



Position statement against HB# 983

The Ocracoke Working Watermen's Association and NC Watermen's United urge you not support HB# 983. Game fish status is not needed to maintain healthy stocks, it would have a devastating impact on commercial fishing families income, eliminate availability of locally caught state fish, a public resource, to NC residents, tourists, restaurants and seafood retail. Please consider the following points of view:

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- The preamble of the NC Fisheries Reform Act states that the NC legislature empowered the NCMFC and NCDMF to manage fish stocks for all NC user groups. OWWA's opinion is that **HB 983** violates the intent of that legislation.
- The NCDMF's public statement stating "it is neither necessary nor consistent with current NC law to designate these fish as game fish" is consistent with our point of view.
- Commercial harvests of red drum and speckled have been significantly reduced. In the case of red drum, total stock biomass and spawning biomass are at or close to NCDMF target levels. In fact, this year class may be the largest ever in NC, VA and MD. Speckled trout FMP has given the NCDMF Director Proclamation authority to manage the stock for cold stuns and commercial harvests are at an all time low. It is estimated that the recreational rod and reel bycatch mortality for red drum and speckled exceeds commercial landings of red drum and speckled trout.
- NC legislature has spent considerable time and money to establish branding campaigns and advertise "NC Fresh" products to foster more consumption of NC seafood by residents and tourists. Red drum, speckled trout and striped bass are perennial favorites and great strides have been made to find ways to get seafood further west so more state residents can enjoy NC seafood..
- CCA commercial fishery valuations for the red drum, speckled trout and striped bass fisheries are inaccurate because they only reflect dock value which does not take into account economic multipliers associated with commercial fishing. Some examples include: boat and motor purchases, jobs associated with harvesting, packing out, shipping and retail, purchases of gear, sales tax from tourism and maintaining the coastal fishing heritage that is so beloved by our communities and tourists.
- Commercial fishing supports economic diversity in our coastal communities and is often the only employment after hurricanes and during the winter. Commercial fishing families and their income is irreplaceable to coastal economies. Ocracoke's fish house provides a place to sell seafood; its paychecks have a large impact on our economy and keep the "quaint fishing village" atmosphere that our tourists enjoying being a part of. The seafood industry benefits all businesses on Ocracoke and other coastal communities by providing locally caught seafood that tourists ask for.
- Commercial and recreational fishing does not have to exclude one or the other. Both play a role in providing income and products to our economies. NC needs every job to keep unemployment down. CCA projections of increased tourism are unrealistic and unproven and the loss of jobs will be destructive to our coastal communities.
- Like any business, commercial fishermen need to be able to maximize their income. Fishermen have to fish for what is available during the year. While not harvested in significant numbers, red drum, speckled trout and striped bass provide fishing families income during late fall, winter and spring when they need it most.

Thank you for the opportunity to express these points of view. Our fishing families and their communities need your support to stop HB# 983 from being passed.

Regards,
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