

**MFC PUBLIC  
COMMENT  
NOVEMBER 2020**



**NC Marine Fisheries Commission Quarterly Business Meeting  
November 19-20, 2020**

**Small Mesh Comments**

CCA NC thanks the Commission for the opportunity to comment on small mesh rules under consideration. Presently, small mesh regulations are nightmarishly complicated, not just for the fishing public, but for Marine Patrol, and the Commission. Can you imagine trying to explain them to a legislator? We appreciate the Divisions attempt to simplify and update them.

CCA NC was disappointed in that there was no option to remove small mesh statewide. We saw no data about what removal of these nets would mean on the economy and the well-being of striped bass and other species. The Commission should have been presented with the data on what removal of nets completely from our estuarine waters would mean to the recovery of troubled fish species that continue to be overfished and their recovery handicapped by the continued cryptic mortality from our gill net fisheries. There is also no plan for dealing with the impact from latent commercial fishing licenses. How can the Commission properly manage the gill net fisheries when they do not have a complete picture of the impacts due to unreported catch from 60% of SCFL holders?

Your tasks today, from the meeting handout, are:

“The primary issues to be addressed concern the streamlining and simplification, where possible,

- (1) of all rules that directly or indirectly regulate small mesh gill nets,
- (2) reduction and increased survival of bycatch,
- (3) greater flexibility with constraining harvest of quota managed fisheries, and
- (4) to the greatest extent practical reducing conflict between gill net users and other stakeholders.”

All of CCA recommendations would resolve or alleviate the four issues listed above.

**Striped Bass and Small Mesh Gill nets.**

CCA NC has separately submitted scoping comments for the Estuarine Striped Bass FMP underway, many concerning the small mesh issue being considered today and we will highlight those comments as they pertain to gill nets. We cannot operate in a vacuum where the blame for depleted fisheries gets passed on to the next FMP or topic when things can be done now. Striped bass recovery and gill nets are inextricably linked and failure to address them together, in a holistic approach, guarantees failure.

In North Carolina, all of our estuarine striped bass stocks are depleted, or alternatively overfished and overfishing occurring due to well documented factors. Some factors we do not have control over, and *other factors we have control over and must act to remedy these problems*. Bycatch of striped bass and dead discards from gill nets are an important factor leading to these declines, and we have direct control of these nets. Gill net striped bass bycatch in small mesh is more important than large mesh, so scrutinizing the impacts of small mesh gill nets and making changes is timely. In Amendment 1, when striped bass were in the recovery mode and abundant in the Albemarle Sound, it was estimated that hundreds of thousands of juvenile striped bass were killed in small mesh nets annually, (Table 7.6). **If we are serious about restoring striped bass to their original geographic range, we must remove all gill nets from the historical range.** Presently, estimates of bycatch have been called into question by many entities, including the Division, because of several data problems. Through no fault of Division biologists, the trip ticket data submitted and used for these estimates is inadequate, incomplete and to leads to underestimates of harvest, bycatch and protected species interactions. One critical factor for this underreporting is latent licenses, i.e., licenses that have no trip tickets associated with them. Over half of Standard Commercial Fishing Licenses fall into this category. Latent licenses harvest and bycatch data is absent from stock assessments; thus, stock assessments give a rosier picture of stocks than they really are. Using faulty data in large part resulted in faulty projections of striped bass populations in the 2014 Revision to Amendment 1 predictions that our stocks would be fine today, yet they are overfished. A 275,000 lb was the limit imposed at that time and that harvest level predicted no overfishing – it was subsequently shown to be very wrong, based on the 2020 assessment.

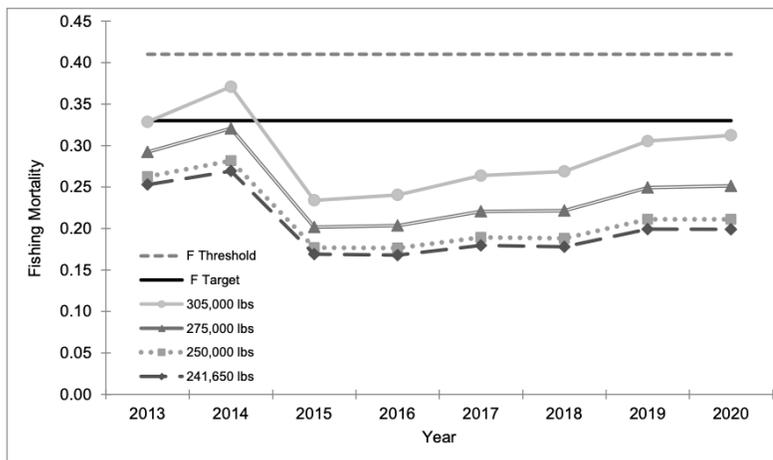


Figure 13. Fishing mortality projections at various harvest levels for 2013-2020 and the target and threshold fishing mortality reference points.

An additional source of faulty data is using data from the protected species gill net observer program. This program was designed to monitor turtle and sturgeon bycatch. For small mesh, the observer coverage requirement is only 1% and this is an inadequate sample size (n). In addition to an inadequate number of observations, those observations do not represent the various fisheries for a variety of reasons and provide inaccuracies for stock assessment. Again,

this is no fault of Division biologists who have to work with what data they are provided, as feeble and misleading as it may be.

To summarize, the lack of accounting for latent licenses, unrepresentative turtle observer data and undocumented gill net mortality all accounted for the failure of the Estuarine Striped Bass Amendment 1 FMP and its 2014 Revision to the plan.

