



North Carolina Wildlife Federation

Affiliated with the National Wildlife Federation

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RESOLUTION

North Carolina Marine Fisheries Reform

WHEREAS, North Carolina is home to roughly 2.5 million acres of estuarine waters which is an important and once productive network of sounds, wetlands, waterways and rivers which holds the title as the largest nursery area on the Atlantic Coast. These waters provide critical habitat for hundreds of species to spawn, develop and feed as they grow to maturity and are able to migrate; and

WHEREAS, while increasing environmental pressures, including habitat loss, water quality degradation and overfishing, are threatening our coastal marine habitat, North Carolina is becoming more known for its ineffective policies, mismanagement and unsustainable fishing practices; and

WHEREAS, with the Public Trust Doctrine and North American Model of Fish and Wildlife Conservation as our guide, the North Carolina Wildlife Federation (NCWF) holds the belief that North Carolina's marine and wildlife resources are public trusts, and as such, must be protected and sustained for the use and benefit of all citizens, present and future; and

WHEREAS, NCWF established the *Sound Solutions* campaign to ensure that our sounds and estuaries are protected and to sustain both commercial and recreational uses of these resources. NCWF is taking a comprehensive, resource-based approach to dealing with the magnitude of issues impacting our sounds. Sound Solutions goes beyond the simplistic dynamic of commercial vs. recreational anglers, and presents solutions that will benefit all users; and

WHEREAS, despite the depleted condition of our state's recreational and commercial fishing industries, the combined current economic impact of \$2 billion annually could be significantly increased through proper management; and

WHEREAS, the Fisheries Reform Act of 1997 (FRA) is two decades old, and has shown little progress toward achieving the goal of long-term fisheries sustainability, and should be reviewed and rewritten to make it more responsive, efficient, and focused on resource conservation; and

WHEREAS, in the twenty years since passage of the FRA of 1997, fish stocks in North Carolina have steadily and significantly declined to the point that many commercially and recreationally important fish are in a depleted state and harvest rates are at all time lows. The conservation viewpoint, based upon scientifically collected data and analysis, points to overharvest, waste from excessive bycatch, and biological benchmarks for success that are set far too low for healthy fisheries as the causes for this deterioration in fishery stocks; and

WHEREAS, the primary harvest from shrimp trawls is not shrimp, but juvenile fishes that have historically provided significant landings to both commercial and recreational fishermen; and

WHEREAS, measures to reduce shrimp trawl bycatch impacts and damage, including nursery area designations and closures, reduced head rope length, shortened trawl times, and designated harvest seasons, have not been enacted or have been ineffective for North Carolina inshore waters; and

WHEREAS, while original nursery areas were created in North Carolina waters to protect finfish during their early developmental stages subsequent research and data collections show that these nursery areas are not expansive enough and are not located in the best areas to adequately protect developing finfish and crustaceans; and

WHEREAS, North Carolina is the only state on the east coast that still allows shrimp trawls to operate in estuarine nursery areas, and its trawling regulations are the least restrictive on the entire gulf and eastern coasts. Hundreds of millions of juvenile fish continue to die each year from shrimp trawls, which significantly contributes to declining stocks. These species are critically important to the recreational and commercial fisheries of NC and provide an ecosystem function as forage and energy transfer; and

WHEREAS, after much research and discussion, NCWF petitioned the Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) to create new rules to expand nursery areas and better protect the developing finfish in North Carolina waters. The MFC accepted the Petition in February 2017, and the rule-making process has begun. The implementation of the Petition into Rule could transform the sustainability and growth of fish stocks in North Carolina's sounds and estuaries; and

WHEREAS, NCWF has worked with other conservation oriented groups to focus on the conservation and sustainability of fish stocks, and in pursuit of this goal, House Bill 867, Coastal Fisheries Conservation and Economic Development Act of 2017, has been developed and introduced into the North Carolina General Assembly and would require MFC to base its decisions on stock-specific scientific data and analysis.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the North Carolina Wildlife Federation Board of Directors, on September 9, 2017, in Raleigh, NC, affirms its total support and advocates using all of its means to create positive change and meaningful reform to promote positive change concerning the proper management of marine resources, and the associated fisheries, within North Carolina's jurisdiction; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the North Carolina Wildlife Federation urges the MFC to develop and implement Rules that address the intent of the NCWF Petition for Rule-Making and urges the NC General Assembly to pass legislation to comprehensively reform the process of protecting North Carolina's fish stocks.

Signed: _____

Dr. Bob Brown, Chairman, North Carolina Wildlife Federation

CC: The Honorable Roy Cooper, Governor, of North Carolina
The Honorable Phil Berger, President Pro Tempore
The Honorable Tim Moore, Speaker of the House
Michael Regan, Secretary, N.C. Department of Environmental Quality
Dr. Braxton Davis, Director, Divisions of N.C. Marine Fisheries and Coastal Resources