

Committee To Tackle Menhaden Fishing Issue

BY DOUG RUTTER

A committee of local beach town officials, state agents and commercial fishermen has been formed to work out an agreement regarding menhaden fishing off the Brunswick County coast.

The N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission established the committee at its meeting Saturday, when it took no action on the request of six towns to keep menhaden boats away from their beaches.

Instead, the commission gave the committee three months to work out a solution that will satisfy town officials and menhaden fishermen who work each summer along Brunswick's coast.

Sunset Beach, Ocean Isle Beach, Holden Beach, Long Beach, Yaupon Beach and Caswell Beach had asked the fisheries commission to pass the same rules for Brunswick County that it approved last year for parts of Dare County.

Those regulations require menhaden boats to stay at least 1 1/2 miles offshore May 1 through Sept. 30 and at least one-half mile offshore Oct. 1 through Dec. 31.

Local officials requested the limits hoping they would reduce the chance of dead, smelly menhaden washing up on their beaches—something town leaders see as a threat to the summer tourist trade.

"It was not the intent of any of the towns to shut down the menhaden fishing industry, but at the same time we do not want the tourism in our towns to suffer as a result of the menhaden fishing industry." —John Altman, Long Beach Mayor

Although the request for local restrictions was not granted last week, Long Beach Mayor Joan Altman said formation of the committee will not prevent the towns from asking again in the future.

"It does not foreclose our opportunity to do that at any time," Altman said. "How well the agreement works will determine if the towns approach the commission again."

The committee was asked to write an agreement specifying how the menhaden industry will act to prevent future fish spills and respond to fish spills when they occur in Brunswick County.

The committee will include representation from the beach towns, Marine Fisheries Commission, N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, menhaden industry and N.C. Fisheries Association.

The group's first meeting is tentatively

scheduled Sept. 21 at Brunswick Community College in Supply.

Altman said it will probably take two or three meetings for the committee to finalize an agreement, which must be presented to the Marine Fisheries Commission's finfish committee no later than Dec. 2.

The agreement will address notification when menhaden boats are working in the area, assistance in cleaning up fish spills, reimbursement for cleanup costs, use of foaming agents to reduce fish oil slicks and distance the boats must stay from fishing piers.

Altman said she was not surprised by the commission's decision to form a committee, especially after a recent meeting of beach officials and representatives of the three menhaden companies that work off Brunswick County.

"I think under the circumstances it was

an expected outcome. I will give this an opportunity to work," Altman said.

"It was not the intent of any of the towns to shut down the menhaden fishing industry, but at the same time we do not want the tourism in our towns to suffer as a result of the menhaden fishing industry," Altman said.

The local move to regulate menhaden fishing started at Long Beach, where officials have documented five menhaden-related fish spills in the past 10 years. The latest occurred in June.

Local beach officials say requiring the boats to stay at least one half mile offshore during the peak tourist season would lower the risk of smelly fish washing up on the strand.

Altman said the agreement isn't likely to include policies on how close to shore the menhaden boats may work.

"The fact that they are so close is part of the reason we have the problems we do. There's no other place for the fish to go when there is a spill but up on the beach," she said.

Menhaden company officials say their boats must work close to the beaches because that's where most of the fish are.

More than two-thirds of the menhaden caught off Brunswick County are within

one mile of the beach. The best season for menhaden fishing locally is the summer, which just happens to coincide with tourist season.

At an Aug. 17 meeting, menhaden company officials said there are willing to give notification when working off Brunswick County and stay at least 750 feet from fishing piers.

They promised to use a foaming agent to break up fish oil slicks if state environmental officials approve it.

Industry officials also said they would reimburse the towns for any costs associated with cleaning up fish spills, even if they weren't responsible but happened to be fishing nearby at the time of the spill.

Since the peak tourist season is just about over, Holden Beach Mayor Gay Atkins said the committee and commission will have time to work out a solution prior to next summer.

"I know more about the industry than I did," Atkins said. "I'm more sympathetic to their problems, but I don't see the benefit we get in Brunswick County because we don't have a plant here."

