Preliminary Matters

November 2026 Quarterly Business Meeting

Documents

Meeting Agenda

Draft August 2026 Meeting Minutes

Marine Fisheries Commission Business Meeting
AGENDA

Holiday Inn Resort Lumina; Wrightsville Beach, NC
November 18, 2026

N.C.G.S. 138A-15(e) mandates at the beginning of any meeting of a board, the chair shall remind all members of their duty to avoid conflicts of interest under Chapter 138. The chair also shall inquire as to whether there is any known conflict of interest with respect to any matters coming before the board at that time.

N.C.G.S. 143B-289.54.(g)(2) states a member of the Marine Fisheries Commission shall not vote on any issue before the Commission that would have a "significant and predictable effect" on the member's financial interest. For purposes of this subdivision, "significant and predictable effect" means there is or may be a close causal link between the decision of the Commission and an expected disproportionate financial benefit to the member that is shared only by a minority of persons within the same industry sector or gear group. A member of the Commission shall also abstain from voting on any petition submitted by an advocacy group of which the member is an officer or sits as a member of the advocacy group's board of directors. A member of the Commission shall not use the member's official position as a member of the Commission to secure any special privilege or exemption of substantial value for any person. No member of the Commission shall, by the member's conduct, create an appearance that any person could improperly influence the member in the performance of the member's official duties.

Commissioners having questions about a conflict of interest or appearance of conflict should consult with counsel to the Marine Fisheries Commission or the secretary's ethics liaison. Upon discovering a conflict, the commissioner should inform the chair of the commission in accordance with N.C.G.S. 138A-15(e).

Wednesday, November 18, 2026

9:00 a.m. Public Comment Period

10:30 a.m. Preliminary Matters
- Commission Call to Order* – *Sammy Corbett, Chairman*
- Moment of Silence and Pledge of Allegiance
- Conflict of Interest Reminder
- Roll Call
- **Approval of Meeting Minutes ****

10:45 a.m. Chairman's Report
- Letters and Online Comments
- Ethics Training and Statement of Economic Interest Reminder
- 2027 Meeting Schedule

11:00 a.m. Committee Reports
- MFC Nominating Committee – *Chris Batsavage*
  - **Vote on slate of nominees for the at-large seat for the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council ****
  - **Vote on slate of nominees for the at-large seat for the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council ****

11:30 a.m. Director's Report – *Jonathan Howell*
- Rule Suspensions – *Jason Rock*

12:30 p.m. Lunch

**** Times indicated are merely for guidance. The commission will proceed through the agenda until completed.***
*****Probable Action Items***

1:30 p.m. Coastal Habitat Protection Plan 2026 Amendment – *Charlie Deaton*

- **Vote to send draft plan out for public and advisory committee review ****

2:00 p.m. Results of the Kingfishes FMP Scoping Period – *Matthew Doster, Dan Zapf*

- **Vote on approval of Goal and Objectives for Kingfishes FMP Amendment 1 ****

2:30 p.m. Rulemaking – *Catherine Blum*

- 2026-2027 Rulemaking Cycle
  - **Receive public comments and vote on final approval to adopt 15A NCAC 03M .0524 for Atlantic Bonito Management ****

3:00 p.m. Issues from Commissioners

3:30 p.m. Meeting Assignments and Preview of Agenda Items for Next Meeting – *TBD, MFC Coordinator*

3:45 p.m. Adjourn

**** Times indicated are merely for guidance. The commission will proceed through the agenda until completed.***
*****Probable Action Items***

Marine Fisheries Commission Business Meeting Minutes

DRAFT

DoubleTree Midtown

Raleigh, North Carolina

August 19-20, 2026

The Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) held a business meeting August 19-20, 2026, at the DoubleTree Midtown in Raleigh, North Carolina. In addition to the public comment sessions, members of the public submitted public comment online or via U.S. mail. The written comments, briefing materials, presentations, and full audio from this meeting are available here.

Actions and motions from the business meeting are listed in **bold** type.

BUSINESS MEETING

August 19, 2026

Preliminary Matters

Chairman Corbett called the August 2026 business meeting to order.

Chairman Corbett began the meeting with a moment of silence, followed by the pledge of allegiance.

