

# State Marine Fisheries Officials Studying Limited Entry Concept

BY DOUG RUTTER

It may be years in the making, but state officials have started talking about limiting the number of commercial fishermen who are licensed to harvest oysters, flounder and other species.

The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries has no limit now on the number of commercial fishing licenses it issues each year, and some officials believe it has resulted in over-fishing and the decline of certain types of fish.

"In general, we probably have too many fishermen and too much equipment in the water," said Dennis Spitsbergen of the Division of Marine Fisheries. "The pieces of the pie are getting smaller and smaller."

Prompted by blue crab fishermen, Spitsbergen said state legislators are expected to start looking into a policy known as "limited entry" which restricts the number of commercial fishing licenses.

"It's in its infancy yet. I don't know that anyone has taken a solid position on it yet," Spitsbergen said Tuesday. "It's just an idea that has been kicked around."

Lloyd Ward of Calabash, president of the Carolinas Commercial Fishermen's Association, said he has mixed feelings about the idea.

"In one way I could see where it would help the people who make

their living at it," Ward said. "But in another way it's taking away the rights of people who want to get a mess of fish or oysters."

Ward said he will reserve his judgment until legislation is drafted. "I'd like to see the whole proposal before I make a decision on it," he said.

If it's possible, though, Ward said he doesn't want to see things get to the point where the state dictates who can and cannot fish.

"I think it's getting in trouble when we get to that point. I'd hate to see the natural resources taken away from the public at large," he said.

Limited entry is not a new concept. Spitsbergen said federal officials already have programs in place for several species including sea scallops, summer flounder and wreckfish.

Virginia lawmakers recently passed legislation that requires a two-year waiting period for fishermen to get into a fishery if they don't already have a history in that fishery.

For instance, someone with no records as a blue crab fisherman has to wait two years before he can get a license. People who harvested blue crabs prior to the legislation were not affected.

Although such a proposal would not directly affect recreational fish-

ermen in North Carolina, Ward said it would affect them indirectly since the number of licenses would be limited.

Commercial license holders are generally allowed to harvest more than fishermen without licenses. For example, recreational fishermen are limited to one bushel of oysters per day while commercial fishermen can take five.

Spitsbergen said any limited entry plan would have to come through the N.C. General Assembly since the legislature must approve all rules related to fishing licenses.

Ward said he was told the limited entry proposal came from Bob Lucas, a recreational fisherman who chairs the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission.

But Spitsbergen said that's not the case. "He definitely didn't initiate it. Knowing him, he will do a lot of evaluation before he takes a strong position on it."

Spitsbergen said the issue came up a recent meeting with blue crab fishermen. "This just came up as they were discussing various license options...It's one of several options now that is being kicked around."

## Division Seeks Comments On Oyster Shell Program

Whether or not the state places oyster shells in Brunswick County coastal waters this year could depend on the comments of local fishermen.

The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries is seeking comments on its Oyster Rehabilitation Program and has scheduled five public meetings next month for fishermen.

However, none of the meetings will be held locally. Telephone calls and letters may be the best option for local fishermen interested in the program.

Each year, the division places shell material on estuarine bottom in an effort to enhance oyster production. Oyster larvae attach to the shells and the oysters grow, providing new resources for fishermen.

State officials want suggestions on all aspects of the upcoming shell planting season including locations, methods, materials and amounts.

Public meetings have been scheduled in Bayboro, Hatteras, Swan Quarter, Manteo and Morehead City.

Fishermen unable to attend the meetings can make suggestions to program coordinator Jeff French by calling 1-800-682-2632.

Letters may be mailed to Jeff French, Division of Marine Fisheries, P.O. Box 769, Morehead City, N.C. 28557.

## Fifty Speak At Career Day

More than 50 South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce members were speakers for Career Day, held Feb. 15 at Shallotte Middle School.

The event, marking National Vocational Education Week, was for all seventh- and eighth-graders at Shal-

lotte Middle and Waccamaw schools.

Its goal was to make students aware of occupations and to learn more about career options.

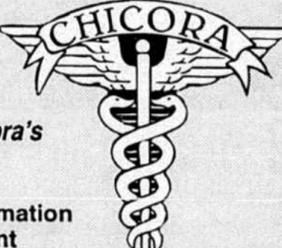
Sponsors were the chamber and the schools' Career Exploration classes.

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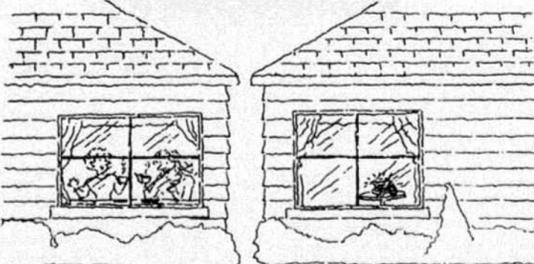
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