The only menhaden processing plant in North Carolina is in Beaufort. The two others that work off Brunswick County are based in Reedville, Va.

Planning Board Approves New Zoning For Sunny Point

BY ERIC CARLSON

The Brunswick County Planning Board has recommended a special new zoning district for the Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point and agreed to remove the property's current designation as a "heavy manufacturing" area.

In a vote of four-to-one, with member Sue Franks dissenting, the planning board agreed to ask its department staff to come up with a plan for a new "military installation" zoning district for the ammunition terminal located near Southport.

County Planning Director Wade Horne said he would try to have a draft proposal for the board to consider in time for its next meeting.

The change was made in response to an application from Sabrina Puckett of Moore's Creek Village, who asked the county to remove all zoning from Sunny Point because the county cannot control land use on a federal installation.

About 50 people, mostly from the Southport and Boiling Spring Lakes areas appeared at a Aug. 17 public hearing to voice concerns that the H-M zoning does not accurately represent current land use at Sunny Point. Many insisted that maps designating the area for heavy manufacturing create a misleading impression that the area is available for industrial development.

Horne and the planning staff recommended against removing all zoning from Sunny Point, insisting that doing so would leave the county unable to control development there if the U.S. Army closes the giant ammunition terminal.

"The removal of zoning from this facility could set a precedent for other areas of Brunswick County and would be detrimental to the county as a whole," the planning staff said in a written report. "No future control of the area would exist, thus no land use control of an area that would be clearly suitable for an extensive and possibly offensive industrial use."

Horne said the question of zoning at Sunny Point is more than a "neighborhood or community issue." Designating the area for use only as a military installation would give the county time to decide how the land should be used if the base closes, since it is highly unlikely that another military use would arise immediately.

Without zoning, the federal government could sell its Sunny Point holdings to an industrial developer who would not be restricted in how the property was used.

"You still have a deep water shipping port there with loading facilities and railroad lines and access roads and gas lines already in place," Horne said in an interview before the meeting. "You tell me

that's going to stay residential without zoning."

The planning staff also recommended that the county commissioners be asked to include future proposals for zoning at Sunny Point on the agenda for a "zoning overlay study committee" that will review land-use priorities throughout the

county. The commissioners have voted to form the committee, but have not yet agreed on its membership.

"This issue is of significant concern to the entirety of Brunswick county and not only as a neighborhood or community concern," the planning staff said in its report.

Drug Squad Nabs Leland Woman In Prostitution Sting

Responding to complaints from local residents, the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department narcotics squad set up an undercover operation Friday that resulted in the arrest of a 33-year-old Leland woman on prostitution charges.

Teri Lynn Crisp of Village Road was charged with one count each of engaging in solicitation for prostitution and remaining in a public place

while engaged in conversation offering sex for money, Detective Lt. David Crocker said Monday.

"It seems to be an isolated problem," Crocker said. "But we've been having complaints from people saying they were being approached and offered sex for money, so we decided to do something about it."

What they did was send Detective

John Ingram into a Leland convenience store where many of the complaints originated. At about 8:50 p.m., Crocker said Ingram was approached by Crisp and offered sex for \$40.

"She even consummated the deal by going inside and buying a package of condoms," Crocker said.

Later that evening, with assistance from the Leland Police Department, the narcotics squad set up a roadway check station where three suspects were arrested on misde-

meanor charges of marijuana possession and possession of drug paraphernalia, Crocker said. Two people were charged with driving while impaired by alcohol and 21 other traffic citations were issued.

One suspect fled the area and was later apprehended on a charge of driving with a revoked license, Crocker said.

The narcotics squad encourages anonymous tips from anyone who observes illegal drug activities in their area. The squad can be reached directly at (910) 253-4797.

Election Board Meets Wednesday

The Brunswick County Board of Elections was to meet at 3:30 p.m. Wednesday in special session at the elections office at the Bruns. County Government Center at Bolivia.

Board members were to approve the layout of the ballot for the Nov.

8 election, select applicants to be interviewed for a secretarial position and approve minutes of past meetings, said Lynda Britt, supervisor of elections.

Meetings of the board are open to the public.

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