NC Marine Fisheries Commission

Rulemaking

November 2026 Quarterly Business Meeting

Documents

Rulemaking Update Memo

2026-2027 Annual Rulemaking Cycle

News Release for Notice of Text

N.C. Register Excerpt

Fiscal Analysis

Written Comments

Public Hearing Summary

JOSH STEIN
Governor

D. REID WILSON
Secretary

JONATHAN HOWELL
Director

October 28, 2026

MEMORANDUM

TO: N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission

FROM: Catherine Blum, Rulemaking Coordinator
Marine Fisheries Commission Office

SUBJECT: N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rulemaking

Issue

Request the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) vote on final approval to adopt the single rule in the 2026-2027 rule package at its November 2026 business meeting.

Findings

- At its May 2026 business meeting, the MFC began the process for one rule for the management of Atlantic bonito.
- On August 3, 2026, the rule was published in the *N.C. Register*, beginning the public comment process; a news release was issued.
- A public hearing was held on August 26, 2026, at 6 p.m. via WebEx with a listening station in Morehead City.
- The public comment period closed October 2, 2026.
- The public comments will be presented to the MFC at its November 2026 business meeting to inform its scheduled vote on final approval to adopt the Atlantic bonito management rule. The majority of stakeholders supported the proposed rule.
- If approved, the rule is subject to legislative review; the earliest possible effective date would be in spring 2027.
- Only the proposed five-fish recreational bag limit per person per day would be implemented upon the effective date of the rule. Additional steps would need to be taken for any other harvest restrictions to be implemented, as outlined in this memo.

Action Needed

The MFC will be asked to vote on final approval to adopt the proposed Atlantic bonito rule.

2026-2027 Rulemaking Cycle (1 rule)
ATLANTIC BONITO MANAGEMENT (15A NCAC 03M .0524)

Public Comments

The public comment period for Notice of Text for Rulemaking for the MFC's proposed Atlantic Bonito rule opened on August 3, 2026, and closed at 5 p.m. on October 2, 2026. In total, 86 public comments were submitted: 78 in support, 7 against, and 1 undecided. Of these, eight individuals submitted either two or three public comments via a combination of online submittals and at the August 26 public hearing. These eight individuals represent 18 public comments in support of the proposed rule, yielding a total of 68 unique individuals in support, 7 against, and 1 undecided. A table of the public comments received is included in the rulemaking section of the briefing materials. The table of public comments is organized alphabetically by the commenter's full name [first name / last name]. Doing so puts in sequence multiple comments from the same individual.

There were 12 speakers at the August 26 public hearing, one of which participated in person via the listening station at the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) Central District Office in Morehead City. These 12 individuals are included in the counts above. Of these, 11 speakers were in support of the proposed rule and 1 was against. A summary of the public hearing is included in the rulemaking section of the briefing materials, including the detailed comments provided by each participant.

Because there were several participants who opted to submit multiple comments, the hearing participants are included in the table of the public comments, which were largely received online. The table also accounts for two individuals who submitted online comments about the proposed rule as part of the August 2026 MFC business meeting, which occurred during the open comment period. These two individuals are also included in the counts above. A separate copy of their comments is also included in the rulemaking section of the briefing materials.

History of Proposed Rule

At its May 2024 business meeting, the MFC passed a motion to request DMF staff develop an issue paper for Atlantic bonito management, including landings information and proposed rule language, using the previous sheepshead issue paper (February 11, 2013) as a model to follow. Discussions among commissioners noted concerns expressed by recreational stakeholders about angler behavior changing in targeting Atlantic bonito in more recent years and the potential need to implement a recreational bag limit. Further concerns expressed by the MFC identified limited information about Atlantic bonito in this part of the Atlantic Ocean and no measure of stock status for the population, and whether these recent increases in recreational catches may not be due to more fish, but rather due to changes in fishing tactics and new technologies available to recreational anglers to improve their success in catching Atlantic bonito when available in state waters. Commissioners did not express concern for commercial catches due to a limited shelf life as a fresh product and not being desirable frozen as likely reasons behind no similar increase in commercial harvest occurring. Potential waste of the resource was discussed, since there are no current limits on Atlantic bonito. The MFC also identified the need to learn more about the fisheries and develop a rule to implement regulations to get ahead of a potential problem.

Commissioners continued discussions on Atlantic bonito at the August and November 2024, and May 2025 MFC business meetings with an urgency to be proactive in their management and continued to stress the need to implement a bag limit in the recreational fishery. After key DMF vacancies were filled, DMF staff presented background information about the life history and catch characteristics of Atlantic bonito to the MFC at its August 2025 business meeting. Commissioners discussed that Atlantic bonito appear to behave differently off southeast North Carolina than in other locations along the coast, showing preference for structure and pondered if these preferences are associated with spawning, thereby making Atlantic bonito more vulnerable to harvest. Commissioners mentioned that the presentation illustrated the increasing trends in recreational landings with smaller fish being caught in recent years and discussed the potential for implementing both a bag limit and possibly a size limit on the recreational sector. The MFC passed a motion to ask the DMF staff to bring proposed rulemaking language for a five-fish recreational bag limit per person (per day) for Atlantic bonito to its November 2025 business meeting, a request DMF staff fulfilled.

