



Protecting the livelihood of the people who fish for a living

November 2008 Newsletter

Letter From The President

Ladies and Gentlemen of the NCWU,

As I look outside, I can see the sun for the first time in about a week. Our weather is about like fishing – sometimes things go along so well you have to pinch yourself, and other times it doesn't seem like you can get one thing to go your way. We finally won a small victory, in securing a Dogfishery for the first time in about seven years, and we have Dare County to thank for that. Mike Johnson, Dare County Commissioner, needs a special "Thank you!"

We suffered a setback at the Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) meetings held in Dare County November 5 – 7. Continuing the extremely antagonistic approach to professional watermen, the Commission voted to pursue a Limited Access Privilege Program (LAPPs) for the Rock Fishery. **LAPPs GOES AGAINST WHAT THE NCWU STANDS FOR**, and we will not – nor do we – support it. The MFC also voted to get a letter from the North Carolina Legislature giving Louis Daniel (the Director) the authority to pursue Joint Enforcement Action (JEA). This is a quick way of saying that the Division will have Federal enforcement rights. The legislature has defeated this before, and the NCWU stands opposed, still.

Also, in a very brash move – which shows the disdain the Chairman of the MFC has for professional watermen – the MFC voted to make small mesh gillnet fishermen attend their nets. This action poses a real safety problem, as well as going against common sense in light of the new, favorable stock assessment of Red Drum. The attendance provision is a direct result of a petition by the Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) asking our Director and the MFC Chairman to make it as difficult as possible for professional watermen to make a living.

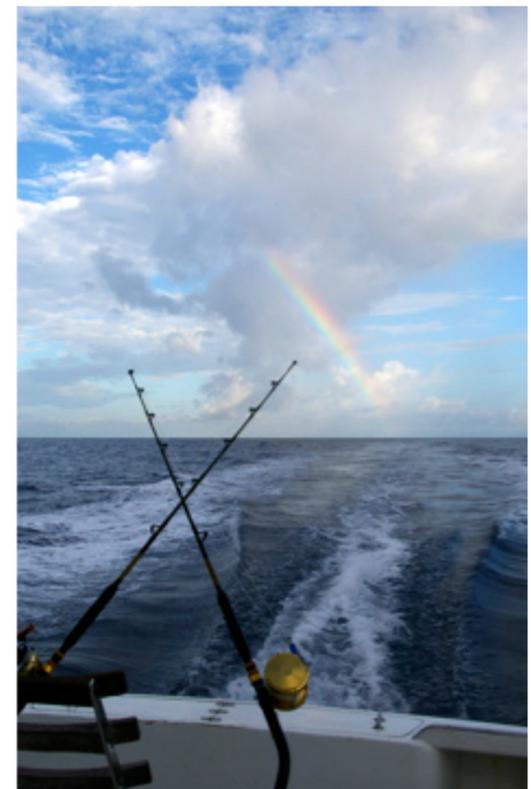
I have altered the way in which I do business since becoming the President of our organization. I have become soft-spoken; I have even shaken Mac Currin's hand. I had put aside my professional dislike of the man's views in order to further the agenda of the group, but that is over now. Because of our victories, the CCA and now the RFA have quickened the pace in which to try to put professional watermen out of business. This is a personal assault on our way of life, on our communities and on our families. The businesses that depend on us are in jeopardy, and they see the economic facts. The dollars produced by our professional watermen are at a premium, especially in light of the recession our country is experiencing. There are proposals in the works which will affect our Yellowfin Tuna landings, and we are going to see once again, a call on Dolphin possession and size-limits.

Even as we see some victory, we see some setbacks, but we continue to go to work. That is what makes us survivors. I am proud of what I do, and I am proud of calling you my friends and neighbors. The CCA and RFA are trying to stem a tide which is eventually going to overwhelm them. They have won some battles, but the war is far from over. One of my fightin' buddies used to say, "This thing is getting' good to me, now." When he became bruised and bloody and got that maniacal look in his eye, you were glad he was on your side.

Look out boys; the gloves are off; the NCWU is wading in; I'm standing by.

Shack

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Dear NCWU members,

I want to thank you once again for all your support – both financially and physically. There are so many issues on the table and for the future, it is hard to imagine how we are going to have the time to address them and come out on top. I think sometimes it is the government's desire to immerse us in so much bureaucracy that we just give up and throw in the towel. Thanks to you and the Board of NCWU, that is not going to happen. Some of the issues that are important to our industry are –



LAPPs

There has been much discussion about Limited Access Privilege Permits (LLAPs) in the last two years, and I feel that they are being shoved down our throats – whether we want them or not. There are some positives and some negatives. I listened to a whole-day presentation about them in Silver Springs, MD. There were three examples that supposedly worked well – for Tilefish, Snapper/Grouper in the Gulf of Mexico and Salmon. I also heard some horror stories about how they failed. I feel that the bottom line is, LAPPs does not leave any new entry into a fishery, which in my opinion, is not good.

