

Local Shrimpers Fear Worst With TED Restrictions

BY DOUG RUTTER

Local commercial fishermen believe the picturesque waterfront at Calabash, complete with its weathered shrimp boats, may change in the coming years.

The boats and dockside dealers may disappear, they believe, if federal regulations requiring the use of turtle excluder devices in shrimp trawls are enforced.

Turtle excluder devices, commonly called TEDs, are sewn into shrimp nets just above the tailbag where shrimp are collected. They act as gates, directing turtles through an opening before they become trapped in the tailbag.

Depending on the outcome of a state lawsuit and efforts at federal legislation, rules requiring these devices will take effect next month in some states and next spring in North Carolina.

Ronnie Pittman of Calabash said the devices don't work and the regulations are going to put him and other shrimpers out of work.

"It's disgusting," he said of the rules, which will require all large offshore shrimp boats to use the devices starting May 1, 1989. Shrimpers operating in inshore waters or from vessels less than 25 feet in length will not be required to pull TEDs as long as they lift their nets every 90 minutes to check for turtles.

"They're gonna put the trawler out of business," said Pittman, adding that shrimp farming will be the industry of the future if the rules are strictly enforced.

Jim Bahen, UNC Sea Grant marine advisory agent, agrees that the TEDs do cause shrimpers to lose a percentage of their catch. But he feels that can be changed once the devices are improved.

"We're looking at something that really hasn't been tested that much," he said. "There needs to be work done on them to perfect them."

Pittman, who has used turtle excluders while shrimping in South Carolina where they are now required in state waters, said the devices have caused him to lose between 50 and 90 percent of his catch. He said the cost of the TEDs, which run anywhere from \$25 to \$275 apiece, is nothing compared to the amount of shrimp loss.

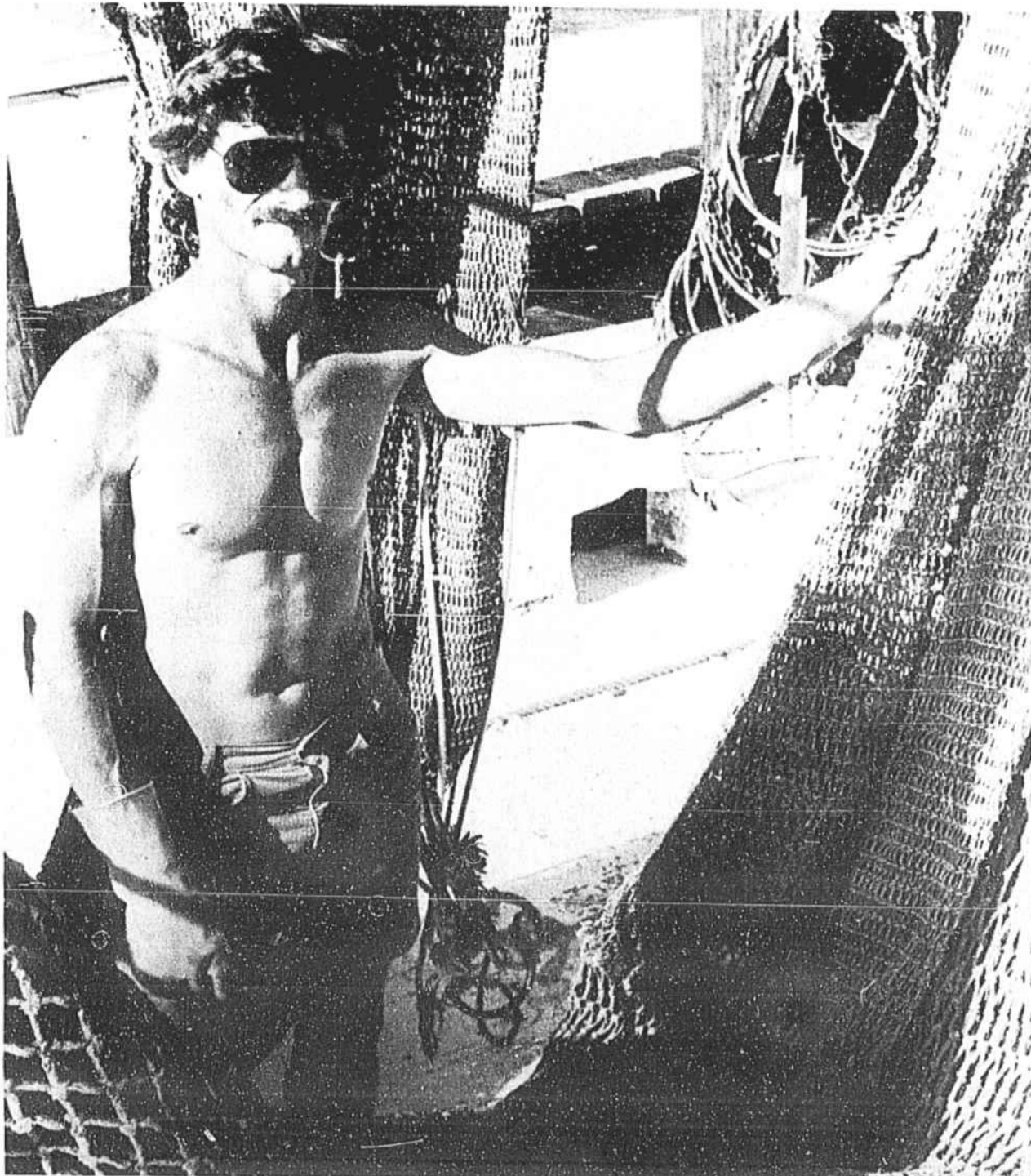
"Anytime you cut a big hole in your extension you'll lose all your catch," added Tommy Hickman of Hickman's Crossroads, a lifetime shrimper who also docks at Calabash. "TEDs is a mess."

