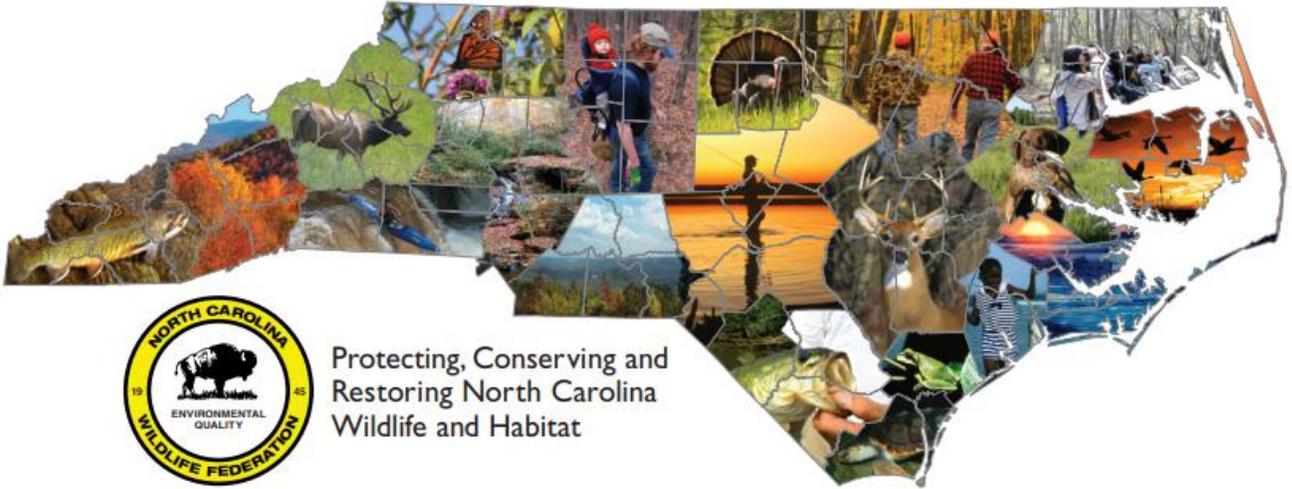


NORTH CAROLINA WILDLIFE FEDERATION



House Bill 486 (Coastal Fishing License Reform)

*a case for supporting common sense solutions
for sustainable marine resource conservation*

Coastal Fishing License Reforms (H 486): Facts and Benefits

This legislation is needed to correct several provisions to the commercial and recreational fishing license statutes that have resulted in insufficient and incomplete harvest records over the years, which have hampered the development of sound management measures based upon accurate harvest statistics. The bill would also establish minimum levels of commercial fishing activity for eligibility to qualify for a commercial fishing license to address over capacity of licenses and gear, which hampers collection of statistical data on harvest and results in overfishing pressure. The objective is to develop a core cadre of experienced and skillful commercial fishermen who will benefit from expanded opportunities to harvest commercial fisheries and who will realize more income from reduction of competition from license holders who do not depend upon commercial fishing for their basic subsistence. Here are a summary of the major provisions of H 486.

SECTION 1.1.

- (d1)- limits a person to no more than **one commercial fishing license**. No current restriction on the number of licenses exists.
- (e)- **raises fee** for a Standard Commercial Fishing License (SCFL) from \$400 to \$800. The reciprocity provision for non-resident remains with a floor of \$800. This raise will be justified by the fewer SCFLs issued under the new eligibility rules and by the expanded harvest opportunities for SCFL holders provided in the bill.
- (f)- **restricts the assignment** of SCFLs to members of the immediate family, which eliminates a source of commercialization of the SCFL through indiscriminate assignment of license privileges for monetary charges or other considerations.
- (g)- **restricts transfer of SCFLs** only to a member of the licensee's immediate family and eliminates the transfer to a third party purchaser of the commercial fishing vessel.
- (i1)- **requires reporting of fish** taken pursuant to a SCFL that are not sold to a licensed fish dealer but are kept for personal use or donation to a charitable cause, which has been a serious omission of fish harvest information in the past.
- (j) and (k)- **establishes a Heritage SCFL** whereby a SCFL holder may exchange the license for the Heritage license upon payment of \$100 per year for a period of up to ten years during which time the Heritage license can be converted back to a SCFL without meeting the eligibility requirements for a period.
- GS 113-168.3(b)- **raises license fee** for resident RSCFL from \$200 to \$400 and from \$260 to \$520 for non-residents.
- GS 113-168.3B. **Establishes a Crew License** at a resident fee of \$100 per year, \$130 per year for non-residents. After three years using this license the individual is eligible to apply for the SCFL without regard for the eligibility requirements of landings or trip tickets.
- GS 113-168.4(c)- Establishes the **requirement for fishing tournaments** to record and report the fish caught to the Division of Marine Fisheries for completeness of harvest information.

SECTION 1.1.(b)

- **Establishes a minimum level of participation for eligibility for a SCFL** to be either landing 1,000 pounds of seafood products or 15 trip tickets in two of the previous five years.

SECTION 1.2.

- Directs the Marine Fisheries Commission and the Division of Marine Fisheries to develop a plan to **expand opportunities to access and harvest commercial fisheries.**

SECTION 2.1(a).

- Directs MFC to revise the eligibility rules for the pool of SCFLs regarding issuance and availability of these licenses.
- Reserves 100 SCFLs from the eligibility pool to be available for an **apprenticeship program** whereby a person graduating from a commercial fishing program at a NC Community College is eligible for issuance of a SCFL without regard for the regular eligibility requirements.

SECTION 3.1.(a).

- **Repeals** the Recreational Commercial Gear License. The popularity and usefulness of this license has diminished since its inception twenty years ago due to restrictive creel limits. Licenses sold declined from 7,629 in 2000 to 2,445 in 2018 (a 67% reduction in 18 years.) In addition, the fish taken under this license are not reported in an accurate manner and are thus not available for inclusion in management decisions related to harvest. Bycatch under this license is inordinately high, especially with gill nets and trawls, and should be eliminated.

SECTION 3.2(a).

- **Expands authority** under the Coastal Recreation Fishing License to use bait seines and up to five crab pots for recreational purposes.

SECTION 4.1.(a).

- **Adjusts Coastal Recreational Fishing License fees** to be equal to fees charged by the Wildlife Resources Commission for comparable fishing privileges to fish in inland waters. These fees have been different since 2014. Over a period of three full license years, the difference has resulted in a discrepancy in revenue of **\$5,963,564**. The average loss in revenue for marine fisheries has been about \$2 million per year.

Bottom Line:

Protects active commercial fishermen who depend upon commercial fishing for their livelihood; vastly improves data collection; removes destructive and bycatch prone gear from the hands of recreational fishermen; creates an apprenticeship program and a Crew License; provides for a Heritage License; reduces an overcapacity in participation and gear that is causing overfishing; eliminates multiple commercial fishing licenses, and restricts transfers and assignments of commercial licenses to immediate family; sets equity in recreational license fees and raises \$2 million in annual revenue for marine fisheries; and defines reasonable participation levels to qualify for SCFL.