



## N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

Release: Immediate  
Date: Aug. 13, 2007

Contact: Patricia Smith  
Phone: (252) 726-7021

### FISHERIES COMMEMORATES DECADE OF REFORM

**MOREHEAD CITY** – Tuesday marks the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Fisheries Reform Act and the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries is sounding off about its successes in meeting the mandates of the law.

Signed Aug. 14, 2007, by then Gov. James B. Hunt, the act completely changed the way North Carolina approaches coastal fisheries management.

It legally recognized the importance of balancing the interests of both commercial and recreational fishermen with the need to protect the marine resource for the benefit of all. It also tied the protection of marine fisheries with the conservation and enhancement of coastal habitat.

“The Fisheries Reform Act was the guiding factor that helped the Division of Marine Fisheries become one of the best marine fisheries agencies in the nation,” said Secretary William G. Ross Jr. of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. “It is a crucial law that led the state to make ecosystem management a central theme in our conservation strategy. It also required a cooperative approach to conservation that we see at work today in the form of the state’s Coastal Habitation Protection Plan.”

“Without this impetus of state law and subsequent funding, the division would not have been able to move forward as it has,” said DMF Director Louis Daniel.

One of the requirements of the act was that DMF redesign its commercial fishing license system, capping the total number of Standard Commercial Fishing Licenses and Retired Standard Commercial Fishing Licenses that can be issued at 8,896. The law also required this new licensing system to distinguish between commercial fishermen who sell their catch and those who fish with commercial fishing gear for recreational purposes. The new licensing system was implemented on July 1, 1999. The cap on commercial fishing licenses has never been met.

The act also expanded the data collected with an existing Trip Ticket Program, allowing DMF to cross-reference landings reports, commercial fishing licenses and commercial vessel registrations to track when, what and where fishermen were catching seafood and what gear they were using, as well. This detailed tracking ability has provided vital information used in fisheries management decisions. An unforeseen benefit of this change has been the use of the detailed data in helping fishermen gain financial assistance through Hurricane Floyd grants and shrimp and blue crab economic assistance programs.

Another provision of the law created a smaller, more balanced marine fisheries commission. It reduced the number of members from 17 to nine with three seats reserved for persons representing commercial fishing, three representing recreational fishing, one scientist and two at-large seats.

The act also directed DMF to prepare draft fishery management plans to be adopted by the Marine Fisheries Commission for all commercially and recreationally important marine species in North Carolina. And it set up an advisory committee process through which these plans were to be adopted by the Marine Fisheries Commission.

-- more --

Four regional advisory committees were set up to review region specific issues for the northeast, central and southern coastal areas and inland areas of the state. Four standing advisory committees were set up to review issues pertaining to finfish, shellfish, crustaceans and habitat and water quality.

The result was fishery management plans adopted only after a comprehensive and very public review of the fishery that took into account the species' life history, stock status and commercial, recreational, economical and sociological issues.

To date, DMF has completed or revised nine fishery management plans covering numerous species.

Lastly, the act required the development and adoption of a Coastal Habitat Protection Plan, a multi-agency ecosystem management plan for coastal fish habitats. The plan was developed by agencies within the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources and adopted by the Marine Fisheries Commission, the Coastal Resources Commission and the Environmental Management Commission in December 2004. The three commissions and DENR subsequently approved integrated implementation plans specifying more than 100 specific actions to be taken. Many of these actions have been put into place and new implementation plans are ongoing.

So far, 18 new permanent state funded positions have been established in DENR agencies to implement various CHPP implementation actions, such as establishing oyster sanctuaries in Pamlico Sound, monitoring compliance with conditions of Coastal Area Management Act permits, and closing swine farm waste facilities in the 100-year flood plain.

The CHPP was the first of its kind and is being used as a blueprint for other ecosystem management plans on the state and national level.

###