### **CCA Recommendation 1**

**ASMA.** Remove all gill nets from the Albemarle sound, except for the blue catfish fishery. When the striped bass stock recovers institute a commercial hook and line fishery in lieu of a gill net fishery. This may reduce the need for a sturgeon ITP and the upcoming ITP renewal may not be necessary.

### **CCA Recommendation 2**

#### **Central Southern Management Area.**

**Central Region** (Neuse and Tar Pamlico systems). Extend the gill net free zone. Presently there is a tie down line, marking where the current population of striped bass reside. The gill net free zone needs to be extended East of the tie down line. A gill net free zone would encompass rivers and bays on the Western Pamlico Sound and some of the Pamlico Sound. Other high-density areas where striped bass congregate should also be protected.

### **CCA Recommendation 3**

**Southern Region.** In the Cape Fear, the gill net free zone (line) is several miles above the City of Wilmington. Currently, the majority of adult fish reside in the area of Wilmington where gill nets are allowed (August 2020 striped bass Stock Assessment), and that line must be moved South to restore this fishery. In the Cape Fear we have had a moratorium on harvest and possession on striped bass for both recreational and commercial sectors for a decade, and a robust stocking program of 100,000 Phase II (6-8") striped bass annually. Incredibly those stocks continue to plummet and yet no explanation has been forthcoming by DMF to explain this decline. In the absence of another credible explanation, we believe that bycatch in other gill net fisheries is largely responsible and should be immediately addressed.

**For areas where gill nets remain to be allowed, the options put forward by the Division which CCA supports are:**

#### **Yardage**

**Option 5:** Specify that the allowable yardage of gill nets with stretched mesh less than four inches shall not exceed 800 yards per vessel in Internal Coastal Waters north of Highway 58 and 500 yards south of Highway 58, regardless of the number of individuals involved. In addition to the rationale stated, it would reduce protected species interactions/takes.

#### **Attendance**

**Option 4:** Require year-round statewide attendance for gill nets with mesh size less than four inches. In addition to the rationale stated, it would reduce protected species interactions/takes.

## **Areas and Time**

**Option 5:** Specify that nets may not be fished from midnight on Friday to midnight on Sunday statewide. In addition to the rationale stated, it would reduce protected species interactions/takes.

**Option 9:** Prohibit use of small mesh nets in areas of high conflict determined by the MFC.

### **Overnight Soaks for Small Mesh Gill Nets should be eliminated**

We do not support overnight soaks for small mesh nets. The reason for overnight sets in the large mesh fishery was to reduce turtle interactions because sea turtles are relatively dormant at night. However, the small mesh fisheries are less likely to entangle turtles because of mesh size and lesser yardage length. Additionally, some areas where small mesh is fished have fewer turtles and more sturgeon, thus daytime attendance makes sense. Lastly, enforcement of nighttime fishing is almost non-existent due to insufficient numbers of Marine Patrol, who must choose between enforcement areas. Let's face it, nighttime and weekend enforcement are tough, especially in winter when much of the small mesh infractions occur. Complicating this problem, the pay for MP is so low, many open positions remain unfilled. Taken together, attending daytime sets, is much preferable to nighttime soaks without attendance.

The Division staff concludes their report with, "The DMF's Gill Net Work Group requests that the MFC provide substantive feedback on the identified issues and potential management actions for further development and refinement. The Work Group acknowledges that the list of issues identified is not exhaustive and that other issues may arise through discussion by the MFC." The Commission should use this opportunity to consider the removal of all nets from our inshore waters to aid in the recovery of our troubled fish stocks. Of the stated goals of this exercise, it would be the most efficient and direct way to address, (1) the streamlining and simplification of the rules that regulate small mesh gill nets, (2) the reduction of bycatch, (3) greater flexibility with managing harvest of quota managed fisheries, and (4) eliminating conflict between gill net users and other stakeholders.

Thank you for your consideration,

Dr. Chris Elkins and David Sneed  
On Behalf of the Coastal Conservation Association North Carolina

## North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission.

My name is Dewayne Ward. I have been a Commerical fisherman for 42 years. I've been fighting this war for 42 years against recreational fishermen.

The law that the commission are about to vote on will cripple the Commerical fishing in N.C.

I agree with the reduction of gear to 400 yards Small mesh nets. I also agree with the attendance of nets.

But I don't agree with the mesh size. Small mesh nets is how we make our living. Without our  $1\frac{5}{16}$  and  $1\frac{3}{8}$  size nets we would not have a winter-spring-summer fishery.

This would be devastating for all the Seafood markets in N.C. and the people we feed.

Please don't let others peoples threats influence your deaision.

Concerned fisherman,

D. Ward

### **Another Attempt to Dismantle Commercial Fishing**

On May 4, 2020 the Director of the NC Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) issued a proclamation (“temporary rule”) designated M-12-2020 that addressed the use of small-mesh gill nets (i.e., nets with a stretched mesh length less than 5 inches). Included in this rule was a one sentence item--“it is unlawful to use fixed, stationary or unattended gill nets in Management Unit D1.” Understanding the socio-economic impact of this ruling, that in my opinion is arbitrary and capricious, requires the reader to understand the fishery-resource rich area involved, and the economics of being able to fish in this area during the Fall season.

For background information, Management Area D1 is a relatively small area that includes southern Core Sound, Back Sound (south of Harkers Island), the Straits and North River with most waters adjacent to Core and Shackleford Banks. Although small in area it is biologically rich, and during the Fall it is a migratory route for late fall and winter ocean-spawning species (e.g., southern and gulf flounder, spot, Atlantic croaker, and striped mullet.) It is at this time fishes are congregated and available on a sustaining basis to commercial and recreational fishermen and finally as a quality product to restaurants and retail consumers.

