

# Brunswick Oyster Harvest Jumps Despite Lean Year For Carolina

**BY DOUG RUTTER**  
Brunswick County commercial fishermen had a surprisingly good year for oysters in 1991, although the catch continued to tumble on a statewide basis.

Local fishermen landed an estimated 101,903 pounds of oysters last year compared to only 37,633 in 1990, according to N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries statistics.

The big increase locally was the exception to the rule along the North Carolina coast, where oyster harvests continued their recent decline.

Commercial fishermen in the state landed only 319,040 pounds of oysters last year, with nearly one third of them coming from Brunswick County. The state's 1990 oyster harvest was 328,850 pounds.

Mike Marshall, fisheries development chief with Marine Fisheries, said the parasite "Dermo" continued to devastate the oyster beds last year.

The parasite, which can kill oysters but doesn't affect humans, was found to some degree in all of the 103 sites that were sampled last year.

Marshall said the southern district, which includes Brunswick County, didn't see as much oyster mortality as the central and northern sections of the coast.

"The oyster landings based on our sampling probably could have been worse," Marshall added.

The poor oyster haul, coupled with one of the worst years for clambers in more than a decade, made 1991 a lousy year for commercial shellfishermen.

"They're virtually the same as the year before," Marshall said of the preliminary landings. "We had the same kind of year, which is dismal."

North Carolina fishermen harvested only 984,410 pounds of clams last year, a drop of nearly 30 percent from the 1.35 million pounds in 1990.

Marshall said last year marked only the second time since 1978 that the state commercial clam harvest was less than a million pounds.

Brunswick County fishermen felt the decline, bagging only 126,233 pounds of clams last year compared to 192,359 pounds the year before.

While oysters and clams suffered, North Carolina shrimpers had their best haul in at least five years.

The 10.7 million pounds landed last year was a 27 percent increase over the 1990 catch of 7.8 million pounds.

County shrimpers didn't see much of a change last year, landing 535,398 pounds compared to 599,225 pounds in 1990.

North Carolina's commercial fishermen also had a banner year for blue crabs in 1991.

"We've had some of the best crab

*"We had the same kind of year (as '90), which is dismal."*

—Mike Marshall  
N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries

years lately that we have on record," Marshall said. "Fortunately not every fishery has gone like the oysters."

Fishermen harvested about 41 million pounds of hard crabs last year worth an estimated \$9.1 million.

Last year was also a good one for flounder. The state's commercial fishermen landed about 7.8 million pounds, an increase of over 30 percent from the 5.4 million pounds in 1990.

Fishermen not only had to contend with poor landings in certain species last year, but an unstable market as well.

Overall, fish and shellfish landings increased from 1990, but the number of dollars paid to commercial fishermen decreased.

Fishermen landed about 157 million pounds of fish last year for an increase of 32 million pounds over the previous year.

But commercial anglers received only \$28.6 million for the 1991 catch, compared to \$31.4 million the year before.

The market decline also showed up in shellfish figures. Landings jumped from 49.8 million pounds to 60 million pounds, but the dollar amount fell from \$39.3 million to \$38.1 million.

Marshall speculates that a drop in consumer confidence might have had some effect on the dollar figures. National media reports of contaminated fish and shellfish have hurt the markets, he said.

As far as oysters are concerned, Marshall said there wasn't nearly the same demand last year compared to previous years. A good harvest in Texas also hurt local fishermen because oysters were plentiful on the East Coast.

Species of finfish seeing big decreases in landings last year included croaker and mullets.

The croaker catch dropped from 5.7 million pounds in 1990 to 3.4 million pounds last year. Commercial fishermen landed less than 1.5 million pounds of mullet last year after pulling in nearly 3 million pounds the year before.

Marshall wasn't alarmed by those figures. The croaker harvest usually

runs in cycles, he said, and the commercial effort for mullet wasn't as great last year as it was in 1990.