Next, Chairman Corbett reminded all commissioners of N.C. General Statute § 138A-15(e), which mandates at the beginning of any meeting of a board, the Chair shall remind all members of their duty to avoid conflicts of interest under Chapter 138. The Chair also shall inquire as to whether there is any known conflict of interest with respect to any matters coming before the board at that time. There were no stated conflicts of interest from any commissioner.

The following MFC members were in attendance: Mike Blanton, Willie Closs, Sarah Gardner, Alfred Hobgood, John Mallette, Doug Rader, Tom Roller, William Service, and Sammy Corbett – Chairman.

Chairman Corbett asked for any corrections, additions or deletions that need to be made to the May 2026 MFC Quarterly Business Meeting minutes.

Motion by Commissioner Roller to approve the May 2026 business meeting minutes.

Second by Commissioner Rader.

Motion passed unanimously.

View the video recording of the motion and surrounding discussion

Chairman's Report

Letters and Online Comments

Chairman Corbett referred commissioners to letters and comments provided in the briefing materials.

Ethics Training and Statement of Economic Interest Reminder

Chairman Corbett reminded commissioners to work with MFC Liaison Jesse Bissette to stay up to date on their ethics training and Statement of Economic Interest.

Election of Vice Chair

Chairman Corbett asked for nominations for the Marine Fisheries Commission Vice Chair.

Commissioner Blanton nominates Commissioner Gardner for Marine Fisheries Commission Vice Chair.

Second by Commissioner Mallette.

Motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Gardner elected as Marine Fisheries Commission Vice Chair.

View the video recording of the Chairman's Report and surrounding discussion

Red Snapper EFP Update

Interim Director Michael Loeffler introduced himself to the Commission and then turned the floor over to DMF Assistant to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAMFC) Trish Murphey for an update on the Red Snapper Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP)

Murphey provided an update on the status of North Carolina's EFP application. Following the Commission's May meeting, when the Commission was informed that North Carolina had been awarded an EFP, a lawsuit resulted in an injunction preventing implementation of the permit. North Carolina subsequently requested that its EFP be withdrawn, which NOAA approved.

Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina resubmitted EFP applications addressing the court's concerns and including proposed harvest limits. North Carolina elected not to resubmit an application for the 2026 season and instead plans to focus on a potential EFP for the 2027

season. North Carolina does not currently hold an EFP for the 2026 season. NOAA anticipates that the federal recreational red snapper season will likely occur in October.

Chairman Corbett opened the floor for questions and comments regarding the Red Snapper EFP.

View the video recording of the verbal presentation and surrounding discussion

Director's Report

Interim Director Michael Loeffler provided several Division updates. He announced Barbie Byrd as Deputy Director of Science and Management. The additional deputy director position will allow for greater focus on the Division's science and management responsibilities.

Loeffler provided an update on the recent contested case hearing regarding a denied shellfish water column lease. Shellfish leasing staff anticipate receiving a ruling later this fall. He also notes that the Division has received the judge's ruling related to the ongoing CCA lawsuit and is currently reviewing the decision. As the litigation remains ongoing, the Division will not make further statements at this time.

The shellfish lease moratorium in Bogue Sound expired July 1, allowing new shellfish lease applications in the area between the Morehead City Port and Emerald Isle bridge. The Division has received six applications sine the moratorium expired.

Loeffler provided budget and legislative updates, noting the General Assembly approved a 3% salary increase for state employees, with an additional increase for law enforcement. A one-time bonus of either $1,700 or $1,000 was also approved, depending on employee salary. Additionally, the budget includes funding for nine new Marine Patrol Officer positions.

Loeffler recognized the Division's IT staff for their work incorporating artificial intelligence (AI) into the Division's biological database. The project has utilized AI to modernize the biological database and reduce manual data entry resulting in an estimated $300,000 in state savings and years of reduced manual work. The team received the 2026 AI 50 State Project Award and the 2026 Governor's Award for Excellence in Efficiency and Innovation. Loeffler recognized the team members involved in these efforts: Stephanie McInerny, Chris Capoccia, Becky Chapman, Semir Badic, and Scott Smith.

Lastly, Loeffler recognized several recently retired DMF employees and thanked them for their service and contributions to the Division, including former Director Kathy Rawls, Sergeant Brian Long, Pilot Mark Daniels, Officer Bill Register, Maintenance Supervisor Steve Chapman, and Environmental Technician Steve Trowell.

