

Comments by CCA NC Executive Director David Sneed to the NCMFC Feb. 15, 2017

My name is David Sneed and I am here representing the members of the Coastal Conservation Association of North Carolina. We are here to offer our support for the NC Wildlife Federation Petition for Rulemaking. Many of our members made the trip to New Bern to offer their public support for this petition but unfortunately were not allowed to speak at that time due to time constraints, and they were unable to make it to this meeting in Wilmington. Over the last two months, over 1,000 of our members and supporters have also submitted letters of support by email to the commission in care of Nancy Fish.

Much of the opposition to this petition has focused on a misleading campaign intended to make consumers believe that if this petition is successful, they will no longer be able to buy fresh local shrimp, and that it will somehow lead to the demise of the commercial fishing industry in North Carolina.

The real truth is that the only fishermen who will not benefit from these changes are a few large industrial trawler operators who control over 60% of the industry. What other fishermen would not benefit from better habitat protection and less bycatch of juvenile fish? One group that has been particularly vocal in their opposition to this petition is NCCATCH. I asked one of the scientists who serve on their board if they had considered the conservation side of this issue at all? In his reply, he stated, "I am in total agreement with you that for this industry to continue we need to first take care of the ecosystems that support these finfish and shellfish".

The proposed rules are also consistent with the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan (CHPP), which was adopted by the MFC. Commercial fishermen come to every MFC meeting to comment on the importance that water quality and habitat protection play in our state's battle against declining fish stocks. The CHPP repeatedly acknowledges the important role that nursery habitats play in maintaining viable fisheries and a healthy coastal ecosystem and identifies shrimp trawling as a physical threat. This petition supports the role habitat protection plays in improving fish stocks for all fishermen.

Public comments against this petition have blamed everything from poor water quality to an overabundance of skates, sharks and cormorants. There have also been many comparisons to management measures on the Chesapeake Bay. I received an interesting article written by Tom Horton who has been writing about Chesapeake Bay for more than 40 years. The opening lines in his article should also speak to the management of North Carolina's sounds, "Saving the Bay is obviously about improving water quality, but equally tricky is the business of managing how much seafood we extract from that water. From crabs and other shellfish to finfish, modern technologies enable harvest pressure that could overwhelm the healthiest estuary. So, we need rules – and moderation."

Please do not allow this important issue to be overwhelmed by the forces of greed. Conservation does not mean an end to commercial fishing. Please show me one state on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts where conservation measures have not led to a thriving commercial fishing industry. More fish in our waters benefit all fishermen. A rising tide lifts all boats. Please show the public that

we can work together for the future of our coastal resources and the total North Carolina fishing economy.

Thank you for your service and your consideration.