



Fish Dealer Report



License & Statistics Section, PO Box 769, Morehead City, NC 28557

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Trip Ticket Program Contacts

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Preliminary Results of the 2008 Commercial Catch

Commercial fishermen landed 71.2 million pounds of fish and shellfish in 2008, a 13-percent increase over 2007, according to harvest data collected by the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries Trip Ticket Program. The increase is a positive note for the commercial fishing industry after three years of declines in overall harvests. Dockside value of the 2008 harvest increased by \$4 million from 2007 figures.

The top five species harvested in 2008 were: blue crabs (32.9 million pounds), shrimp (9.4 million pounds), croaker (5.8 million pounds), southern flounder (2.6 million pounds) and summer flounder (2.4 million pounds).

Hard crabs rallied back in 2008 with a 57-percent increase over 2007. A good winter crab trawl season contributed to some of the increase. Peeler and soft shell crabs experienced another reduction in harvest from previous years. Cooler weather and higher salinity were possible factors in these reductions by causing crabs to move further inland and away from the usual crabbing spots. The season was hit or miss and crabbers just missed them.

Shrimp harvest remains steady with only a 1-percent drop from 2007. Despite the slight decrease, the 2008 harvest is 64 percent higher than the previous five-year average, marked in 2005 by one of the lowest harvests on record since the Trip Ticket Program began. Approximately 740 fewer shrimp trawl trips were made in 2008 which could also account for the slight drop in harvest. Fewer trips may be

attributed to high fuel prices in the summer and fall of 2008.

Results were not as positive for the yellowfin tuna fishery. Landings dropped 59 percent, from the 1.2 million pounds harvested in 2007 to just over 500,000 pounds in 2008. Lower yellowfin tuna landings coincide with a drop in trolling trips by 1,121 trips in 2008.

To make up for the lower abundance of yellowfin tuna, some fishermen sought grey tilefish. This fishery experienced a significant jump in harvest amounts since 2007. Commercial rod-n-reel gear was used to land over 200,000 pounds of grey tilefish in 2008, with bottom longline catches adding another 185,000 pounds to the harvest.

Fishermen had a good year for harvesting black drum and white perch. Reports of their abundance in 2008 supported the increased harvest levels of these species compared to 2007.

Hard clams fell about 10-percent below the 2007 harvest while oysters were up almost 7-percent. Looking at the landings averages from the previous five years, clam harvest shows an 18-percent drop while oysters show an increase of 23-percent.

For more information on the preliminary landings results for 2008, view the 2008 Annual Fisheries Bulletin. The bulletin also contains landings and value by species for 2004-2007 as well as a summary of the number of trips by major gears.

Fish Dealers Let Their Views Be Known

Results of a 2008 Fish Dealer Survey are in and dealers continue to give favorable reviews of the Trip Ticket Program. The survey is conducted every two years to poll dealers on their views on various aspects of the program. Trends in answers are tracked to see where improvements can be made to the program.

Twenty-two percent of 698 active dealers responded to the survey. Dealers responded very favorably to questions regarding instruction received about the program, the ease of filling out trip tickets, design of the tickets and the time it takes to fill them out.

Dealers also responded very favorably in the area of customer service. Dealers satisfied with the customer service received from the Trip Ticket Office in Morehead City, and with the time and accuracy in receiving trip ticket supplies ranged from 91-95 percent. A majority of dealers were also satisfied with the customer service received from the Commercial Port Agent assigned to their area.

The majority of dealers surveyed still oppose the addition of new fields on trip tickets to collect effort

data. Most dealers surveyed also oppose mandatory reporting of prices paid for seafood. When asked about mandatory electronic reporting of trip ticket data, 29-percent of dealers supported it, while 54-percent did not. Seventeen percent had no opinion on this topic.

Additional questions were asked to get dealers' views on electronic reporting. Half of the dealers surveyed have computers but prefer using paper trip tickets. Twenty-eight percent of dealers did not own a computer. Dealers do not want to pay any additional costs to be able to report electronically. Ten percent of dealers who have computers do not have Internet service. Only 3-percent of those are willing to purchase it to have the ability to report electronically.