This management area is considered a sea turtle “hot spot” by DMF biologists due to their frequent interactions with endangered sea turtles with large mesh gill nets (4-6 inch stretched mesh). On the other hand, the DMF “Protected Species Report” for the period Sept. 1, 2019 – Aug.31, 2020 reported zero turtle interactions for anchored, estuarine small-mesh gill nets. The area has basically been closed for fishing large-net gill nets that are traditionally used to harvest southern and, infrequently, gulf flounder. This is an economic loss to gill netters and further losses will be exacerbated by the recent arbitrary ruling.

The rule has major negative impacts. Fishing attended, drifting nets during the Fall especially spot and spotted seatrout by commercial fishermen is ineffective and a hurdle to attain economically viable landings. Most fishermen will fish multiple 100-yard nets and by this ruling they would have to remain adjacent to the drifting nets. This would require being in more than one place at a time and furthermore, because nets are traditionally soaked overnight and unattended, now a potentially dangerous environment could exist. This includes weather, surface obstructions as nets are not deployed in large open water bodies, but close to pilings and docks and subject to strong tides and wind currents. This is, in my opinion, an absurd requirement. As of this writing fishermen have lost approximately 30 days of fishing that represents a considerable “salary cut.”

Based on my experience as a former science appointee to the NC Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) the DMF biologists are knowledgeable and competent. Yet, I am puzzled by their decision to introduce an arbitrary rule that “chips” away at the commercial fishery. DMF staff response

to my inquiry on this debacle was the ruling would not be withdrawn at this time, but a decision would be made by the MFC during their November 18-20 meeting. This would decimate the Fall spot and spotted seatrout set-net fishery in Area D1.

It is important that decision making by the DMF is based on science with the goal of maintaining sustainable fish population that can provide a high-quality product and support commercial and recreational fishermen. **The credibility of DMF staff will suffer if agenda or political driven policy is adopted, and if arbitrary rules are enacted.**

Allyn B. Powell

e-mail: [REDACTED]

Note: It is important that commercial fishermen setting anchored gill nets cooperate with DMF and allow observer coverage. The DMF, in order to maintain their sea turtle, federal, incidental take permit must maintain 7% coverage for anchored large-mesh gill nets and 4% for small mesh. Failure to cooperate will close the fishery.

## Comments to the NC Marine Fisheries Commission Members

November 11, 2020

My name is Allyn Powell. I am a retired fishery biologist serving 30 years at National Marine Service, Beaufort Laboratory. I also served as the science appointee on the NC Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC). I have resided in the Down East community of [REDACTED] for 49+ years.

The NC Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) has provided you with an informative document, titled *Small Mesh Gill Net Rule Modifications Information Paper*. As the paper was released on November 9 and written comments are due by Nov. 15 there is inadequate time for me, and in my opinion MFC members, to properly address all the options presented by DMF. However, based on my fishery background and experience (ca. 50 years) in participating in, and observing, the gill net fisheries in management area D1 (southern Core Sound, Straits, Back Sound and North River), I feel I have the knowledge, specifically in area D1, to provide comments on "attendance requirements" and "set time and area restrictions."

The majority of the present attendance requirements and set time and area restrictions are a result of existing Fishery Management Plans (FMP) or were established to reduce interactions with protected species, and in some cases conflicts between user groups. Some of the options presented have no science-based rationale to back them up. For example:

**Option 2:** This attendance option would enable a ruling in proclamation **M-12-2020, IV. B.** (see my attached comments to media outlets on this ruling) to be codified. The rule is arbitrary and capricious. It would cripple the fall fishery in D1. This is an option to simplify a rule, but if not scrutinized could have a major impact on fishermen using anchored small-mesh gill nets.

**Option 3,4,5 and 6:** These attendance options are examples of discounting FMP science-based rules that recognize different rules are required in different management areas. For example, existing attendance rule **15A NCAC 03R.0112 (b3, b5)** was established from the red drum FMP and Amendment 1). Please see p.12 (paragraphs 2 and 3) of the document for a discussion of this rule. Again, please see my attached comment on **M-12-2020** that is relevant to these options.

**Option 8,9 and 10:** In my opinion the majority of these attendance options (although I am sure not intended by DMF biologists) if adopted are aimed at, and will clearly eliminate a viable anchored gill net fishery, especially the Fall spot and spotted seatrout fishery. Based on my knowledge, few commercial fishermen would attend anchored gill nets. Besides not being economically viable (inability to set multiple nets, difficulty in culling and processing fish at night), anchored gill-net fishermen that mainly operate from small boats must contend with weather, currents and obstructions.

*Note: The stated intentions of the “set time and area restrictions” options are confusing. Do these options include strike and drift nets? It would be helpful if the DMF clarifies the options as to what gill net gear they are addressing.*

Relative to “set time and area restrictions,” **Options 3 and 4** makes good sense for set nets in that they ensure high quality fish are obtained, and they potentially could minimize cormorant, pelican and merganser interactions. However, the negative impact would be “picking” fish within one hour after sunrise. This could be very difficult and subject fishermen to unfair citations. It is to the financial advantage of fishermen to “pick” their nets promptly and deliver iced, fresh fish to the fish house. There is little incentive to do otherwise. **Option 5** neglects the effects of weather on days fished. As a commissioner I would request data from DMF as to the magnitude of conflicts. The negative impacts noted by DMF for this option should not be taken lightly.

