

Beach Gill Nets Hot Issue At Local Fisheries Hearing

BY DOUG RUTTER

A conflict between commercial and recreational fishermen over use of gill nets on local beaches came to the surface at a public hearing last Wednesday in Bolivia.

Sportfishermen told N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission members that gill nets interfere with their right to fish public waters, while commercial fishermen defended their right to make a living.

"Commercial fishermen have got to make a living, but there's got to be room for everybody," said Vic Gillespie, a recreational angler from Holden Beach.

Gillespie and Walter Bridges of Supply complained that gill nets set off Holden Beach and Oak Island each fall don't leave room for sportfishermen. Bridges said the nets are sometimes spaced just 200 feet apart.

"If you go from one end of Yaupon Beach to the other end of Long Beach and you can't fish anywhere but between nets, you're out of luck," Bridges said.

Bridges supports a proposed rule change that would give the state fisheries director authority to regulate commercial gear and activities when they conflict with recreational fishing.

Hollis Smith, a commercial fisherman from Shallotte, said oceanfront property owners put out about half of the gill nets that are used on the beaches.

"The commercial fisherman is getting a lot of blame for things he does not do," Smith said. "We need to quit laying the blame and try to get along. When you jump on gill nets you're jumping on my toes."

"The commercial fisherman is getting a lot of blame for things he does not do."

—Hollis Smith, commercial fisherman

Smith was one of about 20 fishermen who attended the hearing, one of nine being held along the coast to gauge public opinion on 17 proposed rule changes the fisheries commission will consider at its May 5 meeting.

"We understand the needs of commercial fishermen. They've got to make a living," commission chairman Bob Lucas said at the start of the hearing. "On the other hand, we've got to protect the resource for all fishermen."

Another proposed rule change drawing local interest would require shellfishermen to tag their baskets of oysters and clams. Tags would list the harvester's name, the date and location of the harvest and other information.

"This would allow consumers to trace any shellfish back to the harvester, the place they were harvested and the date they were harvested," said Fentress Munden, deputy director of the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries.

If the rule isn't passed, Munden said the U.S. Food and Drug Administration could prohibit North Carolina

fishermen from shipping oysters and clams across state lines.

Annie Smigiel, a shellfisherman from Varnamtown, said she doesn't think the tags will work because shellfish buyers mix clams and oysters harvested from different areas.

Smigiel also suggested the state put a limit on the harvest of clams, perhaps three bags per day. "If there isn't something done eventually they're going to be all gone. They're just about gone now."

David Beresoff, a commercial fisherman from Bolivia, didn't comment on any of the proposed rule changes but said he's concerned about water quality and its impact on fishing.

"A lot of the problems that face the fisherman overall have to do with water quality," he said. "Instead of sportfishermen and commercial fishermen fighting, why don't we work together to protect the water?"

Bald Head Creek was recently closed to shellfishermen due to pollution. Beresoff said he's afraid a proposed sewer system at Yaupon Beach will force state health officials to close more waters.

"How much ground are fishermen going to lose because of that?" he asked. "I think it's very important that we eventually address this issue because more areas are closing and closing and closing."

Lucas agreed that water quality is one of the biggest problems with the resource, but pointed out that the Marine Fisheries Commission has no say in water quality issues.

Protecting waters from pollution is the job of the N.C. Environmental Management Commission, but Lucas said there must be interaction between the two panels.

"The bottom line is there's got to be communication, if not a change in the law," said Lucas, a recreational fisherman and lawyer from Selma who recently replaced Southport's C.B. "Cash" Caroon as board chairman.

Beresoff said he harvests clams and crabs and net fishes in the summer and fall to make a living. "I'm concerned because this is my life."

George Earley of Sneads Ferry said the Division of Marine Fisheries needs more officers to enforce the regulations already on the books. "I don't see what you want to make any of these rules for unless you can enforce them."

Lucas suggested Earley and others talk to their state representatives about the need for more officers. Legislators decide how much money the division gets to enforce the rules.

"We've heard it up and down the coast and you're dead right," Lucas said of the lack of officers. "It's not that we don't think they're doing a good job. We do think they're doing a good job. We just need more of them."

If the proposed rules are approved, they will take effect July 1. Written comments will be accepted through April 16. They can be mailed to the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, P.O. Box 769, Morehead City, N.C. 28557.