View the video recording of the Director's Report and surrounding discussion

Fishery Management Plan Updates

DMF Fishery Management Plan Coordinators Jeff Dobbs and Dan Zapf gave a presentation on the implementation of adopted FMPs and upcoming FMPs.

After the presentation, Chairman Corbett opened the floor to commissioners for comments and questions.

View the video recording of the presentation and surrounding discussion

Fishery Management Plan Annual Review

DMF Biologists Charlton Godwin and Jeff Dobbs gave a presentation on the FMP Annual Review.

After the presentation, Chairman Corbett opened the floor to commissioners for comments and questions.

View the video recording of the presentation and surrounding discussion

Review of Kingfishes Stock Complex Data

DMF Biologists Matt Doster, Claire Pelletier, and Matt Zink gave a presentation on the Kingfishes Stock Complex Data.

After the presentation, Chairman Corbett opened the floor to commissioners for comments and questions.

View the video recording of the presentation and surrounding discussion

Public Comment Period

Chairman Sammy Corbett held a public comment session that began at 6:00 p.m. The following members of the public provided comment to the commission: Mary Ellon Ballance, Bob Woodard, Marc Boettger. With no one else wishing to speak, Chairman Corbett ended the public comment period at 6:11p.m.

View the video recording of the August 19, 2026, 6:00 p.m. public comment session

August 20, 2025

Public Comment Period

Chairman Sammy Corbett held a public comment session that began at 9:00 a.m. The following members of the public provided comment to the commission: Stuart Creighton.

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With no one else wishing to speak, Chairman Corbett ended the public comment period at 9:04 a.m.

View the video recording of the August 20,2026, 9:00 a.m. public comment session

DWR Water Quality & the Connection to Division of Marine Fisheries

DWR Deputy Directors Michael Pjetraj and Julie Grzyb and Water Planning Section Chief Karen Higgins gave a presentation on North Carolina's water quality management.

After the presentation, Chairman Corbett opened the floor to commissioners for comments and questions.

View the video recording of the presentation and surrounding discussion

Comments from DEQ Secretary

DEQ Secretary Reid Wilson provided comments to the Commission and updates on current Department initiatives. He thanked the Commissioners for their time, service, and contributions to the public, as well as DEQ staff for their continued work.

Wilson recognized Marine Patrol's response to Hurricane Helene, specifically their efforts to conduct swiftwater rescues and transportation and distribution of supplies to affected communities. He reported that Governor Stein recently announced approximately $1 billion in DEQ funding for Helene recovery. While the funds have been awarded, they have not yet been spent. Much of the funding is directed toward repairing and strengthening damaged water infrastructure, with additional funding dedicated to debris removal. Other recovery efforts have included inspections of more than 400 dams, mapping approximately 4,000 landslides, and funding 24 emergency microgrids to be installed in affected communities. Wilson notes that the state is approaching the two-year anniversary of the storm and recognized both the extent of the devastation and the continued efforts of affected communities to rebuild.

Wilson provided an update on statewide flood resilience initiatives. DEQ has developed flood resilience blueprints for six river basins, providing an online resource for local governments to identify areas most vulnerable to flooding and evaluate potential projects to reduce future impacts. Through the program, DEQ has awarded $44 million to 83 projects across the six river basins. Revised floodplain maps have also been published to reflect recent flooding conditions. Additionally, DEQ is developing action strategies for each river basin in collaboration with local communities. Strategies have been issued for the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico river basins, with the Lumber river basin strategy scheduled for release followed by the White Oak, Cape Fear, and French Broad river basins in the coming months. Wilson also highlighted the Resilient Coastal Communities Program, which works

with local governments to identify projects that address coastal flooding and improve community resilience. To date, the program has identified 89 projects totaling approximately $16 million.