Thirty-one percent of dealers already using the software to electronically report landings responded to the survey. They revealed a preference for electronic reporting over paper tickets and gave it high marks in instruction and technical support received and the ease of which to use it.

State Imposes Striped Bass Gear Restrictions

Division of Marine Fisheries Director Louis Daniel issued a proclamation in March that implements a 6.5-inch gill net maximum mesh size limit in the central and southern waters of the state. The purpose of the proclamation is to allow large, migrating female striped bass – some reported to be as large as 40 pounds – to escape capture and continue to upriver spawning grounds.

While striped bass stocks are considered recovered in the Atlantic Ocean and in the Albemarle Sound and its tributaries, striped bass stocks are still depleted in central and southern waters of the state that run from Roanoke Marshes to the South Carolina state line.

The division has a joint fishery management plan with the Wildlife Resources Commission aimed at trying to rebuild a depleted stock. Large female fish are considered to be the most productive spawners. There are signs these fish are migrating up the rivers, but they also need to be able to spawn. Researchers estimate that a 16-year-old female striped bass (about 42 pounds) has the potential to produce 28



times the number of eggs that a 3-year-old female striped bass (about 4 pounds) can produce.

Daniel had issued a proclamation to increase from five to seven the numbers of striped bass commercial fishermen were allowed to retain in the central and southern waters of the state, with no mesh limit. The intent was to provide fishermen the opportunity to retain incidental catches of striped bass when fishing for shad and flounder. Instead, a few fishermen began targeting the larger brood stock striped bass with 8-inch mesh gillnets, typically used for ocean fishing.

The proclamation does not impact recreational fishing, however, Daniel also advises recreational fishermen to not target or retain these larger fish. The division is monitoring recreational harvests and further protective measures will be adopted, if necessary.

The N.C. Estuarine Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan can be found on the DMF Web site at <http://www.ncfisheries.net/download/>

Commercial License Fees Support Vital Marine Fisheries Functions

An annual ritual for commercial fishermen in North Carolina, as certain as hull maintenance or mullets in the fall, is the purchase of licenses and issuance of permits from the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries.

In fiscal year 2008 the division issued more than 23,000 licenses and permits, including Standard Commercial Fishing Licenses, Recreational Commercial Gear Licenses, and Fish Dealer Permits. The license fees collected from these sales play an important role in the division's mission of ensuring sustainable fisheries. One vital division operation made possible by license fees is the Trip Ticket Program. This program, which marked its 15-year anniversary in January, requires fish dealers to complete a form for each transaction with a fisherman. It was patterned after a program developed in Florida, and since its inception, the North Carolina and Florida programs have served as models and guides for other states along the Atlantic Coast.

Data provided by trip tickets are an important benefit of the use of money collected in license sales. The program helps the division to better manage the fisheries in the state. The data allow fisheries authorities to know what are being caught and how much, the types of gear fishermen are using and where they are fishing. The data also help gauge the effort required to catch various species.

Data collected through the Trip Ticket Program are also valuable in quota management. The task of monitoring quotas that have a state-by-state allocation helps protect the state's fishermen. Because there is no lag time in receiving the data, at the end of the day the division knows where they stand in quotas.

Another benefit of the Trip Ticket Program is the use of its data to justify compensation awarded to fishermen. In the past, trip ticket data have been used for hurricane relief programs. Fishermen were required to demonstrate a loss of fishing income due to hurricanes and the only way to do that was to look at their landings data, the data coming in on trip tickets.

When the federal government was providing economic assistance to the shrimp and crab industries, the Trip Ticket Program was used to see who commercially harvested shrimp and crabs to determine how they qualified for those monies.

Trip ticket data have been a benefit in arguing for more federal quota. It's been a tool to use for estab-

lishing quotas and confirming that the state is not exceeding quotas. However, while the Trip Ticket Program plays a critical role in the division's effort to fulfill its mission, it would be an impossible task without the dedicated staff members whose salaries are funded by license sales. License receipts of \$1.9 million are scheduled for use in the current budget year by the following sections or projects: Recreational Commercial Gear Program, 4 percent; Resource Enhancement and Administrative Services, 4 percent; License Administration, 9 percent; Trip Ticket Program, 17 percent; Information Technology, 17 percent; and Marine Patrol, 49 percent.

