



NC Division of Marine Fisheries
3441 Arendell Street
Morehead City, NC 28557

July 6, 2015

Director Daniel,

The North Carolina Watermen United (NCWU) does not support the process, the science or the procedure in the southern flounder management plan.

In May, 2015 we joined with many fishermen and other groups, including the North Carolina Fisheries Association (NCFA), the Ocracoke Working Waterman's Association (OWWA) and the Carteret County Fishing Association (CCFA) on this issue. Our members worked with many Boards of Commissioners including Carteret, Currituck, Dare, Hyde, Pasquotank, Perquimans and Tyrrell Counties that have issued Proclamations against the supplement process and the 25 - 60% reduction because of the economic impact to each County.

There is concern by scientists, biologists and NCWU that the supplement process is too quick, does not require an FMP Advisory Committee for the MFC, does not require MRC Regional Advisory Committee review and does not require a report to an appropriate Committee of the NC General Assembly. We would like an independent review of the supplemental (temporary) management measures and we would like a "new" stock assessment.

In February 2015, we asked that no action be taken in the flounder fishery, because the Peer Review for the stock assessment had rejected it. NC scientists and biologists believe that the 2007-2008 model does not take into account the migration of the southern flounder and should not have been used for the 2014 assessment. Neither the state nor the stakeholders know the flounder population status. Many of the scientists and biologists also believe that the 25 - 60% reduction was selected arbitrarily with an explanation that catch efforts are "trending downward."

One of our NCWU Board members, Andrew Berry, has compiled data showing that the landings of southern flounder by the commercial fleet have remained consistent from 2004 - 2013, in spite of the limitations imposed, mostly because of the ITP for Sea Turtles, to reduce the fishery from 365 days per year to about 70 days per year. Because of severe restrictions and closures, the 2014 landings were less. A copy of his May 2015 letter is attached.

In 2013, NCWU requested that the minimum size for flounder be reduced to 14 inches for the recreational and charter/headboat sectors. Many of our non-commercial fishermen are being disenfranchised because of the large number of flounder just under the minimum retention size. Reducing the size by merely an inch would take the pressure off, as anglers would more quickly catch their limit - or enough to eat - and stop targeting flounder.

Since we do not support the process, the science or the procedure, we do not support any of the six options that have been proposed for the southern flounder fishery.

Yours truly,

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Britt Shackelford

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| Perry Wood Beasley | Billy Maxwell |
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BTS: mm

Cc: Nancy Fish, Liaison
NCDENR Secretary Van der Vaart
NCGA Senators and Representatives



NC Division of Marine Fisheries
3441 Arendell Street
Morehead City, NC 28557

May 14, 2015

Director Daniel,

This letter is to help you understand that there is no depletion in North Carolina's southern flounder stocks. I want to insure that there are no changes to the southern flounder fishery that is so important to our NC economy and to our state's coastal communities. The value of the southern flounder fishery is one of the highest of any seafood that is available to the consumer in our state.

I am providing facts and figures below that will help you understand that there is no need for further restrictions or a closure. The commercial southern flounder fishery is not "trending downward" -

- From 2004 through 2013, the 10-year average landings of southern flounder were just over 2 million pounds.
- From 2004 to 2009, fishermen were allowed to catch and set flounder nets 365 days per year.
- Beginning in 2009-2010, a new regulation restricted large mesh nets to 40 hours per week. Over half the state is restricted to 4 days per week with night time soaks only.
- In 2011, there were only 1.2 million pounds caught by commercial fishermen.
- In 2013 there were close to 2.2 million pounds caught by commercial fishermen.
- In 2013, southern flounder landings in Dare County were 1.3 million pounds.
- In 2013, from June 1 to November 30, there were only 70 days in which large mesh nets were able to be used from Oregon Inlet down to South Carolina. Fishermen could only set nets 4 days per week. Plus, there was a 2-month closure during this time frame to all large mesh nets.
- The point being, the largest body of water in the state had only 70 days that allowed fishermen to use nets for southern flounder in 2013, and still the commercial landings exceeded the 10-year average by 200,000 pounds, even though half of the 10-year average allowed flounder fishing with nets 365 days per year.
- In 2014, southern flounder landings went down to 1.66 million pounds because the state shut down fishing with large mesh nets during peak flounder fishing times, in peak areas.
- In 2014, from Currituck and Albemarle Sounds south to the SC line, there were only 82 days open to set large mesh gill nets for flounder.

In summary, more southern flounder are being caught with much less fishing time.

The southern flounder fishery management plan cannot compare landings from years ago when fishermen could 365 days a year, and now only about half of the state's coastal areas allow flounder nets to be used 70 days per year. Even the NC State Biologist disagrees with the MFC about a depletion of southern flounder.

All of the above information came from the NCDMF statistics office and from NCDMF Proclamations that show a marked decrease in fishing time. By proof from NCDMF Proclamations, southern flounder are underfished now more than ever, NOT overfished.

Southern flounder are considered a depleted stock by the NCDMF, but there is not one bit of scientific data to back up this myth.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours truly,

Andrew Berry

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Board of Directors

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