**Option 8** would be devastating to the setnet fishery especially on the mainland side of Core Sound, Straits and Back Sound and certainly in other areas where shoreside development occurs. I find it difficult to understand why owners of docks that are on public waters are given privileged rights. As many of the docks in the area are owned by non-residents how would one get their names and address? Would the DMF provide this information? Would written permission need to be notarized to avoid fake permission letters? Would permission be required by trip, monthly, annually etc. What if ownership changes and the fisherman is unaware of this situation—will a citation be issued? This option is more than condescending and if it wasn't for its serious repercussions it would be laughable.

As a former MFC science appointee, I would need to do a lot of homework to understand the options provided by DMF's capable staff. The options need to be carefully examined to ensure that science-based decisions are made and agenda-driven (i.e., NC CCA) decisions are contested.

Overall, I find it difficult for the MFC to “vote on preferred management options to inform development of proposal rules” without stakeholder and advisory committee input as well as the socio-economic impacts of the options. I am sure the purpose of these serious policy changes was sincerely intended to streamline NC fishery rules. But because of the diversity of NC estuarine ecosystems, stream lining rules could “open a can of worms.” Simply stated without further data and detailed information unanticipated consequences appear inevitable. I recommend the MFC table this issue after the presentation by DMF staff until more rigorous information is provided.

The credibility of DMF staff and MFC members will suffer if agenda or political driven policies are adopted, and if arbitrary rules are enacted.

Allyn B. Powell

e-mail: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

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PLEASE TYPE YOUR COMMENTS IN THE BOX BELOW.

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11/10/2020 -  
6:54am

Chris  
McCaffity

North  
Carolina

November 2020 Marine Fisheries Commission Meeting Public Comment

Please focus more on enhancing our fisheries and food supply than restricting the public's freedom to access them. Hatcheries and habitat enhancements can sustainably create more seafood and recreational opportunity while generating new revenue. Wise use of these proven management tools would benefit everyone and the environment.

Rather than letting global corporations pollute our public waters by raising fish in crowded cages, let's release native seafood to live wild and free for everyone to enjoy. Public water finfish aquaculture should be limited to stocking native species that can naturally reproduce.

Rather than promoting catch and release, let's hatch and release so we can keep and eat more local seafood.

Please use some of our fishing license fees to regionally stock a variety of native larval-stage seafood.

Please support a moratorium on farming fish in public waters.

I am happy to answer questions and/or provide more detail.

Thank you,  
Chris McCaffity

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11/12/2020 -  
6:22pm

Marklan  
Meadows

North  
Carolina

Just a short comment on the Flounder season for 2021 going forward. I live on a tight retirement budget so I can't make many trips down a year. I would like to see the Flounder season moved up into October and November so I can target big Drum and Flounder during the same trip.

Thanks

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11/15/2020 -  
2:42pm

Stuart  
Creighton

North  
Carolina

We are at a critical juncture in the history of North Carolina marine fisheries. Numerous species are in serious trouble, among them southern flounder and striped bass, because our management philosophy has been one of maximum harvest regardless of what the trends in the data are showing. That can continue NO LONGER!! As you meet this week, you will begin making decisions on how to best recover both of the aforementioned species. I have read the preliminary plans and documentation, and commented on both flounder amendment three, and the striped bass scoping document. I want to reiterate that I believe adamantly that population recovery is NOT POSSIBLE as long as gill nets are allowed to remain in

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the water. Large mesh nets must be removed from the flounder fishery, and ALL NETS must be removed from the historic range of striped bass if you expect either species to recover. There are other ways to fish commercially that are both profitable and sustainable, and North Carolina MUST begin to incorporate these methods so gill nets can be removed.

I will focus my the remainder of my comments on the proposed management options that will be considered for anchored small mesh gill nets during this meeting. The issue paper is full of information on each fishery, and shows that gill nets are used extensively across every fishery in the state. It did not mention the large number of latent licenses, how much gear they use, how often they use it, or the take generated by such gear. I do believe that latent licenses are a much more extensive problem than the division is willing to admit, and causes a large amount of uncertainty in all stock assessments. It is not the fault of the division scientists, they do the best they can with the data they have. It is not the fault of the enforcement officers, who are stretched unimaginably thin, and can't possibly monitor all of the water they must. It IS the fault of DMF staff that allows such a practice to continue, and it must be stopped. Fully half of the licenses in this state never register a trip ticket and are used for "personal consumption", If that gear is used with any degree of regularity (which it is), most commercial harvest data would be off significantly causing large discrepancies in each stock assessment.

The gill net issue paper presents a dizzying array of management options, ultimately falling short of what must happen, removing gill nets from our fisheries. If we must choose between the options listed, I would begrudgingly endorse the following: When considering the yardage limits, option 5 is most palatable, limiting nets to 800 yds north of highway 58, and 500 yds to the south of that line.

When considering attendance, option 4 requiring mandatory attendance coastwide is most sensible.

When considering time and area restrictions, three options should be executed concurrently: option 3 requiring nets to be set one hour before sunset and removed one hour after sunrise, option 5 prohibiting small mesh sets during the weekends, and option 9 that does not allow nets in areas of high conflict. Incorporating these together would make the most sense.

In closing, I want to reiterate that stock recovery is directly tied to gill net effort. Neither striped bass nor southern flounder will recover until the Division recognizes the fact that the gill net fishery in our rivers, creeks, and sounds must be replaced by other, more sustainable, means of harvesting fish commercially. Other states have figured it out, why can't we? When will we address the real cause of the cryptic mortality experienced across so many fisheries, which is the bycatch from gill nets?? When will we decide that healthy, recovered stocks are more important than overharvesting??