Hickman said he has experimented with different designs but none seems to work effectively. He said he has tested nets with and without TEDs and has found no comparison.

"They don't work too good. You lose over half of what you catch through them," he said. "When it shoots that turtle out it shoots the shrimp out too."

In addition to the loss of shrimp, local fishermen say they lose towing time because their TEDs are constantly clogged with sea grass or other trash. They also claim the devices are not necessary in most waters in North and South Carolina.

Pittman said he has caught less than 25 turtles in the four years he has been shrimping and has never drowned a turtle. Hickman, who has been shrimping 33 years, said he has seen about six drowned.



TOMMY HICKMAN, a lifelong shrimper who docks at Calabash, says turtle excluders cause him to lose more than half of his catch and claims they will ruin the industry. Requirements for the devices, which protect

endangered and threatened sea turtles from drowning in shrimp nets, take effect next May in North Carolina waters.

The National Marine Fisheries Service, however, which will enforce the restrictions, claims that 12,000 sea turtles drown each year in shrimp nets and something needs to be done to protect the threatened and en-

"When it shoots that turtle out it shoots the shrimp out too."

—Tommy Hickman
Commercial shrimper

dangered creatures.

According to Bahen, the six turtle excluder designs now accepted by the NMFS have just been developed in the past few years and have not been tested and modified enough to please both shrimpers and environmentalists.

"These devices that we've got to use are like antique cars," he added. "They're the first ones on the market and there are bugs to be worked out."

Although it now appears shrimpers will be forced to pull the devices in North Carolina waters starting next May, Congress could release fishermen from having to follow the turtle excluder restrictions while trawling inshore.

Last month, the U.S. Senate passed an amendment to the Endangered Species Act which would delay implementation of TED restrictions in inshore waters until May 1, 1990. That amendment also requires research on endangered sea turtles and reasons for population declines.

In December, the House of Representatives passed a similar amendment to delay the inshore requirements which also called for the testing of turtle excluders.

Sue Waldron, spokesperson with the House Merchant Marine Fisheries Committee, said the two houses will have to approve the same amendment before the federal requirements can be delayed. She said it will be at least next month before a compromise can be reached.

A state lawsuit filed earlier this year against the federal government could also provide some relief from the rules.

The state filed the lawsuit in April on the basis that the final set of TED rules included restrictions for inshore waters and waters north of Ocracoke. The original draft rules, according to state officials, included no reference to those waters because no data exists to justify TED requirements in those areas.

According to Bahen, however, most state officials dealing with the lawsuit feel it will either be thrown out of court or a ruling will be issued in favor of the federal government. Those expectations, he said, are based on the outcome of a similar lawsuit filed in Louisiana.

In some respects, he said it is unfortunate the regulations are not already in effect. He said many shrimpers who are ignoring the impending rules for now will feel the crunch next season.

Bahen recommends that shrimpers experiment with TEDs this season and be prepared when the regulations are enforced next year. "If we've got to use them next year we should be out there trying them right now."

BCC Foundation Launches New Work-Study Program

A new work-study program at Brunswick Community College will provide part-time employment opportunities on campus for students with exceptional financial assistance needs.

The program was established by BCC Foundation at its August board of directors meeting with a grant of \$3,000 for the 1988-89 year. The work-study program complements but is

separate from the college's federally-funded work-study program.

Any student with an exceptional financial need is eligible to apply for the BCC Foundation Work-Study Program. Any student awarded funding in the program must have their application supported by a college faculty or staff member who will agree to provide for and supervise the student's work experience. The program provides faculty and staff

an opportunity to identify and supervise students whose financial assistance needs might not be met otherwise.

To remain in the program a student must have and maintain an overall "C" average.

BCC Foundation President David Batten said the program will not only provide financial assistance, but will give students the "positive benefits of combining work with other learning experiences" at BCC.

Rescue Course Is Scheduled

An ambulance attendants course will be taught beginning Friday, Aug. 26, at 7 p.m., at Coastline Volunteer Rescue Squad on N.C. 130 near Holden Beach.

The 40-hour course will be taught by Area Emergency Medical Services Coordinator Marie Ruchti.

Classes will be held Aug. 26 through 28 and Sept. 9 through 11. State testing will be scheduled upon completion of the course.

For more information or to register for the course, contact Coastline Volunteer Rescue Squad at 842-2222.

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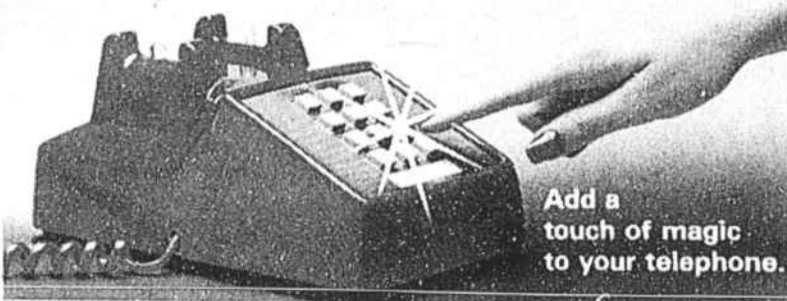
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