Regarding PFAS, Secretary Wilson discussed a recently announced settlement involving the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Justice, and Chemours. The settlement affects Chemours facilities in North Carolina, New Jersy, and West Virginia. Wilson expressed concerns that North Carolina was not consulted during settlement negotiations and stated that the agreement provides little benefit to the state. He noted that the pollution reduction requirements included for New Jersey and West Virginia have largely already been addressed in North Carolina through a consent order established approximately seven years ago. The settlement sets aside $90 million over 15 years for projects, with approximately $2 million allocated annually to each state, although the funding is not guaranteed. Wilson stated that the settlement does not adequately address North Carolina's needs. Governor Stein, the Attorney General, and Secretary Wilson submitted joint comments to the EPA, DOJ, and the court urging rejection of the settlement.

Wilson discussed findings from the UNC Collaboratory regarding PFAS contamination at rural fire departments across the state. Testing identified elevated PFAS levels at numerous fire stations, potentially associated with firefighting equipment and contamination in surrounding communities. Additional testing was conducted at nearby residences. The Environmental Management Commission (EMC) has issued draft rules addressing PFAS and other chemicals through a Monitoring and Minimization Rule. The proposed rules would require monitoring of discharges into state waters and the development of plans to reduce those discharges but would not establish specific pollution reduction requirements. Wilson stated that DEQ supports pollution reductions at the source and noted that the EMC has received numerous public comments, with most encouraging the inclusion of measurable pollution reduction requirements.

The Secretary provided an update on DEQ's permitting transformation initiative, which is focused on improving the permitting process. Approximately 60% of the Department's permits have been updated as part of the effort.

Wilson reported that the recently approved state budget provides several additional resources and funding opportunities for DEQ. Key investments include additional positions and laboratory support for PFAS monitoring, water infrastructure improvements, and alternative water sources for households affected by contamination. The budget also includes funding for Hurricane Helene dam recovery projects, flood resilience initiatives, the Resilient Coastal Communities Program, coastal reserve management, and the

Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership. Additional funding was allocated for air quality initiatives and DEQ's permitting transformation project. Marine Patrol will also receive funding for nine additional officer positions. Wilson characterized the budget as providing several positive investments and additional resources for the Department.

Wilson provided an update on the ongoing CCA lawsuit, noting that the judge ruled against the state. DEQ is reviewing the decision an consulting with the DOJ regarding next steps.

Secretary Wilson thanked Interim Director Michael Loeffler for stepping into the leadership role and reported that the process of interviewing candidates for the permanent DMF Director position is ongoing.

Wilson also discussed the UNC Collaboratory report, describing it as a fair and balanced assessment. He noted that elements of the report may be incorporated into the state's response to the court. The Coastal Habitat Protection Plan (CHPP) was identified in the report as a valuable tool that could benefit from stronger implementation measures. Wilson emphasized the importance of the CHPP in protecting healthy habitats and improving water quality.

Lastly, Wilson noted that DEQ is developing videos featuring employee interviews to highlight the work conducted across the Division of Marine Fisheries, including programs and responsibilities that may be less familiar to the public.

Chairman Corbett opened the floor to commissioners for comments and questions.

View the video recording the DEQ Secretary's comments and surrounding discussion

Coastal Habitat Protection Plan

DMF Biologists Charlie Deaton, Derek Detweiler, and Jaselyn Owens gave a presentation on the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan 2026 Amendment draft.

After the presentation, Chairman Corbett opened the floor to commissioners for comments and questions.

View the video recording of the presentation and surrounding discussion

Standard Commercial Fishing License Eligibility Report

Marine Patrol Captain Garland Yopp, the Standard Commercial Fishing License (SCFL) Eligibility Board Chair, gave a presentation with information about the SCFL eligibility pool determinations.

After the presentation, Chairman Corbett opened the floor to commissioners for comments and questions.

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Motion by Commissioner Blanton to set the number of licenses in the Standard Commercial Fishing License Eligibility Pool for the 2026-2027 license year at 500.

Second by Commissioner Gardner.

ROLL CALL VOTE					
Member	**Aye**	**Nay**	**Abstain**	**Recuse**	**Absent**
Blanton	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Closs	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Gardner	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hobgood	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mallette	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Rader	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Roller	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Service	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Corbett	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐

Motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Closs left the meeting.

View the video recording of the presentation and the surrounding discussion

Rule Suspensions

Fisheries Science Section Chief Jason Rock gave a verbal presentation providing information on current rule suspensions and requesting the MFC vote on approval of an additional suspension.

After the presentation, Chairman Corbett entertained a motion to address the additional rule suspension.