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Sincerely,  
Stuart Creighton  
NC

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11/15/2020 -  
7:47pm

Vince  
Garrenton

North  
Carolina

Quit killing the rec fishing folks. You are accomplishing nothing. Just take a look at the commercial haul and also the giggers (especially the charters). I've seen pics on forums and Facebook of dozens of flounder harvested in just one night...like shooting ducks in a barrel.

And striped bass fishing so far this year has very good compared to the last several. I fish the ██████ sound and █████ River.

Until there is enough courage to abolish gill nets (they are strung out everywhere and I would love to know how many total miles they cover) your strategy of reducing rec limits is like "spitting in the wind". Flounder and striped bass are a public resource belonging to the public and not to commercial entities to devastate. Think about it.... you have already restricted the season to next to nothing (when you consider weather and winds keep us off the water half of that time) and now propose one fish! I invest money in boat, tackle, gas and license to enjoy a day on the water... catch one fish and I have to go home? Ridiculous.

I am 71 years old and respect our natural resources and "reasonable" guidelines/limits to protect them. For example, I think the minimum size for speckled trout should be 16"...and for flounder as well. But it is obvious, or so it seems, the folks in charge are more interested in protecting the commercial industry and in some cases the charter industry as well.

Please don't hammer us anymore in the name of protecting the flounder stock.

Sincerely, Vince Garrenton

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11/17/2020 -  
8:50am

Cameron  
Coley

North  
Carolina

I feel strongly about gillnets not being a legal means of harvest in North Carolina waters. The impacts both economically and ecologically are well articulated by unbiased, third party researchers. North Carolina is supposed to be a leader on all fronts. We are a state that has contributed and taken the lead in so many areas. On the topic of gillnets, we are behind every other coastal state. It is a black eye to the leadership charged with managing our resources.

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11/17/2020 -  
9:03am

valerie  
rabeler

North  
Carolina

I strongly believe gill netting should be banned completely. The amount of by kill is unacceptable.

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11/17/2020 -  
9:16am

John  
Fletcher

North  
Carolina

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the absurd plan to change the flounder limit to one fish per day. Recreational anglers are being not considered with

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|                      |                  |                |   |
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|                      |                  |                | respect to the quite limit. I'd encourage the commission members to consider the significant contribution that recreational anglers make to the overall fisheries budget. If the trend continues to be to take length of season and bag limits and GIVE them to the commercial then North Carolina will see a steady erosion in the purchase of licenses and fishing related items.   |
| 11/17/2020 - 9:30am  | Mike Stinson     | North Carolina | Live on the [REDACTED] Sound. Gill netting has devastated this fishery. Three years ago watched 111 fish killed and only 7 harvested in just a small net section near the shoreline. Due to the overfishing no nets have been observed for two years. It was just this year that white perch, puppy drum and catfish were caught by those in my area. Gill nets must be eliminated in this estuary.   |
| 11/17/2020 - 9:49am  | Jack Staley      | North Carolina | There needs to be NO nets allowed in small creeks where fish congregate between Oct 1 and May1 of each year. Also, only 1 fish allowed per day hook and line in the same waters.  |
| 11/17/2020 - 9:51am  | Randy Till       | North Carolina | Do not take our limits on flounder down to 1 fish per day. 4 fish was a good number. STOP the giggers. You are not policing what they are doing ! Flounder is a treat for inshore fisherman. Don't take it away !   |
| 11/17/2020 - 10:04am | Sterling Whitley | North Carolina | Would like to see reduced or removal of gill/small mesh nets in ALL estuaries in NC. Having been a resident and fisherman in NC my entire life, I have seen numerous events of heavy dead bycatch from these nets. In the past year, with net limitations in place, we have seen an increase in fish population (catches) by rec anglers. NC has reached a point where the economic benefit from better Rec fishing (I believe) outweighs the benefits from netting in these breeding areas. Would like to see NC resources used more fairly to benefit the masses vs the few. Thanks for all your efforts. SW  |
| 11/17/2020 - 10:04am | Dylan Hall       | North Carolina | Gill netters continue to deplete the waterways of a multitude of different species with no remorse for their actions. There is simply not enough eyes on the waterways to properly enforce the rules and regulations and nets can be seen stretching entire channels on a regular basis especially in the night hours. The amount of undersized by catch that lives after being released is proven to be less than 50% which can directly correlate to the Flounder shortage the state is trying to combat. This practice is banned in almost every other state for good reason and North Carolina should follow suit immediately before more irreversible damage is done to the fishery. |
| 11/17/2020 - 10:09am | John             | North Carolina | Inshore trawling is decimating our inshore fisheries.   |
| 11/17/2020 - 10:16am | Gregory biggs    | North Carolina | The commercial net fishers have no business in internal waters if they see you catch a fish they immediately surround you with nets and tell you the fish belong to them and tell me that I take too many but the math says they keep 75 and I keep 4   |

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the commercial fishing lobbyists seem to hold sway here in north carolina more than any other state on the east coast

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11/17/2020 -  
10:29am

David  
Holloman

North  
Carolina

Born an NC native and fished most of my life in NC's coastal waters it saddens me to see where we are in maintaining our resources for the public enjoyment. I fish for pleasure and occasionally like to eat fresh fish. It's not right to place the burden of restocking fish populations solely on the recreational angler, which is almost certainly what is happening. We were limited to 45 days in 2020 for flounder and now there's talk of one fish per day in 2021 with 70% of harvest for commercial. This would be a knife in the back to the recreational community. Way more money is generated in revenue from recreational than commercial fishing. Gill nets don't discriminate. There is no place for them (large or small) in our coastal waters. IF commercial netting must continue it should be only for NC commercial residents who demonstrate that at least 60% of income is from commercial fishing. No out of state large companies. Please consider all responses and listen to all the people of NC, not the special interest and big money.

