:

Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendment 29 – Gulf King Mackerel Allocations

Items scheduled for approval for scoping and/or public hearings:

Spiny Lobster Regulatory Amendment 4