

NCFA UPDATE: 03/07/2022
NORTH CAROLINA FISHERIES ASSOCIATION
"Serving the Commercial Fishing Families of North Carolina since 1952"
PO Box 86; Morehead City, NC 28557
Phone: (252) 726-NCFA (6232)
Fax: (252) 726-6200
www.ncfish.org

Shortly after the February 2022 meeting of the Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) made a social media post explaining how Amendment 3 to the Southern Flounder FMP would impact recreational flounder fishing in NC.

In response to the post, David Sneed, Executive Director of the NC CCA made the following comment. David Sneed *"Let's not forget how we got here...southern flounder has been overfished for over 20 years with the commercial sector taking 70-80% of that harvest for the last 30+ years. Yet they will continue to take 70% of the total allowable harvest while the rec anglers are expected to be happy with their 30% for the next three years? Oh, and if rec anglers exceed their quota in a year, they will be expected to pay it back the next year, further reducing the annual harvest quota to potentially zero...yet the industry that overfished the stock for over 20 years is protected by DMF and allowed to continue to profit from a public trust resource. Makes perfect sense, right?!"*

Have you ever noticed how the CCA, like the NC Wildlife Federation, disagrees with everything the DMF/MFC says except for when they determine a fish stock is overfished? As soon as a stock assessment comes back as "overfished" they get downright giddy at the thought of reducing harvest in yet another fishery. Their giddiness is quickly followed by claims of commercial overfishing, mis-management, and "overfished for over 20 years", with no mention of data gaps, research needs, or scientific uncertainty.

I first noticed this back in 2009, when the speckled trout stock was deemed "overfished". The 2009 spotted seatrout stock assessment determined that the stock had been overfished and overfishing was occurring throughout the entire time series (1991-2008), nearly 20 years. The goal was a Spawning Potential Ratio (SPR) of 20% and the assessment determined the SPR was at 8% meaning we were "overfishing" at twice the rate of the overfishing threshold. Of course, the CCA was preaching doom and gloom claiming the stock was on the brink of collapse and demanding immediate action to reduce harvest, but I wasn't convinced.

There were several issues of concern with the spotted seatrout assessment, but one short statement particularly grabbed my attention. "The population has largely been able to sustain itself against high levels of fishing pressure throughout the years."

Sound Familiar?

That's right, like Southern Flounder, Spotted Trout had supposedly been overfished at a high rate through multiple generations of fish but somehow the stock hadn't collapsed. In fact, like Southern Flounder, there were no clear declining trends in either catch or Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB).

"Makes perfect sense, right?"

I didn't think so either. Unfortunately, my concerns and those of others fell on deaf ears and the, CCA dominated, MFC moved forward, despite the scientific uncertainty, and adopted the current management measures for speckled trout. In 2015 the Division completed a new stock assessment which utilized a different assessment model and

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data from a tagging study, which advanced the understanding of how cold stuns impact natural mortality. The new assessment, based on data from 1991 through 2013, determined that the stock was not overfished and never had been.

Despite this new revelation, the MFC chose not to increase recreational or commercial limits, instead they chose to maintain the current regulations meant to rebuild a supposedly "overfished" stock. Simply put, the current 4 fish recreational bag limit and 75 fish commercial trip limit were meant to end overfishing in 2 years and achieve a sustainable harvest within 10 years for a stock that is not overfished and never was.

You'd think the CCA, who points to low recreational bag limits as a failure of fisheries management, would have supported increasing the bag limit, in light of the new assessment but you'd be wrong!

It was then that I realized, the CCA's beef isn't with commercial fishermen or our nets, it's all about eliminating harvest, commercial and recreational. This was further confirmed in October of 2019 at a meeting discussing possible solutions to user conflict in the states speckled trout fishery. In attendance were representatives from the DMF, DEQ, MFC, CCA, and NCFA.

The commercial representatives, myself and Commissioner Doug Cross, offered solutions that would allow both gill netters and anglers to harvest trout while separating the two groups to avoid conflict, but the CCA took a much different approach. Their suggestion was to eliminate all harvest, commercial and recreational, in areas where trout "overwinter" and the majority of fishing occurs.

Obviously, in their view harvest of these fish was the issue that needed to be resolved, not which gear was responsible for the harvest. The rhetoric about gill nets, trawls, overharvest, and profiting from a public resource is nothing but smoke and mirrors. It's the distraction that allows the CCA to create the illusion of supporting anglers while they systematically decrease access to all but those who only practice catch and release.

The recent MFC meeting was a perfect example. The public comment from the CCA and its supporters revolved solely around banning large mesh gillnets and how this one measure would solve all of our fishery woes. When the MFC went to deliberate Amendment 3 the story was the same. Large mesh gillnets yes, or no?

No one discussed scientific uncertainty, the impacts of the recommended management measures, or even if they were necessary, only gill nets and allocation. Like gill nets, allocation was just a distraction from what was actually occurring.