Commercial landings of spots and mackerel didn't see much change between 1990 and 1991. Anglers caught just over 3 million pounds of spot, 1.1 million pounds of king mackerel and 858,808 pounds of Spanish mackerel last year.

## This Week's Tide Table

		APRIL		HIGH		LOW	
Day	Date	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
Thursday	9	1:03	1:35	7:32	7:44		
Friday	10	2:07	2:45	8:34	8:53		
Saturday	11	3:13	3:54	9:40	10:02		
Sunday	12	4:18	4:58	10:42	11:08		
Monday	13	5:20	5:59	11:38	—		
Tuesday	14	6:17	6:54	12:09	12:31		
Wednesday	15	7:12	7:45	1:05	1:19		

**ADJUSTMENTS**  
SHALLOTTE INLET—add 17 min. high tide, add 32 min. low tide.  
LOCKWOOD FOLLY—subtract 22 min. high tide, subtract 8 min. low tide.  
BALD HEAD ISLAND—subtract 10 min. high tide, subtract 7 min. low tide.  
SOUTHPORT—add 7 min. high tide, add 15 min. low tide.  
LITTLE RIVER—add 7 min. high tide, add 7 min. low tide.



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

### Fishing For Spots

Tiny spots were the only fish biting last Thursday in the Holden Beach surf. Judy Hogsd of Lancaster, S.C., and Doug Carpenter of Gastonia had the whole east end of the island to themselves.

## Cool Weather Can't Last Much Longer

**BY JAMIE MILLIKEN**

The weather continues to be the largest story in regards to offshore fishing. Unseasonably cool temperatures for the past five weeks have virtually

stopped our warming trend of the ocean water. Along with this cool weather we have experienced very high winds. All of these factors have made catching a good fishing day about as hard as catching a 40-pound king mackerel.

Captain Adam Sanders and Stuart Foxworth did make a trip last Wednesday. They displayed a lot of true determination to fish as they battled five-foot seas all day. Captain Adam report-

ed that he did not find 67-degree water until he was 45 miles offshore. Compare that to the 68-degree water I found the first week of March only 32 miles offshore. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out that we are going the wrong way.

The long-range forecast this week calls for a few 70-degree days with mid 40s at night. Well, at least this is a start. The way it stands now it will take at least two weeks of warm days and mild nights to get fishing equal to what we had the first day of April last year.

As you can tell from this report, the fishing is slow. I have not been to sea in so long I wonder if I can find my way out the inlet! But there is one thing for certain, it can't last much longer. I have never seen a cool summer in 37 years.

Until next time, good fishin' and, if you happen to know a fair weather dance, please put on your dancing shoes. We need it!



**CAPTAIN JAMIE'S OFFSHORE FISHING REPORT**

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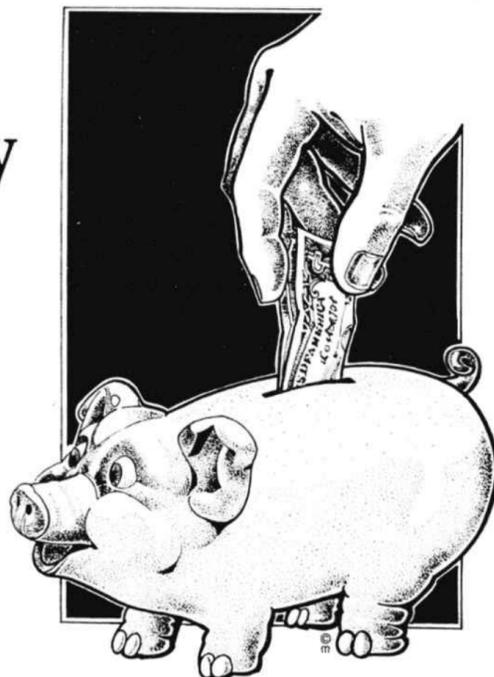
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