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11/17/2020 -  
10:30am

Joel Herring

North  
Carolina

It's so obvious the huge decline on inshore and near shore resources is a direct result of gill netting and trawlers. Recreational impacts are so small although not completely innocent can hardly contribute in such a way as to come close to the impact evident in the past 25-30 years. It's plain mismanagement on the resources. We are already experiencing flounder season reductions. Something should have been done LONG before it got to this point. Gill netting is the culprit of so much damage. Neglect in maintaining and dishonest practices have contributed to a large part of the resource damage. Reluctantly the damage has now not only impacted the recreational side but also the commercial as well. We need a new plan as the one that is in place now is not working. This new plan needs to be executed as soon as possible before more damage occurs.

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11/17/2020 -  
10:31am

Daniel  
Winfield

North  
Carolina

I have been a North Carolina resident and angler since 1984. I currently reside on an estuarine bay and fish both by boat and from my pier/dock. I support the need for better management to protect the Southern flounder from overfishing. The reduced season in 2020 and the reduced limit being considered for 2021 place too much of the burden on recreational anglers with not enough placed on commercial anglers. I have caught numerous flounder in the past 6 weeks from my pier and have released those because I support the goal of fishery management. However, I then watch out the window as flounder giggers on numerous nights harvest flounder from the very same waters with little restriction on their harvest. This is not fair. Commercial harvesting has a far greater impact on the fishery than do recreational anglers. While I understand the need for management steps through reduced recreational seasons, these must be accompanied by much stronger steps to reduce the

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commercial harvest as this will go much further in achieving the rebuilding of the flounder stock.

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11/17/2020 -  
10:40am

Jeffrey  
Fitzgerald

North  
Carolina

Inshore Netters should be completely outlawed. A single netter can take more fish in two outing than I can though fishing everyday for a month. This practice is banned in every state throughout the eastern shoreline. I don't understand why North Carolina allows it to continue. Our shallow estuaries are a idea habitat for fish to spawn, but netting and the subsequent bycatch do not allow those young fish to grow, mature, and return to deeper waters.

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11/17/2020 -  
11:03am

Joel  
Graybeal

North  
Carolina

I would ask the MFC to enforce the regulations governing the commercial fishing licences. If the reports are true that not all commercial fisherman are accurately reporting their catch numbers, their licenses should be revoked. I would also ask the MFC to find a better balance between commercial and recreational fisherman. The data suggests that recreational fisherman are being penalized for the leniency given to commercial fisherman. Our coasts are the an asset of all people in NC -not just the commercial fisherman.

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11/17/2020 -  
11:15am

Bryce  
Eatmon

North  
Carolina

I have witnessed the small mesh gill nets absolutely wreck the juvenile red drum and stripped bass in our area of Kill Devil Hills (Kitty Hawk Bay Area). These small mesh nets will cover the shorelines all winter long to "perch fish". I have witnessed commercial fishermen throwing back dozens of juvenile red drum and stripped bass from each net which are all dead. They fish multiple nets like this all across the sound and I can only imagine how many hundreds of juvenile fish these netters kill every day by every netter. These netters leave their nets out for 12 to 24hr intervals giving no chance of their survival. Wasting our resources like this hurts ALL citizens of NC including commercial fishermen who could harvest the adult fish and recreational fishermen who target these fish while supporting all sorts of businesses in the process. Gill nets should be removed from all inshore waters where they indiscriminately kill our juvenile fish that will support future generations. I support sustainable methods of commercial fishing but gill netting is from it.

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11/17/2020 -  
11:32am

John  
Beasley

North  
Carolina

For the past 20 years or so the recreational fisherman has born the brute of the restrictions put in place to manage the fisheries in NC. I understand there are some environmental impacts, but the biggest issue the fishery faces is inshore destructive gear, in the form of inshore gill nets and trawling. All one has to do is look to our neighbors. Every other south eastern and gulf coast state has all out banned, or severely restricted the use of destructive gear, and their fisheries have recovered. The recreational fisherman contributes millions of dollars to the local economies with purchases. The vast majority of the few thousand commercial fisherman are part timers. They are supplementing a full time job. It's a "side hustle" for most of them. It would be a real shame it their side hustle destroyed a multi million dollar industry that contributes to the local economies. Their side hustle is also destroying

