



North Carolina General Assembly  
20301 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27301

February 7, 2018

Dear Legislators,

PLEASE DO NOT allow the NC Division of Marine Fisheries Commission to redefine a commercial fisherman. This would be a classic example of trying to fix something that is not broken. It is mind-boggling to me that the state would want to eliminate the 1.6 MILLION DOLLARS (Minimum) being sent to the NCDMF for commercial licenses that are not being used. Lots of my fellow fishermen (For-Hire, recreational, commercial) that have been buying SCFL are asking me "What in the H... is going on? Why do they want to take away my license when I am not even using it? There is no impact on the resource, no gear in the water, no enforcement officers needed and a minimal amount of clerical work to fill out the license."

Some of the NCDMF Commissioners seem to be scratching their heads about why people keep buying their licenses. I will tell you why. Most of them have commercial fished at some point in their life and do not want to lose the opportunity to do it again if necessary. An example: my Charter Boat mate for the last five years, Andy Trant, has done a wonderful job. Before charter fishing, he crabbed, gill-netted, pound-netted, long-lined and had a few other commercial fishing ventures. He has maintained his license the last seven years even though he has not sold a fish or had a trip ticket. Last year, he started losing his voice around noon every day; went to the Doctor and was told that he needed to talk a lot less. In the charter business, talking is as important as rigging the bait - No talk, No tip. Being newly married and just purchasing a house does not leave him the luxury of going before a License Board to wait for approval to commercial fish. Do you want to be the one that tells him he can't maintain his License? I don't think so; this is crazy.

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Last time I checked, a couple of years ago, the average age of a Commercial fisherman was 59. This seems to be an industry that is dying a slow death anyway, and now you are trying to speed it up. We need to be encouraging young people to fish rather than making it harder for them. By the time a new fisherman buys the boat, gear, insurance and the Federal Permits necessary to survive, he can have spent \$100,000 to \$150,000 pretty quick. It is a tough business; that is why you see so many that only fish part-time now. I see very few young people getting in the business. If you enjoy fresh NC caught seafood or watching a working waterfront with hard working fishermen and women trying to make a living, then do away with this REDEFINING A COMMERCIAL FISHERMAN.

An article, *Salt of the Earth*, by Craig Ritchie from the *Boating Industry Magazine* (March 2017) showed that the growth percentage for Boat Sales in 2016 was up 24.48% in Raleigh-

Durham and 21.33% in Wilmington, NC, the top leaders in a list of 16 cities along the Atlantic Coast. If you think NCDMF is doing such a poor job of managing its fishermen and the fishery, then why did North Carolina lead in all of the sales from Texas to Maine in percentage of increase in sales of Salt Water Boats? A hard look at these numbers would show that North Carolina probably led the whole nation in percentage increase in boat sales, what about that do we need to fix? This is from a trade organization that has nothing to do with fishing, so I do not think that they are biased. I get a little agitated when people start telling me to look at this state or that state and what they are doing better. I have always been a firm believer of "Show Me, Don't Tell Me," and it looks to me that North Carolina is doing a pretty good job of managing its fisheries. I was told by a past MFC member that this proposal of redefining a Commercial fisherman has been addressed three times in the last 15 years and thought it was finished in 2010. I go back to, "Why are you trying to fix something that is not broken?"

I have owned and operated the Charter Boat, *RELEASE*, for 30 years in Hatteras and take 800 to 1,000 people fishing every year. These anglers bring kids, spouses, aunts, uncles, grandads, grandmoms and other friends that don't go out on the boat, but spend money on hotels, rental cottages, gas, groceries, restaurants and plenty of other places. I can assure you that almost every one of them will ask me or my mate where they can go to eat fresh local seafood, and by the way, about 80% are from out-of-state. If you eliminate commercial fishermen, the seafood is going to dry up, but I guess they can eat talapia in any state.

I also think that it should be illegal or immoral, at best, that the For-Hire Industry (Charter/ Headboat) does not have a seat or a voice at the NCDMF Commission table. Taxation and Legislation with No Representation is not what this great country or state was founded on. In the last economic survey, a couple of years ago, the For-Hire Industry generated about 700 MILLION PER YEAR for the economy of North Carolina. At one time, the For-Hire boats were required to have a Commercial License, and every Charter Boat Captain that I have talked with has maintained his license even though he has sold no fish nor had a trip ticket since the requirement was dropped.

There is a cap on the number of Commercial Licenses, supposedly there are almost 2000 in the eligibility pool; there certainly are not many people even wanting to buy one, so WHY are you trying to take them away from people that want to send the NCDMF \$400.00 per year? If you have a few cases out there where fishermen are trying to abuse the recreational limits and selling fish on the black market, then let Law Enforcement do its job; we have an excellent group of enforcement officers in the NCDMF.

I plead with you to just say, "NO" to REDEFINING A COMMERCIAL FISHERMAN

Thank You

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Hard look