

Comments by CCA NC Executive Board Member Bert Owens Feb. 15, 2017

Having not been allowed to speak in New Bern, I find myself away from work again to get another chance to speak in favor of North Carolina's fishery resources by supporting the petition for rule making regarding our inshore nurseries.

This is the 20th year since the FRA of '97 was passed. Comparing the state's own statistics from then till now shows the act to be a total failure in its goals of rebuilding or restoring our fish stocks. The NCMFC has been a key player in this failure by picking winners and losers. The consistent winner has been King Shrimp, as one person called it in an earlier New Bern meeting. Losers have been the Spot fishery with landings going from 2,600,00 pounds to 377,00 pounds, a decline of 86%.

Other losers are Weakfish with landings going from 3,500,000 pounds to 80,000 pounds, a decline of 98%, and Croaker with landings going from 10,700,000 pounds to 1,800,000 pounds for an 86% decline. The commercial fishermen for these three were disregarded for the sake of the trawl fishery, and recreational fishermen have been given no respect or consideration at any point in the process.

Being from Beaufort, I've seen the Spot Yachts in the fall go from dozens for weeks to perhaps a dozen for a few days. And if you cruise through and ask how they're doing, they say "not much, kinda slow".

To catch nice Croaker our anglers go to Virginia. Our younger generation, who haven't yet been up there have no idea how big a Croaker can get. And Weakfish have been managed to one fish a person. The millions of these fish wasted each year to benefit a few big trawler and fish house owners have been paid for by the commercial Spot, Croaker and Gray Trout fisherman; by tens of thousands of anglers who'd like to be able to put their children on some Spot each fall and by the seafood consumer who can't go to the market and buy any of these three. Talk about local seafood, the local catch has been done away with for the sake of one species.

Now some say they aren't sure that all the waste behind the trawlers really even makes any difference. We do know that big fish come from little fish don't we? We know that spawners come from fish that were too little to spawn, but grew don't we??

We know that from here to Texas all states have made these kind of changes to their trawl fishery and five of those states still catch more Shrimp than North Carolina. We know that if all Shrimp caught every year stayed in North Carolina and our citizens could eat only Carolina caught Shrimp, then we would have to stop eating Shrimp around March 1st.

It's past time to give the losers a chance, give the resource a chance. Pass the Petition for Rulemaking so commercial finfish catches can go back up and the Spot Yachts can come back, and we don't have to take our kids to Virginia to see what a full grown Croaker looks like.