

MFC Meeting Recap

The North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) met last week in Beaufort, NC for their May quarterly meeting. Here is a quick summary of the meeting.

Eastern Oysters

The final vote to close two large areas of deep-water oyster reefs (DORAs) passed with a 5-4 decision. These areas will no longer be open to mechanical harvest of oysters. The Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) has still not announced any plan to monitor these areas for changes after harvest restriction takes place, although Director Rawls said "I don't have any ideas right now but staff is currently working on what their monitoring plan is for the DORAs".

Hard Clams

The final vote to phase out mechanical clam harvest over the next three years also passed with a 6-3 decision. The last three vessels participating in this fishery that has been confined to a handful of small areas determined to be free of oysters, SAV, and sensitive habitat will no longer be able to work just because a few people simply do not like what they do.

Southern Flounder

The preferred management option for an early shift of commercial to recreational flounder quota was selected by a 6-3 vote. Instead of trying to increase access for both sectors by easing the draconian 72% reduction to a much more reasonable number, the MFC wants to take commercial quota and still only give the recreational sector maybe a two week season.

One might think that since everyone (except DMF samplers) are seeing more and more flounder every year, the MFC would choose to reduce regulatory burden for all. But instead, they chose to punish the commercial sector and consumers all while gaining no real benefit for the recreational sector.

Hopefully H.B. 442 will remedy the flounder issue for all North Carolina citizens!

Blue Crab

Discussion was also had on Adaptive Management for blue crabs. DMF options and preferred management has not changed, but they are currently reevaluating their initial recommendation and plan to bring more management options to the MFC in August. Chairman Corbett said during the meeting that the vote on Adaptive Management would not occur in August and would be pushed back to the November meeting.

Striped Bass

A presentation on whether the Central Southern Management Area (CSMA) Estuarine Striped Bass population was self-sustaining was also given. DMF staff will provide their conclusion on this issue at the August meeting as well as their opinion on whether the 2019 gill net closure above the ferry lines has had any effect on striped bass abundance since the closure.

Issues From Commissioners

Lastly, "Issues from Commissioners" showed their continued goal of restricting access for all. Commissioners Hobgood and Roller were quick to again propose restrictions on Atlantic Bonito as they have at almost every meeting since last May. However, this time they requested the DMF to bring back rule making language for a 5 fish recreational bag limit for Atlantic Bonito.

Their rationale for the need for this rule was social media posts they deemed "unsustainable" and "wasteful" fishing practices. For a fish that lives from Nova Scotia to Argentina and the average recreational landings in North Carolina the past ten years has been 29,000 fish annually, what are they trying to accomplish? Punishing everyone who wants to eat fish, recreational, commercial, and consumers? Do they really think removing a few thousand fish from a global population is unsustainable? CCA and their MFC appointments clearly do not want anyone harvesting a fish in this state!

Commissioner Service proposed looking at anchoring restrictions in the newly created DORAs. His reasoning was as the oyster reef grows 4 feet in 10 years and he did not want one guy dragging a 12 pound anchor across the reef knocking it down.

I don't know whether to blame myself, DMF, or the Governor.

NCFA UPDATE:05/27/2025
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Maybe I did not do a good enough job explaining to the Commissioners that these oyster reefs have survived mechanical dredging since the mid 1800s. Maybe I did not explain well enough how many restrictions are already on the fishery with how and what kind of gear we use to minimize the damage to the reef.

Maybe the DMF should have explained some of that.

Maybe the Governor should appoint people who know that an oyster reef cannot grow almost 5 inches a year and that one fisherman with a 12 pound anchor surely cannot drag down an oyster reef!

I know the struggle is real, we are feeling it just like everyone else. Thank you for reading along and staying engaged. **Keep fighting the good fight and trust in the Lord to help us all get through one day at a time.**

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