



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

February 1, 2018

Dear Chairman Corbett,

The North Carolina Watermen United (NCWU) is opposed to the changes in the definition of a commercial fishermen that are being considered at the NCMFC Meeting in February 2018.

The proposed changes are -

- Must have at least \$10,000 in annual sales
- Must have at least 50% of earned income from commercial sales
- Must have at least 36 trip tickets per year.

The commercial fisherman must meet all of these criteria or will not be allowed to renew his/her license. If the NC Marine Fisheries Commission approves these recommendations at the February meeting, and the General Assembly approves them in Raleigh, the impacts on coastal communities will be profound.

This proposal raises a number of troubling questions -

1. Why are we redefining who can be a commercial fisherman? What exactly will be improved?
2. Are the existing commercial catch limits and restrictions, determined by stock assessments, tied to this proposal? NO!
3. Will the Division of Marine Fisheries revenues go up? NO! They will actually decrease by at least \$1.6 Million from the loss of sales of the 4000 inactive licenses.
4. Will these proposed changes create greater economic diversity in coastal communities NO! Have you ever heard an Economist or Financial Advisor argue against economic diversification?
5. Will the loss of family income from “part-time” fishermen increase state income tax revenues? NO!
6. Will the charter/headboat industry be strengthened? NO! It will lose skilled crew, who presently commercial fish during non-tourist months, because they will lose annual commercial fishing income because of the 50% requirement.
7. Does anyone - ANYONE - believe that this is being proposed with the hope of increasing commercial fishing activity by forcing the use of the 4000 inactive licenses? NO!

8. Are there any other licenses issued in any other professions in North Carolina that come with such “Use It or Lose It” restrictions?

In reflecting on the above questions, one is led to try to identify specific examples of financial damage or benefit that might actually occur in our coastal communities if these proposals become law. The most obvious major question is -

WHERE IS THE INTEREST IN ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION?

You cannot find an economist who argues against it. You cannot find a financial advisor who advises his/her clients against it. So, what is going on? You do not need a degree from the Wharton School of Business to know that you do not “Put all your eggs in one basket.”

The very nature of barrier islands and other coastal fishing communities has historically made economic diversification a challenge. Tourism has changed that somewhat. However, in the immediate aftermath of a major storm, tourism grinds to a halt because of infrastructure damage. Fortunately, one part of our economy can still function as our commercial fishermen go back to work the next day, and, in so doing, provide some immediate help for the local economy. Do we really need to reduce that effort?

So, what are some of the socio/economic consequences that will result from the proposed “re-definition” of a commercial fisherman, so as to eliminate part-time commercial fishermen?

Who will experience negative economic consequences? In no particular order -

- 1.. Marinas that sell fuel
2. Marine mechanics and maintenance/repair parts' stores
3. Charter boats that commercial fish for king mackerel in the late fall when charter business slows down (Less than 36 trips or 50% income.)
4. No fresh bait at tackle shops. (Bait is caught by part-time cast-netters.)
5. Part-time fishermen who provide tackle shop bait.
6. The NC Division of Marine Fisheries, previously mentioned above, will lose \$1.6. million from lost license sales.
7. Those so called part-time individuals who fish on their days off from their “regular” jobs to increase the family income.
8. Charter/headboat crew members who commercial fish in the off season, but do not make 50% of their earned income from commercial sales.
9. Wholesale fish houses (Lower volume equals lower income and fewer employees.)
10. Wintertime businesses in coastal towns and villages. (News Flash! Tourism goes way down in the winter). Is the suggestion from the MFC to be that barrier island and coastal villages become places for summer dwellers only?
11. Fish truck drivers who make fewer deliveries.
12. Old-timers who have spent a lifetime commercial fishing and are now in the twilight of their years. Should they be told by the MFC, “You are not working hard enough to qualify for a license, so we are putting you out to pasture. Enjoy the rest of your life.” Would the NCMFC really do this?
12. The young people of coastal communities who will be forced to leave without their additional “part-time” fishing income. As towns slowly but surely become ghost towns or

summer only resorts the not-so-obvious impacts will be felt throughout communities where commercial fishermen live. What will happen to the -

- Volunteer fire departments?
- The local hardware store?
- The gas station?
- Local churches?
- The Post Office with reduced mail volume?
- The corner grocery?

The list goes on and will vary community by community- the only certainty is that our coastal communities will be change, NEGATIVELY, forever.

Knowing that the social fabric of entire communities will fray as various household incomes decrease and consequently, some bills will not be paid, and some families will be forced to move away, is a sad and difficult future to contemplate.

The certainty that the general sense of well-being throughout entire communities will be diminished in ways, both large and small, if the NCMFC proposal becomes law - is beyond dispute.

One can look at the above, non-inclusive list and be left with one burning question - **WHY?**

The Board of Directors of the North Carolina Watermen (NCWU) submits our unanimous opposition to the NCMFC proposal to redefine a commercial fisherman.

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