Information Technology staff provide computer support for many division functions. They play a crucial role in license sales by assuring the smooth operation of software and other functions of the division's centralized database for landings and license information. This database, known as the Fisheries Information Network, or FIN, was developed as part of the restructuring of licenses under the Fisheries Reform Act of 1997. The FIN system serves as the archive where trip ticket data are stored.

The Marine Patrol is the largest recipient of funding from license sales. The monies the Marine Patrol receives are used to help pay salaries of officers and dispatchers and other support staff. License funds also contribute to paying operational costs such as fuel and equipment expenses. These funds occasionally make possible the purchase of a big ticket item like the 2004 Cessna 182 aircraft operated by Marine Patrol's pilots.

Aircraft such as the Cessna are vital to the patrol's efforts, given the 2.5 million acres of water and 4,000 miles of coastline it is tasked with covering. While aircraft operations can be expensive, they ultimately make enforcement work more efficient. With the Cessna, one pilot can cover one of the three districts in an hour. He can notify officers and let them know where there is fishing or other activities so they can coordinate enforcement efforts. The result is savings in time and expense.

Adapted from an article by Richard Davis, Fish Eye News. Fish Eye News is a Web-based newsletter issued by the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries Public Affairs Section. The intent of Fish Eye News is to draw attention to issues affecting marine fisheries in North Carolina and to promote a better understanding of agency functions. Visit www.ncfisheries.net/fisheye/ for the latest edition.

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Conversion Project Is Underway

The Trip Ticket Program has recently started a project to validate many of the conversion factors it uses to determine the whole weights of seafood brought to the docks. Conversion factors are used to convert landed or processed weight into whole weight. Whole weights are calculated using conversion factors that vary between fish species and products. The program's fisheries statistics are presented as whole weight. Also, since most fish quotas are based upon whole weight, conversion factors are a fundamental tool in the management process.

The project started in December 2008 and so far samples of beeliners, various groupers, king mackerel, clams and oysters have been collected. In addition to validating the existing conversion factors the Trip Ticket Program uses, data from the project will be used to update any that have changed.

Staff are currently looking to collect more samples of whole fish and shellfish and are interested in collecting whole specimens of oceanic species, such as sharks, tunas, swordfish, groupers, snappers, and monkfish. If you are interested in participating in this project please call Alan Bianchi, Statistics Coordinator at (252) 808-8092.

MFC Meeting Schedule

The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries is in the process of rescheduling a meeting of the Marine Fisheries Commission that had been slated for May 27-29 in Kitty Hawk. A date, time and place will be announced as soon as plans are finalized. Updates on rescheduled meetings will be e-mailed or faxed to those who have requested meeting notices. They also will be posted on the division Website at <http://www.ncfisheries.net/mfc/mtgsch.htm>.

Other Business Meetings Tentatively Scheduled for 2009:

September 23-25: Clamdigger Inn, Pine Knoll Shores
December 2-4: Clamdigger Inn, Pine Knoll Shores

License Sales to Date

2008-2009 Licenses Sold to Date (as of 4/23/09):

Standard Commercial Fishing License	5,385
Retired Standard Commercial Fishing License (RSCFL)	941
Commercial Fishing Vessel Registration (CFVR)	8,904
NC Resident Shellfish License without SCFL	2,101
Menhaden License for Non-Resident without SCFL	10
License to Land Flounder from Atlantic Ocean	140
Land or Sell License	139
Fish Dealer License	764
Ocean Pier License	20
Spotter Plane License	9
Recreational Fishing Tournament License	18
Recreational Commercial Gear License (RCGL)	5,282
Total	23,713

Reporting Codes Change

The Trip Ticket Program recently made a change to the species codes in the software used for electronic reporting of trip ticket data.

The codes for *unclassified porgies* and *unclassified sharks* were removed to comply with a request from the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Dealers are asked to be as specific as possible in identifying porgy and shark species and record them under their corresponding species code already in the software.

If you have any questions regarding this change, contact Grace Kemp at (252) 808-8101.

Don't Forget! Current fish dealer and commercial fishing licenses expire June 30, 2009.

The Division of Marine Fisheries is dedicated to ensuring sustainable marine and estuarine fisheries and habitats for the benefit of the people of North Carolina.