Waters Closed

All Brunswick County waters remained closed to shellfishing Tuesday, despite openings elsewhere along the coast.

Shellfish waters in Brunswick, New Hanover, Pender, Onslow and Carteret counties were closed April 6 following heavy rainfall. Most waters outside Brunswick County were reopened Sunday.

As of Tuesday morning, all waters between Southport and the South Carolina state line remained closed to shellfish harvesting.

This Week's Tide Table

Day	Date	APRIL HIGH		LOW	
		A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
Thursday	15	3:57	4:23	10:06	10:28
Friday	16	4:52	5:14	10:57	11:22
Saturday	17	5:41	6:01	11:45	-----
Sunday	18	6:25	6:45	12:12	12:28
Monday	19	7:07	7:26	12:57	1:10
Tuesday	20	7:47	8:03	1:40	1:49
Wednesday	21	8:26	8:39	2:21	2:28

ADJUSTMENTS

SHALLOTTE INLET—add 17 min. high tide, add 32 min. low tide.

LOCKWOOD FOLLY—subtract 22 min. high tide, subtract 8 min. low tide.

BALD HEAD ISLAND—subtract 10 min. high tide, subtract 7 min. low tide.

SOUTHPORT—add 7 min. high tide, add 15 min. low tide.

LITTLE RIVER—subtract 11 min. high tide, add 18 min. low tide.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Safe Boating Course Grads

Graduates of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary's Safe Boating and Seamanship Course receive their diplomas in Shallotte April 5. The class provides training in navigation, piloting, marine radio operation, rules of the road, engine maintenance, boat trailering, weather and other subjects of vital concern to boaters. Shallotte's USCGA Flotilla 10-8 plans to hold another class in the fall. Shown (standing from left) are graduates William Sasser, Grant Mays, Tom McDonald, Clarence Williams, Gale Wolny, Stephan Ford, Bob Grummond and (seated) Pat McDonald and Nancy DuBois.



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

ANDY HAZLE shows off the large mouth bass he caught Saturday at Oyster Bay Golf Links at Sunset Beach. The five-year-old said the 7.76-pounder was the biggest fish he's ever caught. He used a minnow for bait.

FISHING REPORT

Anglers Hoping For Warmer Weather

BY DOUG RUTTER

The Easter Bunny may have brought baskets of colored eggs and chocolate bunnies to the South Brunswick Islands, but good fishing is another story.

Local fishermen and visitors didn't have much luck over the holiday weekend, apparently because the water is still too cold for the fish.

"Nothing much has been happening," Travis Elliott of Captain Pete's Seafood at Holden Beach said Tuesday morning.

Elliott said fishermen who venture far offshore have been catching bass, snapper and some grouper.

"Inshore hasn't been anything to speak of yet. It's a little cool yet," he said. "It's just been so cold here lately the water temperature hasn't picked up any."

Allison Hughes of Hughes' Marina at Shallotte Point said nobody went fishing last week because the ocean was too rough and nothing's biting inshore.

"The water's still a little bit too cool," Hughes said. "The water temperature is only 58."

Ken Shipley of Ocean Isle Marina also said it's still a little early in the season for good fishing.

"We've had a few trout caught and the black sea bass is bunching up, but other than that it's not much."

Pier Fishing

Pier fishermen are hoping for warmer weather over the next few

weeks and spring catches of bluefish and Spanish mackerel.

"The fish haven't really started biting yet," Gil Bass of Holden Beach Fishing Pier said. "They've been catching some blowfish and a few small whiting and croaker."

Bass said local anglers have spotted grass shad minnows that usually attract the fish close to the beach. "I'm expecting in the next week or so the Spanish and blues will be in after them."

John Mills of Sunset Beach Fishing Pier said anglers caught a few small spots and whiting last week.

"I wish I could tell you something more. It's been real slow," Mills said. "I talked to the bait man and he said it's slow everywhere."

It was very slow last week at Ocean Isle Beach Fishing Pier, according to Curtis Williamson.

"It didn't do anything on the fishing worth nothing," he reported Tuesday. "They caught a few, not enough to talk about."

Williamson says the water is still too cool for fishing. "Maybe when the water gets a little warmer. Probably the first of May people will get interested in it."

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