

STATE LEGISLATION PROPOSED

Local Fishermen Oppose Mechanical Clam Harvest

BY DOUG RUTTER

If the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission decides to open local waters to mechanical clam harvesting, it won't be the fault of hundreds of hand clambers who loudly opposed the proposal Monday night in Bolivia.

About 300 people from Brunswick and New Hanover counties, mainly supporters of hand clamming, attended a Marine Fisheries Commission public hearing at the Brunswick County Government Center to shout down a proposal to open local waters to mechanical harvesting.

The Commission is currently considering three possibilities concerning mechanical clam harvesting in North Carolina. The state will either open or close all state waters to mechanical harvesting, or open only those areas which have been harvested mechanically in the past.

Mechanical clam harvesting is now permitted during a four-month season in waters from New River in Onslow County through Core Sound. The season lasts from Dec. 1 through March 31.

Although there are about 14,000 hand clambers in the state and only 350 mechanical harvesters, the annual harvest is almost evenly split between the two factions. This economic inequality and the fact that mechanical clam harvesting is known to have harmful effects on

various types of marine life has created friction between the groups.

During the 90-minute public hearing local clambers and clam dealers voiced numerous concerns about opening more state waters to mechanical harvest, saying it would put many of them out of business.

In addition to strong opposition from about two dozen clambers who took their turn addressing the commission, State Rep. E. David Redwine also supported the position of local shellfishermen and vowed to seek legislation to outlaw mechanical harvesting in Brunswick, New Hanover and Pender counties if the commission opens clam dredging statewide.

Outlining the environmental impacts of dredging and the economic impact mechanical harvesting would have on local shellfishermen, Redwine said, "We were against it before, we're still against it and I hope you'll follow our wishes and do what's right for the majority of the people involved."

In addition to Redwine, Harry Van Essendelft of Carolina Beach, spokesman for the newly-formed Cape Fear Baymen's Association, said the organization will push for state law against mechanical harvesting if necessary.

"We will see that this state passes legislation," he ad-

ded. "There are 14,000 of us and if every one of us has 10 friends we can persuade, we have a potent political force."

According to a letter Van Essendelft distributed at the hearing, the major concern of the organization right now is to oppose mechanical clamming statewide. The group, which first met April 29, is also concerned with controlling development along coastal inland waters and basically ensuring the future of the shellfishing industry.

Many of those who spoke during the hearing focused on the harmful environmental effects of mechanical clam dredging on marine life, and specifically on future clam populations.

"The reason these people want to come down here is because they ruined the bottoms up there," said Bob Thorsen of Southport.

If all state waters were opened to clam dredging, he added, it would be years before local shellfishermen could afford to purchase dredges and take part in the harvest.

Several speakers also mentioned the economic hardship which would befall local hand clambers and their families if the state opened all waters to clam dredging. Some almost reached the point of tears as they pleaded with members of the commission.

"Do not allow mechanical machines in our bays or we're all doomed to suffer," said James Stanley. "We have to feed a whole lot more people than the mechanical dredgers."

Another concern touched upon Monday was that local clambers had voiced opposition five months ago to a similar proposal to open local waters to mechanical harvesting.

Annie Smigiel, a Varnamtown clam dealer, said shellfishermen are tired of traveling to Bolivia to oppose the same issue time and time again. "We didn't want it 12

years ago and we sure don't want it now," she emphasized.

Local fishermen last joined forces in December to oppose a state proposal to open parts of Brunswick County to mechanical harvesting. The Marine Fisheries Commission considered the idea as a means of relieving some financial stress during the "red tide" infestation, which did not spread into local waters until late January. After a few hours of loud opposition, the area remained closed to dredges.

Brunswick County resident Clayton Lewis likened the debate over mechanical harvesting to an "old sore" which never heals and is reopened every so often by the state. "As long as this remains a rich area for clamming we're gonna have these meetings it seems."

The Marine Fisheries Commission will make a decision on this issue and 15 other proposals before the board this year during a meeting slated for June 16 and 17 in Morehead City.

Dr. William Hogarth, director of the state Division of Marine Fisheries, said Monday the decision will be based on input from the seven public hearings scheduled for sites along the coast as well as various sources of ecological data concerning the effects of mechanical harvesting.