Magnuson – Stevens Act

The new authorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act basically requires all fisheries to be at Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY), and over-fishing must be eliminated in one year once a fishery has been determined to be over-fished. I have news for you – this is not going to happen all at once, and watermen are being put out of business every day by our fishing managers that are just following the law. This is a process that has to involve watermen more in the regulation – and it is not happening. I encourage all fishermen to get more involved in the process, especially the science and stock assessments.

Yellowfin Tuna

I feel the yellowfins have moved to different areas, or we have caught too many of them. Rather than wait until the last minute and have some kind of draconian measures put in place, I think we should be proactive and start taking some steps to:

1. Figure out where they are (Satellite tags).
2. Manage what we have more efficiently.
3. Learn how to enhance the spawning stock population.

Thank you for your time. Our meetings are always open; we encourage your participation.

I hope for good weather and good fishing for everyone.

Rom

Report from the Coast Recreational Fishing License Advisory Committee

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Recently I was appointed to serve on the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries Coastal Recreational Fishing License Advisory Committee as the charter boat representative. The first meeting I attended was on October 6, 2008.

Our task at the meeting was to weigh in on several projects submitted for funding from the revenue generated by the CRFL (Coastal Recreational Fishing License) sales. The Advisory Committee has no final say on where the money is spent, since we only advise the Marine Fisheries Commission on the funding decision.

The agenda had twenty projects submitted for funding requests totaling \$2.2 million dollars. While several of the projects were worthwhile endeavors, I saw very few that will have a direct positive impact on saltwater fishing resources in North Carolina.

Highlights of some of the projects submitted include –

Two boat ramps in the Morehead City area,
Youth fishing programs, and
Various scientific projects on Specks, Herring, Rockfish, Oysters and Sub-Aquatic Vegetation.

The single biggest expenditure on the list of projects was a nearly \$500,000 request (with a long-term project cost of \$2.9 million) by the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries for Recreational Fishing Data Collection.

Interesting statistics gleaned from the license sales data –

CRFL sales are down 15.35% since 2007

More CRFLs were sold in Dare County in both 2007 and 2008 by a large margin

No projects were submitted nor funded benefitting Dare County

Most people purchasing CRFLs were residents of Wake County

Blanket/For Hire CRFLs declined 30% from 2007 to 2008

Out-of-State Blanket/For Hire CRFLs account for 16% of overall Blanket/For Hires CRFLs

Out-of-State Blanket/For Hire CRFLs cost the same as Resident Blanket/For Hire CRFLs

Dare County is the single biggest contributor to this fund; it was disappointing to see no projects submitted from Dare County. It is my hope that in the next funding cycle, some entity from Dare County will apply for funding for a project that truly does enhance the resources.

I look forward to serving our industry on the CRFL Advisory Committee. I am interested in your input about how the fund is spent.



Cold and Wet

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I went live-bait mackerel fishing last week on a charter boat out of Hatteras with a captain who was “fun” fishing with some friends and his son and grandsons.

The weathermen had promised light winds and sunshine.

We chugged through the inlet with no problem and ran along the beach - in sight of some early-bird surf fishermen angling for puppy drum or trout - to set out the float net. On the first set, the net came back empty, and the second try only had a half-dozen fatback (menhaden, bunker). Circling around the float net on the third set, we saw pelicans flocking around the floats and knew we had a good supply of bait, which we “picked out” and kept in the live-well. I think live-baiting for kings is one of the most elemental kinds of fishing. First, catch the bait, and then look for fish; people have been doing this for centuries.

We started for the fishing grounds in the 2 – 3 foot; No, maybe 3 – 5 foot waves. Sea spray splashed over the gunwales; water splashed out of the live-well; at 8:00 a.m., I was already cold. We seemed to be going up-and-down as much as we were moving forward.

We finally stopped to fish. At first, because the waves were now 4 – 6 feet, we used bait strips on the downriggers, but only caught a couple of mackerel. At last, the captain let us use the live baits on light-action rods, although we had to hold the rod in one hand and hold onto something else with the other.





We began catching mackerel – silver streaks arcing (“skying,” the captains call it) through the waves after the fatback. What an awesome sight! We could see other boats catching fish, too; bobbing up-and-down in the water, rockin’ and rolling from side to side. A lot of boats were out today; it seems the entire fleet had listened to the same weather forecast that we had.

Although I was trying to watch, while I was sliding all over the cockpit to reel in a big king, a wave came over the side and drenched me. I was wearing water-proof bibs and boots, but my hoodie and t-shirt got soaked. The wind, blowing 20 – 25 out of the north cooled me even further.

By early afternoon, we had our limit and slogged back through the seas to the marina. I was cold and wet, but I had “fun.” And then I thought about those other men and women fishing today – charter boats with paying clients; charter captains with commercial fishing licenses and commercial fishermen trying to make “bread-and-butter” money for the coming winter months.

It was fun for me, but it was dirty, stinking hard work, and I thought about these watermen who come back day after day, regardless of the wind and waves, to earn a living from the sea.



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