Commissioner Tom Roller said it best when he said it doesn't matter if the allocation is 90%/10% or 10%/90% the recreational overages still occur. The increased recreational allocation would have never resulted in increased recreational access, instead it was meant to move fish, that could have been sustainably harvested and monitored in the commercial fishery, to the recreational sector where overages would inevitably eliminate harvest no matter what the allocation was, as Roller pointed out.

Increased reduction, not access!

As proof, you only have to look at what happened after 5 of the 9 commissioners chose to delay increasing the recreational allocation, to 50%/50% split, for 2 years. Roller and the other recreational representatives immediately requested a full moratorium which would have eliminated harvest/access to everyone but catch and release anglers!

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This motion, which ultimately failed, shows the true agenda. While anglers bashed gill nets, at the CCA's urging, they never questioned whether all of this was necessary or how the management measures would impact them.

Convenient, isn't it?

The truth is in the 10-year period from 2008-2017 gill nets removed approximately 4.7 million flounder or on average 470,000 fish annually. In the same time period recreational anglers, in the hook and line fishery, removed 5.2 million flounder or on average 520,000 fish annually, slightly exceeding gill net removals. I guess gill nets aren't quite the boogey man the CCA made them out to be, are they?

That's why the CCA uses words like destructive and indiscriminate rather than data when talking about gillnets, the data doesn't support their claims.

Only after Amendment 3 was approved did David Sneed express his concerns about how quota overages and pound for pound paybacks would impact the recreational fishery. Mr. Sneed never mentions, in his comments above, that with exception of a slot limit, Amendment 3 mirrors HB 894, the flounder legislation pushed by the CCA in 2021. If he was genuinely concerned about the impacts of a quota and paybacks, why would he have attempted to circumvent the management process and get these exact same measures implemented through legislation?

He wouldn't!

If the CCA was truly acting in the best interests of the recreational sector they would have opposed accountability measures such as overage paybacks until the Division had a method for accurately monitoring recreational removals in real time. I can tell you with absolute certainty the NCFA would never have stood by and allowed the MFC to require pound for pound paybacks for our members if the state could not monitor harvest in near real time and prevent excessive overages.

Simply put it is unfair to hold either sector accountable for their impacts if the state currently lacks the ability to monitor/ control those impacts. That said, it's also unfair to hold one sector accountable without doing the same for the other which is why accurate and timely data collection for the recreational sector should have been the priority before either HB 894 or Amendment 3 were discussed. The CCA didn't address this issue because it wasn't necessary for achieving their ultimate goal which is to close harvest in both sectors.

The NCFA, on the other hand, has already reached out to DMF/DEQ and requested a meeting to discuss ways to improve data collection in both sectors. The commercial fishing industry has also funded tagging studies hoping to gain a better understanding of the behavior and location of spawning aggregations of Southern Flounder. While the commercial industry is searching for answers to critical research needs the angling community has been led on a witch hunt by the CCA, that has resulted in nothing but decreased access for all but catch and release anglers.

While there are very few things that David Sneed and I agree on, I fully agree with this one statement from his comments.

Let us not forget how we got here!

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Through intimidation and deceit, the CCA has driven us to where we are, and through complacency, ignorance, and greed we have allowed it.

When will you stand up and proclaim enough is enough?

Glenn Skinner
NCFA-Executive Director

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

2022 PRIMARY ELECTION; MAY 17th

CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATES

US SENATE:

There are 11 Democrats, 1 Libertarian and 14 Republicans running for the seat currently held by Richard Burr who is not running.

DEMOCRATS:

Constance Johnson, Charlotte; Rett Newton, Beaufort; Chrelle Booker, Tryon; Cheri Beasley, Raleigh; Greg Antoine, Fayetteville; Alyssia Hammond, Raleigh; Tobias LaGrone, Greensboro; Marcus Williams, Lumberton; James Carr, Jr., Harrisburg; B.K. Maginnis, Charlotte; Robert Colon, Wallace

LIBERTARIAN:

Shannon Bray, Apex

REPUBLICANS:

Jen Banwart, Fuquay-Varina; Ms. Lee Brian, Clayton; Benjamin Griffiths, Cleveland; Charles Kenneth Moss, Randleman; Lichia Sibhatu, Raleigh; Pat McCrory, Charlotte; Drew Bullecza, Lincolnton; Ted Budd, Advance; Leonard Bryant, Fayetteville; Kenneth Harper, Jr., Archdale; Mark Walker, Summerfield; Marjorie Eastman, Cary; David Flaherty, Cameron; Debora Tshiovo, Moravian Falls

US HOUSE DISTRICTS: Listed are only those districts that include coastal counties, which are 3 & 7.

US HOUSE, DISTRICT 3: The incumbent is Greg Murphy; District includes the coastal counties of Currituck and Camden thru Onslow Counties.