Individuals not able to attend the public hearing can still mail written comments which will be taken into account before the commission makes its decision.

Mr. and Mrs. Willie Curtis Fulford of Supply are urging all local shellfishermen and other concerned citizens to write to the commission opposing the mechanical harvest of clams in North Carolina.

Written comments must be received no later than June 1 and can be addressed to Chairman, Marine Fisheries Commission, N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, P.O. Box 769, Morehead City, NC 28557.

Ocean Isle Board Discusses Beach Access, Handicap Ramp

BY DOUG RUTTER

Ocean Isle Beach Commissioners this week set a 9 a.m. public hearing for May 24 at town hall concerning possible beach access locations at the east end of the island.

During Tuesday's regular monthly meeting, Building Inspector Druid Roberson said the town had reapplied for state grants which would help fund small parking areas at either Asheville or Whiteville streets.

He said the town has received preliminary approval for the grant funding a beach access facility at Asheville Street, but added that the town could probably use the money for either location if the grant gets final approval.

Orderly parking is needed at the east end, Roberson said, because it is a popular fishing spot and people often cause dune erosion when they walk to the beach at undesignated areas.

As a means of controlling erosion, he added, sand fences and "Keep Off Dunes" signs have recently been erected where people tend to take shortcuts.

Ramp Considered

Also this week, Roberson informed commissioners of the difficulties involved in extending a ramp which would provide access to the beach for handicapped persons.

The idea of extending an existing handicap ramp located east of the causeway from a deck overlooking the strand onto the beach was first brought to the attention of the board in March. Ocean Isle resident Paul Justice, who initially raised the issue, returned this week wondering what had been decided.

Roberson explained that if a handicap ramp were constructed, it would have to be built according to state code. The state requires a very gradual slope, no greater than one inch down for each foot in length, as well as a six-foot long rest area every 30 feet.

The existing deck is 15 feet high, he added, with steps leading to the beach and a ramp would almost have to extend into the ocean if it were constructed according to code.

"It just makes it a major engineering project to get down from it," he added.

Roberson said he would look at some other areas on the island where the dunes are not as high and where it may be feasible to extend a wheelchair ramp to the beach.

Personnel Discussed

In other business Tuesday commissioners met in executive session for about 30 minutes to discuss a personnel matter, but took no action.

Mayor Betty Williamson said the matter pertained to the patrol officer vacancy in the police department.

Curtiss Pritchard, the town's new chief of police, was present for part of the closed session. The mayor had said before that the town would allow its new chief some input before the board hires another officer.

Payment Approved

Town commissioners also transferred \$148,641 from a reserve fund into the water department checking account to help finance the new 12-inch water line. The transfer will help fund an initial payment of \$205,272 to Zeigler Construction Company of Sumter, S.C., for work completed on the project and \$2,657 to Boney & Associates of Raleigh for engineering services.

Work on the line should be completed by June 1 and will help meet water needs during the tourist season.

Other Business

In other business Tuesday, commissioners:

- Adjourned to reconvene at 8:30 a.m. May 17 for a budget workshop.
- Mayor Williamson said she and the town clerk have been working on next year's budget and that next week's meeting should take about an hour. She added that a tentative

budget may be ready for adoption at the May 24 meeting.

- Renewed a contract with Wilmington CPA John Carraway to audit the town for fiscal year 1987-88 at a cost of \$4,500. The fee is the same as last year.

- Transferred \$4,000 from the water fund and \$7,500 from the contingency fund to pay a 5 percent deposit to Farmers Home Administration for repurchase of the town's water bonds. (See related story this issue.)

- Asked Roberson to erect "No Wake" signs in the canals. The signs had been requested during last month's public hearing on the proposed canal dredging project. The board is also expected to discuss the dredging project during the May 24 special meeting.

- Heard from Roberson that 20 building permits were issued in April at a construction valuation of \$323,646. Fees collected totaled \$3,900.

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

Established Nov. 1, 1962
Telephone 754-6890
Published Every Thursday
At Main Street
Shalotte, N. C. 28459

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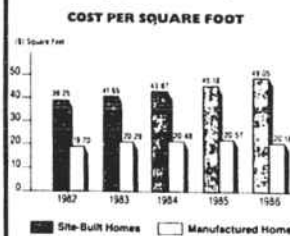
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