Motion by Commissioner Roller to suspend Section (h) of NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03J .0103 GILL NETS, SEINES, IDENTIFICATION, RESTRICTIONS for an indefinite period.

Second by Commissioner Rader.

ROLL CALL VOTE					
Member	**Aye**	**Nay**	**Abstain**	**Recuse**	**Absent**
Blanton	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Closs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
Gardner	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hobgood	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐

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Mallette	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Rader	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Roller	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Service	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Corbett	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐

Motion passed 8-0 (1 absent).

View the video recording of the presentation and surrounding discussion

Rulemaking

Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) Rulemaking Coordinator Catherine Blum provided updates on the 2024-2025 rulemaking cycle, 2025-2026 rulemaking cycle, and 2026-2027 rulemaking cycle. She also presented information on the Periodic Review and Expiration of Existing Rules.

After the presentation, Chairman Corbett opened the floor to commissioners for comments and questions.

Motion by Commissioner Roller to approve final determination of rules per N.C.G.S. 150B-21.3A for the following:

- **15A NCAC 03Q .0100;**
- **All other rules in 15A NCAC 03;**
- **15A NCAC 10C .0100; and**
- **15A NCAC 18A .0100, .0300-.0900, and .3400.**

Second by Commissioner Hobgood.

ROLL CALL VOTE					
Member	**Aye**	**Nay**	**Abstain**	**Recuse**	**Absent**
Blanton	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Closs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
Gardner	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hobgood	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mallette	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Rader	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Roller	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Service	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Corbett	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐

Motion passed 8-0 (1 absent).

View the video recording of the presentation and surrounding discussion

Issues from Commissioners

Chairman Corbett opened the floor to commissioners for comments, questions, and other discussion.

Commissioner Hobgood shared feedback he had received from members of the public regarding potential red drum management measures ahead of the November meeting. Suggestions included game fish status, adjusting the slot, vessel limits, and concerns surrounding the harvest of large red drum and red drum tournaments. He also raised concerns about the significant increase in for-hire fishing operations in North Caorlina and requested that the Division examine available data, barriers to entry, and the associated impacts on fishing pressure and customer experience. He acknowledged that some considerations may fall under legislative authority but expressed interest in further understanding the issue.

Chairman Corbett noted that game fish status and barriers to entry for for-hire operations would require legislative action and would likely not be considered until February.

Commissioner Roller referenced the FMP Annual Report and requested additional analysis on whether the recently implemented sheepshead regulations are expected to reduce harvest as anticipated. He expressed concern that the fishery may be expanding due to new technology and that the resulting fishing activity may not be adequately captured through MRIP, particularly if it occurs in concentrated periods.

Commissioner Roller also referenced NCGS 113-168.6 regarding insurance requirements for commercial fishing vessel registrations with a for-hire endorsement. He questioned whether additional documentation could be required to verify insurance coverage before a license is issued, such as a letter of coverage or documentation through a National Park Service concessionaire license. He expressed concern about ensuring the growing for-hire industry is operating safely and in compliance with applicable requirements.

Commissioner Roller further noted that the public often associates for-hire operations with the commercial fishing industry, although these operations are managed under recreational rather than commercial quotas. He suggested that the Commission have a future discussion to help clarify how for-hire operations are managed. Chairman Corbett suggested that for-hire operations could be considered as a separate allocation category alongside commercial and recreational fisheries.

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Commissioner Roller also raised concerns regarding compliance with South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) Red Snapper EFP requirements for for-hire operations. He noted the criticism the Division received regarding its limited joint enforcement authority and asked whether there are opportunities for additional enforcement of permit requirements. He also asked whether an educational outreach plan could be developed to help for-hire operators better understand the permit requirements.

Commissioner Rader asked when the Commission could expect additional information regarding sampling program 195, specifically how the loss of previously collected data will affect other programs, including stock assessments, and what adjustments may be necessary moving forward.

View the video recording of the Issues from Commissioners

Meeting Assignments and Preview of Agenda Items for Next Meeting

DMF Deputy Director Barbie Byrd reviewed meeting assignments and provided an overview of the November 2026 meeting items.

Having no further business to conduct, Chairman Corbett adjourned the meeting at 12:45 p.m.

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