

**CHANCE OF MENHADEN SPILL LESSENER**

# Ocean Isle Joins Beach Towns Seeking Offshore Boundary For Fishing Boats

BY SUSAN USHER

Ocean Isle Beach Commissioners will join fellow beach towns in asking the state to restrict menhaden fishing off the Brunswick County coast to lessen the odds of smelly fish spills on resort beaches.

The board voted unanimously Tuesday to take an official position supporting rules identical to those already in place off Dare County beaches. These restrictions require that menhaden fishing boats come no closer than 1.5 nautical miles of the beach from May 1 through Sept. 30 and no closer than one-half nautical mile from Oct. 1 through Dec. 31.

Long Beach officials are spearheading a coordinated local effort to restrict the menhaden boats. At its June meeting, Long Beach council members asked Town Manager Jerry Walters to contact other coastal communities in the county seeking support. The Long Beach Town Council is expected to take formal action at its July 19 meeting.

Last week, Holden Beach Commissioners voted unanimously to send a letter to the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission supporting application of the Dare County restrictions to waters off Brunswick County.

Walters indicated in his letter that the Marine Fisheries Commission could act on the request as early as its Aug. 26 meeting.

Ocean Isle Commissioners Debbie Fox, Bill Benton and Kendall Suh voted for the stance. Members Janet Sanders and Ken Proctor were absent.

Mayor Betty Williamson said the menhaden fishing boats have been a "big problem" for beach towns because when full nets break offshore and dead fish litter the beach. Ocean Isle has made several efforts in the past to limit the presence of the boats offshore during the tourist season.

Since the closure of a menhaden processing plant at Southport, menhaden boats working local waters are based in the Beaufort area and in Virginia, Commissioners Fox and Suh noted.

"We're not going to negatively affect local fishing interests," said Suh. "In fact the menhaden fishing hurts both local commercial and recreational fishermen."

Traditionally, more menhaden are caught in North Carolina than any other commercial species and stock is in good condition, but landings have declined sharply in recent years due to industry problems.

Declining fish meal and oil prices caused by world market conditions resulted in the closure of the processing plant in Southport after the 1983 season and a plant in Beaufort after the 1987 season, leaving just one active plant in the state with two vessels. "Spotters" in small aircraft track the movement of schools of menhaden along the coast, then the fish are surrounded by smaller boats from a menhaden vessel and harvested by net.

According to Tar Heel Coast, a publication of the marine fisheries division, the industry is still confronted with social problems that include the unpopularity of smelly fish spills on beach strands, processing plant odors and recreational sport fishermen's concerns about loss of menhaden as bait.

**Eastern Channel**  
Ocean Isle Commissioners also voted for the town apply to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for a per-

mit to dredge the Eastern Channel, a major waterway, and to request the Corps study how the work should be done.

"We need to make sure Sunset Beach is included," said town engineer and resident Finely Boney, a member of the ad hoc committee named to study the issue. "We don't want to do anything that would harm those folks."

He called the request a "beginning," saying the town could then seek assistance from other sources.

Along with clearing the channel to improve navigation, the committee thinks it might be feasible to take some of the "abundant" sand at the west end and move it to the island's eroding east end, said Boney.

Once a permit is obtained from the Corps it remains in effect for one year.

In other business commissioners:

■ authorized the mayor to apply for approval from the state to extend a 6-inch water line 1,250 feet along West 2nd Street to serve new residential development in the vicinity of West 2nd and Troy streets near the Decarol Williamson home. The 6-inch main would eventually be connected to nearby 8-inch mains. The Williamson residence is currently served by a 1-inch line. Town employees will do most of the work involved in the extension.

■ approved street name and house number changes as recommended by the planning board. Residences in Island Park subdivision will now have regular street addresses instead of lot numbers. Name changes to eliminate duplications include Craven Drive to Sandpiper Court, Seagull Court to Atlantic Way, Asheville Street (near Shallotte Avenue) to Columbus Street.

■ adopted a standard \$50 business privilege license for all businesses not specifically covered by the state business license schedule adopted earlier by the board.

■ appointed Larry Sellers, a town employee who recently earned Level III certification, the new licensed operator for the town's sewer plant, and relieved Building Inspector Druied Roberson of that extra duty. Roberson will continue as Sellers' back-up until another town employee is certified.

Police Chief Curt Pritchard said officers responded to 212 calls during June, "none major."

Roberson said he issued 54 building permits within the town limits in June for construction valued at \$390,430, and 13 permits in the extraterritorial area for construction valued at \$382,957.

On July 4, the town's sewer plant handled its largest volume to date, pumping 750,000 gallons of sewage. "We're growing as a town," he said. "It now takes two pumps to handle the volume."

Commissioner Fox, chairman of the board's water committee, said the committee has deferred consideration of a proposal to allow separate water meters for non-household use until fall, after the town has more experience with its new rate schedules for water and sewer service.

"We want to see if the budgeting is working as we anticipated," she said.

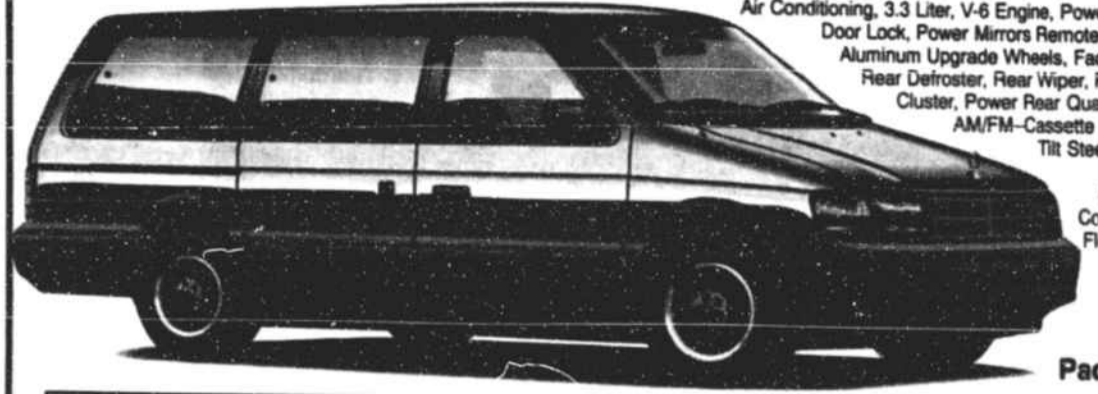
So far, so good. Fox said that since the new billing system and water schedule went into effect outstanding accounts have been reduced from \$7,000 to \$1,400. "That change does seem to be accomplishing what it was intended to do."

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