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|---------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---|
|                           |                       |                        | the fishery, which is evident when you look at all the other south eastern and gulf states. It's already to the point the rec guy has no incentive to contribute to the local economy by fishing. We are already going out of state to fish, South Carolina for me. The issue of "its their livelihood, one, doesn't add up if you look at trip tickets. They are part time. They will have to adapt just like the textile workers and tobacco farmers in our state did. It's a public trust resource, not a given right for commercial use. It's time for NC to do the right thing and ban all inshore trawling and gill nets . It makes sense for the fishery and for the local economies. Please do the right thing this time. |
| 11/17/2020 - 11:37am      | Michael               | North Carolina         | Shrimp trawling by large operations needs to be moved outside the sounds to both protect finish by catch as well as stop sediment resuspension that hurts both natural and farm raised oyster generation.   |
| 11/17/2020 - 11:47am      | Tom Earnhardt         | North Carolina         | If you limit the rec flounder bag limit to one per person, it will no longer be worth fishing. Is it your intention to discourage fishing for everyone except commercial and fly fishing?<br><br>That is certainly what you are doing.  |
| 11/17/2020 - 12:14pm      | Daniel brodie         | North Carolina         | I think netting destroys fishiers and is the reason yall are so strict on what we can and can't catch and keep, if you close down netting the fish will flourish in years to come   |
| 11/17/2020 - 1:19pm       | Seth Vernon           | North Carolina         | It is beyond the time for regulating the southern flounder small mesh gill net fishery. The time is now to remove this destructive gear and the wanton waste associated with it, from our estuarine waters. The MFC has opted for status quo management for far too long. The resulting depletion of the southern flounder stock pushing the fish to the brink and punishing the recreational anglers with more strenuous reductions and seasons. This is a public trust resource not a commercial fishing resource and it's time our Governor, DEQ and the MFC removed the cause of this depletion, Gill nets, from NCs waters.  |
| 11/17/2020 - 1:32pm       | Robert Janger         | North Carolina         | I'm really tired of all these gill nets. There are so many now you can hardly navigate the inshore creeks and streams off of the Atlantic ICW. Take a look at Beaver Dam Creek off of the ICW. It's net after net after net. Shell Island behind Bald Head - same way. Elizabeth River - same way. Dutchman's Creek - same way.<br><br>They are destroying the recreational fishery.<br><br>Most Southern states have banned these things. Isn't it time we've joined them.   |
| 11/17/2020 - 2:04pm       | Jim Hardin            | North Carolina         | Please remove all gill nets from internal waters, Large mesh and small mesh. The Striped Bass population will never recover without this drastic action. End all  |

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commercial sale of internal SB.

Or, if this isn't possible, require full time attendance statewide. Severely limit total yardage, no weekend sets, set/pull sunrise/sunset, and remove nets in areas with high conflict/interactions.

11/17/2020 -  
2:42pm

David Irwin  
Belk

North  
Carolina

North Carolina should boast the greatest fishery in the South. We passed an amendment to protect our right to fish and hunt, but now, unsustainable fishing practices are the biggest threat to our right. As a life long resident of North Carolina, I have witnessed the decline of our inshore fishery, and it is clear that gill nets directly and significantly contribute to the decline in fish. Please reevaluate gill net practices to protect our right to fish and allow fish to spawn. Thank you for your time.

11/17/2020 -  
2:50pm

Bert Owens

North  
Carolina

With our inshore species showing such extreme and steady decline over the past 2 decades or more the chance to address small mesh gill nets couldn'tt be any better. Our fisheries can no longer tolerate the waste inherent in this gear. Gear that is used in an environment almost devoid of enforcement. Fifty Marine Patrol officers could not handle over two million acres even if they all worked 24/7 and didn't have paper work to do. Require full time attendance of the nets or get them out all together. Otherwise you are continuing to allow the people's fish to be wasted.

Current Flounder management shows the MFC's continued biased management. Commercial interests still have a significant ocean season on Summer Flounder with tens of thousands of pounds of Flounder allowed daily. In contrast the angling public is shut out of the ocean fishery by our not being allowed to target Summer or Gulf Flounder. This discrepancy has been pointed out at other MFC meetings well prior to Covid with no action other than to say it will be considered in the supplement. That process is too slow to be fair to the anglers. I call on the MFC to request that the Director proceed by proclamation with opening of the ocean to Flounder anglers with no possession of Southern Flounder allowed. Thank you.

11/17/2020 -  
2:52pm

William H.  
Steenland

North  
Carolina

I am opposed to inshore gill netting. They should be made to keep at least 3 miles out in the ocean.

Gill netting catches and kills illegal, species, undersized fish and destroys nursery's. Recreational fishing is more important to our economy and has many regulations to follow. Gill netting cannot be species specific and therefore kills or injures undersized and illegal species of our fish.

Please keep Gill netting out of inshore waters.

Thank you

11/17/2020 -  
2:54pm

Robert  
Bentley

North  
Carolina

First of all, thank you for considering my input on the matter. First, I wanted to speak on the matter of the summer flounder season. As a recreational fishermen, flounder

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is a staple of my diet. Roughly about 20% of the population of the southeast United States suffers from a condition called alpha-gal or commonly known as mammalian meat allergy. I was bitten by the lone star tick and now carry an EpiPen because I'm allergic to all fur bearing animals. Understanding the value of conserving our Fisheries, I always lean towards the experts who similarly seek to preserve our wonderful resource. This year however, I only managed to put about eight flounder in the freezer. Now one could easily bring up the argument that it does take some skill to catch fish but in such a short flounder season, Tides weather, winds, named storms, etc. really put a hamper on the amount of days that it was even possible for me to Target flounder. As a recreational fishermen it happens and it's a reality, sometimes you have good days and sometimes you have bad days. But at the end of the argument, you still need the days! I just felt like the short-season really didn't provide me with the number of days that I needed. The thoughts of the possibility of next year being able to only take one flounder per person per day is just frustrating. Trying to navigate the short-season, considering weather, loading a boat, loading up the family, launching and recovering the boat, and all the other Associated tasks that go along with a day of fishing, it almost seems not worth it for only one fish. Especially in my context where it's more than just the recreational aspect but also the much-needed dietary necessity. It just seems like the scales favor the commercial side of the house vs. The recreational side when i ponder this. Maybe I'm wrong, I do realize that "perception is reality" can be void of all the facts. However, that remains my perception. Please don't decrease the season or the creel limit for recreational fishermen, they are both smothering as is. If deemed necessary, I would hope that the commercial side is also required to "tow the line"--- both groups must contribute & conserve. Lastly, gillnetting in internal Waters, my literal back yard, I say loudly, "NO"!

