

N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rules Effective April 1, 2026
Form 0300 Notice of Text (Attachment)
7. Explain Reason for Proposed Rule(s):

Permits

15A NCAC 03I .0101 DEFINITIONS

Proposed amendments broaden the definition of "educational institution" to better align with the original purpose of the Scientific and Educational Activity Permit and Coastal Recreational Fishing License Exemption Permit. Additional proposed amendments add a definition of "quota monitoring log" in support of requirements for dealer permits for monitoring fisheries under a quota or allocation, and a definition of "permittee" to address the ubiquitous and interchangeable use of "permittee" and "permit holder" (which is already defined) throughout N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission rules.

15A NCAC 03I .0114 RECORDKEEPING REQUIREMENTS

Proposed amendments set the same recordkeeping requirements for quota monitoring logs as for trip tickets for licensed fish dealers but apply only to dealers holding a permit for monitoring fisheries under a quota or allocation. Additional proposed amendments clarify a fish dealer is required to submit a trip ticket for fish not sold consistent with N.C. law and MFC rules for commercial harvest reporting requirements.

15A NCAC 03O .0501 PROCEDURES AND REQUIREMENTS TO OBTAIN PERMITS

Proposed amendments remove the requirement for a permit application signature to be notarized, instead requiring the initial permit general condition form to be notarized. This is a more appropriate time in the permit issuance process to verify a permittee's identity. Additional proposed amendments clarify existing requirements for holders of an Estuarine Gill Net Permit to hold a valid Recreational Commercial Gear License, Standard Commercial Fishing License, or Retired Standard Commercial Fishing License. Proposed amendments also add a link to the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries website to access permit applications and related information.

15A NCAC 03O .0502 GENERAL PERMIT CONDITIONS

Proposed amendments relocate from proclamation to rule the permit condition that makes it unlawful to refuse to allow N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) employees to obtain data for the conservation and management of marine and estuarine resources, and data for the protection of public health related to the public health programs that fall under the authority of the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission. These requirements are in five other N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission rules, so the proposed amendments would bring consistency across rules and add clarity for regulated stakeholders.

15A NCAC 03O .0503 PERMIT CONDITIONS; SPECIFIC

Proposed amendments address seven items. First, proposed amendments relocate four existing permits from proclamation into rule: Estuarine Gill Net Permit, Estuarine Flounder Dealer Permit, Shellfish Lease Restoration Permit, and Shellfish Relocation Permit to aid in the clarity of existing requirements for the public. Relocating the permit requirements in rule has no real impact on holders of the permits as the application process, permit conditions, and reporting requirements would not change. Second, proposed amendments require any seafood dealer that reports trip tickets electronically be required to report quota monitoring logs electronically, improving the timeliness and accuracy of reporting. Third, proposed amendments include email as a way to satisfy the call-in requirements for Scientific and Educational Activity Permits and Permits for Weekend Trawling for Live Shrimp, making it easier for regulated stakeholders to forward required information to the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries and improving the tracking of activity by the Division. Fourth, proposed amendments clarify requirements for a Coastal Recreational Fishing License Exemption Permit to reflect proposed changes to another rule that broadens the definition of "educational institution", to better align with the original purpose of the permit. Fifth, proposed amendments add a link to the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries website to access information about which Division offices issue striped bass tags for permitted dealers. Sixth, management for horseshoe crabs falls under the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Horseshoe Crab, which establishes state-by-state quotas in all Atlantic states for horseshoe crabs harvested for bait and the requirement to collect information on the use of horseshoe crabs for biomedical purposes. The Horseshoe Crab Biomedical Use Permit was designed to collect that information but is proposed for repeal because the industry has not shown the anticipated

growth since its inception over 25 years ago. Eliminating the permit would not disallow use of horseshoe crabs for biomedical purposes in North Carolina, but access to horseshoe crabs would be limited to the open commercial bait harvest season and counted towards the annual bait quota to maintain compliance with the Interstate Fishery Management Plan. Lastly, proposed amendments add nongovernmental conservation organizations as entities eligible for a Scientific or Educational Activity Permit that exempts the holder from N.C. license, rule, proclamation, or statutory requirements for approved scientific, educational, or conservation activities, pursuant to S.L. 2015-241, s. 14.10A.

Franchises and Shellfish Leases

15A NCAC 03I .0101 DEFINITIONS

Proposed amendments clarify the existing definition of "holder" to align occurrences of "franchise holder" throughout N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission rules with shellfish franchises recognized pursuant to N.C.G.S. § 113-206.

15A NCAC 03O .0201 STANDARDS AND REQUIREMENTS FOR SHELLFISH LEASES AND FRANCHISES

Proposed amendments include the removal of franchises from all shellfish production requirements, as the production requirements are grounds for termination of a leasehold only. Shellfish franchises recognized under N.C.G.S. § 113-206 are perpetual. The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries has understood that because franchises are perpetual, the Division does not have the authority to terminate franchises and thus subjecting a franchise to production requirements would have no consequence. The N.C. General Assembly codified this understanding with the passage of Session Law 2024-32, Section 5.(a), which removed franchises from the production requirements of Session Law 2019-37, Section 3. The N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission's authority over private and protected deeded rights of a shellfish franchise is limited to subjects such as proper marking requirements and permitting of the aquaculture activities occurring on a franchise. Additional amendments in paragraphs (d) through (g) clarify production requirements for shellfish leases based on the date a shellfish lease was granted or last renewed. Additional amendments to paragraphs (a) and (i) clarify who determines eligibility for additional shellfish lease acreage, the time at which the determination of eligibility for additional acreage occurs, what is considered additional shellfish lease acreage, and what is considered acres under a shellfish lease.

15A NCAC 03O .0207 SHELLFISH LEASE AND FRANCHISE PRODUCTION REPORTS

Proposed amendments remove franchises from production report requirements. Franchises are perpetual and not subject to termination, and compliant production reports relate to procedures for termination.

15A NCAC 03O .0208 TERMINATION PROCEDURES FOR SHELLFISH LEASES AND FRANCHISES

Proposed amendments align the rule with Session Law 2024-32, Section 5.(a), by eliminating references to franchises.

15A NCAC 03O .0210 STANDARDS AND REQUIREMENTS FOR FRANCHISES

Proposed amendments clarify the proper activation of a shellfish franchise enables the franchise to be permitted, remove the time limit of 30 days following activation, and remove the method for evaluating production of a franchise, as franchises are perpetual and not subject to termination.