DEMOCRATS:

Joe Swartz, Swansboro; Barbara Gaskins, Washington;

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REPUBLICANS:

Brian Friend, Wilmington; George Papastrat, Richlands; Greg Murphy, Greenville; Tony Cowden, Harrells; Eric Earhart, Eure

US HOUSE, DISTRICT 7: The incumbent is David Rouzer; District includes Pender, New Hanover and Brunswick.

DEMOCRATS:

Yushonda Midgett, Wilmington; Charles Evans, Fayetteville; Steve Miller, Wilmington; Charles Graham, Lumberton

REPUBLICANS:

David Rouzer, Wilmington; Max Southworth-Beckworth, Currie

NC GENERAL ASSEMBLY

NC SENATE:

District 1: Includes Carteret, Chowan, Dare, Hyde, Pamlico, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Washington.

There are only 2 Republicans running: Bob Steinburg from Edenton and Norman Sanderson from Minnesott Beach. They both currently serve in the Senatel Whoever wins the primary in May is the new Senator from this newly drawn district.

District 2: Includes Beaufort, Craven, Lenoir

Republican Jim Perry from Kinston is the incumbent and has no opposition.

District 3: This newly drawn district includes Bertie, Camden, Currituck, Gates, Halifax, Hertford, Martin, Northampton, Tyrell, Warren. Ernestine Bazemore is the incumbent.

DEMOCRATS: Valerie Jordan, Warrenton; Ernestine Bazemore, Aulander.

REPUBLICAN: Bobby Hanig, Powells Point (currently in the House.)

District 6, includes Onslow.

REPUBLICAN Mike Lazzara of Jacksonville is the incumbent and is unopposed.

District 7, includes part of New Hanover

DEMOCRAT: Jason Minnicozzi, Wilmington

REPUBLICAN: Mike Lee, incumbent, Wilmington

District 8 includes Brunswick, Columbus, part of New Hanover

REPUBLICAN Bill Rabon of Winnabow is the incumbent and is unopposed.

NC HOUSE:

District 1: Chowan, Currituck, Dare (Part), Perquimans, Tyrrell, and Washington

REPUBLICAN Ed Goodwin is the incumbent and is unopposed.

District 3: Most of Craven

REPUBLICAN Steve Tyson is the incumbent and is unopposed.

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District 13: Carteret and part of Craven (incumbent Pat McElraft is not running.)

DEMOCRAT: Katie Tomberlin, Newport

REPUBLICAN: Pete Benton, Morehead City; Celeste Cairns, Emerald Isle; Eden Gordon Hill, Cedar Point

District 14: part of Onslow; George Cleveland is the incumbent.

DEMOCRAT: Ike Johnson, Jacksonville; Eric Whitfield, Hubert

REPUBLICAN: Debbie Burke, Maysville; George Cleveland, Jacksonville

District 15: part of Onslow; Phil Shepard is the incumbent

DEMOCRAT: Christopher Schulte, Richlands

REPUBLICAN: Phil Shepard, Jacksonville

District 16: part of Onslow & Pender

REPUBLICAN Carson Smith of Hampstead is the incumbent and is unopposed.

District 17: part of Brunswick

DEMOCRAT: Edward McKeithan, Bolivia; Eric Terashima, Leland

REPUBLICAN: Frank Iler, Shallotte is the incumbent

District 18: part of New Hanover

DEMOCRAT: Deb Butler, Wilmington is the incumbent

REPUBLICAN: John Hinnant, Wilmington

District 19: part of Brunswick and part of New Hanover

REPUBLICAN Charles Miller is the incumbent and is unopposed.

District 20: part of New Hanover

DEMOCRAT: Amy Block Deloach, Wilmington

REPUBLICAN: Ted Davis, Wilmington

MEDIA ADVISORY: Marine Fisheries Commission to meet Mar. 8 by web conference

MOREHEAD CITY –The N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission will meet by web conference at 1 p.m. Mar. 8 to vote on notice of text to begin the readoption process for nine rules pertaining to joint fishing waters that are managed jointly with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. The rules are proposed for readoption without changes.

The public may listen to the meeting by phone or listen and view presentations online. No public comment period is scheduled.

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The meeting links and phone number, an agenda, and information on the proposed readoption of the rules in 15A NCAC 03Q .0100 (General Regulations: Joint) is posted on the [Marine Fisheries Commission meetings webpage](#).

The rules are scheduled for readoption under a mandatory periodic review schedule (G.S. 150B-21.3A).

Also on the agenda is discussion and a possible vote on submitting public comments on a set of proposed Wildlife Resources Commission rules that include rules for joint fishing waters.

WHO:	N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission
WHAT:	Meeting to vote on nine joint rules
WHEN:	Mar. 8 at 1 p.m.
WHERE:	Meeting by web conference Click here for meeting link and phone number