Thank you again for allowing my input into this most important matter!

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11/17/2020 -  
2:57pm

Blake  
Aldridge

North  
Carolina

Gill nets are destroying our estuaries and brackish systems. It's heartbreaking to see fish with the net markings. Commercial fishing sometimes poaches areas that should not be touched.

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11/17/2020 -  
3:33pm

Eric Kimes

North  
Carolina

To whom it may concern:

I live in [REDACTED] County NC. I fish regularly inshore for recreation by myself or with my children. Almost all of my fishing is catch and release. It is too bad that NC allows gill nets to destroy the state's resource. I spend thousands of dollars each year traveling to Florida, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Georgia to fish in areas that do not have gill nets and have abundant fish to enjoy catching. I would prefer to stay close to home and spend my time and money in North Carolina, fishing my home waters. It is just too bad that I may fish for a few days straight and not see or catch

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any fish. Then, when I travel to a state and fish an area I have never been before I catch a bunch of fish. The resource in North Carolina should be world class. People should be flying and driving in from all over the country and world to enjoy our state and the (potentially) abundant fishery. Instead, you have people like me who are leaving the state (with their money) to fish elsewhere.

This is my resource. It is my children's resource. Why can't it be managed for the enjoyment of all citizens of North Carolina?

Sincerely,

Eric Kimes  


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11/17/2020 -  
3:43pm

Donald Willis

North  
Carolina

My name is Donald Willis and I make my living from the recreational fishery. I have been in the business for 35 years. I can say without question that the rules put in to protect stripers in the Pamlico and Neuse river has been an absolute boom for the inshore fishing. If there is a chance to bring these rivers back to spawning status we need to pull out all the stops to make this happen. Included in this would be extending time of the closure and expanding the area of the closure. We have all seen what a little conservation can do so lets build on this for better fishing for all of North Carolina.

Donald Willis

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11/17/2020 -  
3:50pm

Steve  
Corriher

North  
Carolina

Gill nets-I think the use of Gill nets in the internal state waters is devastating to the population of fin fish that breed and nursery in the internal waters. I would like the use of Gill nets banned completely.  
Southern flounder-the tactics used in the 2020 season were extremely detrimental to the flounder population. It caused more overfishing and over harvest than it did to help conservation measures. In my opinion raising the minimum size to 17 inches, keeping the bag limit 3 a day per person and to provide no more than 50 percent of the total allowable harvest on southern flounder to the commercial industry is a fair proposal. Additional open season would be a benefit to the charter industry and should be considered depending on the length of the 2021 recreational flounder season.  
Thanks.

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11/17/2020 -  
3:57pm

Alan Evelyn

North  
Carolina

I support the most restrictive measures for Gill nets. The destruction to the states fisheries is not justified by limited economic value this method of fishing provides.

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11/17/2020 -  
4:09pm

Robby Lucas

North  
Carolina

Nets should be the same length statewide for ease of enforcement, attended at all times, and limited set times not to exceed 6 hours.

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I would like to speak out against gill nets and the harm they cause to our inshore fishery in North Carolina. Unsustainable fishing practices like gill nets threaten the opportunity (and right) to enjoy the wonderful inshore fishery many North Carolinians cherish. I hope the Marine Fisheries Commission takes action to ban or further regulate gill nets to protect the interest of North Carolina's fishing community. Thank you!

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11/17/2020 -  
4:11pm

Ryan Medric

North  
Carolina

Ban small mesh gill nets!

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I appreciate the each commissioner's service to the fine citizens of our great state.

I know you will be discussing gill nets and possible changes in this very destructive gear. It is time to remove gill nets from our inshore coastal waters. Striped Bass in the Tar/Neuse/Pamlico Rivers have rebounded since the gill nets were removed below the designated lines. Up until then the gill nets were harvesting and killing over 80% of the population each year. Gill nets are NOT selective in the fish, mammals, turtles and birds that they kill. Allowing gill nets sets without full time attendance is damaging our fisheries. Why is NC the only Southeastern state basically allowing unlimited gill netting? All the other states long ago recognized the damage done by gill nets and either eliminated or highly restricted the use of gill nets. We need to do the same before more of our fish stock collapse like Southern Flounder and our depleted stocks have time to recover.

11/17/2020 -  
4:28pm

Bud Abbott

North  
Carolina

Southern Flounder had all but collapsed until Hurricane Florence and other weather events highly reduced the 2018 and 2019 fall commercial harvests. The flounder fishery should be divided 50%/50% between the recreational and commercial harvest, not the 20%/80% it is currently. The money spent by recreational fishermen to catch flounder far exceeds the monies recognized from the commercial effort with a lot less fish caught and killed. If the harvest was equally split the State of NC and small business in NC would be greatly enhanced.

It is also high time for the recreational fishermen to be able to harvest ocean flounder, which are not for the most part Southern Flounder but rather Summer and Gulf Flounder. The difference between the spots and appearance are easily seen and totally unfair to prevent one user, recreational fishermen, from harvesting the same fish allowed to the other user, commercial fishermen.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak out in an effort to restore and improve our fish stocks.

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