The DMF developed an issue paper for the management of Atlantic bonito[1] containing background information, authority for management, and discussion of potential management options, including proposed rule options. The issue paper was presented to the MFC at its February 2026 business meeting when it selected Option 4 as its preferred management option for Atlantic bonito. Upon the effective date of the proposed rule, this option would implement a five-fish recreational bag limit per person per day and delegate authority to the Fisheries Director to implement additional harvest restrictions by proclamation; however, additional steps would need to be taken before issuance of a proclamation. Any harvest restrictions beyond the five-fish recreational bag limit would undergo a process including the DMF presenting the most recent data to the MFC, MFC consent that harvest restrictions are needed based on the data, outreach and education to the regulated public that management will change, and identification of an appropriate effective date for the proclamation that would be issued to implement the restrictions so the regulated public can prepare.

Following the February 2026 MFC business meeting, DMF staff developed a fiscal analysis of the proposed rule[2] that was approved by the Office of State Budget and Management. At its May 2026 business meeting, the MFC approved Notice of Text for Rulemaking to begin the process as part of its 2026-2027 annual rulemaking cycle. A copy of the fiscal analysis and a table showing the timing of the steps in the process are included in the rulemaking section of the briefing materials.

On August 3, 2026, the proposed rule was published in the *N.C. Register*, beginning the public comment process; a news release was issued. These materials are also in the rulemaking section of the briefing materials. A public hearing was held on August 26, 2026, at 6 p.m. via WebEx with a listening station in Morehead City. The public comment period closed October 2, 2026. Comments received (summarized in the "Public Comments" section above) will be presented to the MFC at its November 2026 business meeting when it is scheduled to vote on final approval of the rule. The proposed rule is subject to legislative review per Session Law 2019-198 and

[1] https://www.deq.nc.gov/marine-fisheries/marine-fisheries-commission/february-2026/atlantic-bonito-issue-paper/open
[2] https://www.deq.nc.gov/deq2026-04-30-updated-bonito-approved-notepdf/open

N.C.G.S. § 14-4.1 and could possibly be effective following the legislative review process in the 2027 long session; however, the timing is such that the legislative review process may not occur until the 2028 short session. The earliest possible effective date of the rule would be in spring 2027.

Periodic Review and Expiration of Existing Rules (335 rules)

North Carolina N.C.G.S. § 150B-21.3A, enacted in 2013, requires state agencies to review existing rules every 10 years in accordance with a prescribed process that includes a report phase, followed by rule readoption. To comply with the periodic review schedule adopted by the Rules Review Commission (RRC) for the second iteration of the requirements, the MFC gave approval at its February 2026 business meeting of the initial agency determination of each of its rules as "necessary" to proceed to public notice for four groups of rules, per N.C.G.S. § 150B-21.3A:

- 15A NCAC 03Q .0100 (9 rules);
- ALL OTHER 15A NCAC 03 RULES (194 rules);
- 15A NCAC 10C .0100 (11 rules); and
- 15A NCAC 18A .0100, .0300-.0900, .3400 (132 rules).

The public comment period for the reports on these four groups of rules was from March 2, 2026, through May 1, 2026. All the rules are in Title 15A, which is the Department of Environmental Quality. The nine MFC rules in 15A NCAC 03Q .0100 are jointly adopted with the Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC). The 11 WRC rules in 15A NCAC 10C .0100 are jointly adopted with the MFC. All 20 jointly adopted rules set requirements for joint fishing waters. Rules in Chapter 03 are for the management of marine fisheries, while rules in Subchapter 18A are for the management of shellfish sanitation and recreational water quality.

Following the conclusion of the public comment period, the MFC was required to review any public comments and prepare a brief response addressing the merits of each comment. No public comments were received so the proposed final determinations are unchanged: each rule remains classified as "necessary". This information became the final report and was approved by the MFC at its August 2026 business meeting. A copy of the four reports is available on the DMF webpage for the August 2026 MFC business meeting.

Following the August 2026 MFC business meeting, the final reports were submitted to the RRC, which, if approved, will be forwarded to the Joint Legislative Administrative Procedure Oversight Committee for final determination. The MFC's reports are due to the RRC for its January (15A NCAC 03Q .0100; all other 03 rules; 10C .0100) and March (15A NCAC 18A .0100, .0300-.0900, .3400) 2027 meetings.

The second part of the process is the re-adoption of rules. The final report determines the process for re-adoption. A necessary rule must be readopted as if it was a new rule. An unnecessary rule will expire at the end of the report process and be removed from the N.C. Administrative Code. The RRC works with each agency to consider the agency's rulemaking priorities in establishing a deadline for the re-adoption of rules. This consultation process is expected to occur in the

spring or summer of 2027. It is anticipated that the MFC will need to readopt all 335 of its rules that are subject to the Periodic Review requirements as if they are new rules. Rules can be amended during readoption and fiscal analysis of the rules will still be required. Based on the MFC's rulemaking priorities and the number of rules, the readoption process is expected to take several years to complete.

N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission
2026-2027 Annual Rulemaking Cycle

November 2026

Time of Year	Action
February-April 2026	Fiscal analysis of rule prepared by DMF staff and approved by Office of State Budget and Management
May 14, 2026	MFC votes to approve Notice of Text for Rulemaking
August 3, 2026	Publication of proposed rule in the *North Carolina Register*
August 3 - October 2, 2026	Public comment period held
August 26, 2026, 6 p.m.	Public hearing held via WebEx with listening station at NCDEQ Division of Marine Fisheries Central District Office at 5285 Highway 70 West, Morehead City
November 17-18, 2026	**MFC receives public comments and votes on final approval of permanent rule**
December 2026 or January 2027	Rule reviewed by Office of Administrative Hearings/ Rules Review Commission
2027 or 2028 legislative session	Possible effective date of rule subject to legislative review per S.L. 2019-198 and G.S. 14-4.1
2027 or 2028 legislative session	Rulebook supplement available online pending legislative review process

July 31, 2026

Comment period opens, public hearing scheduled for one marine fisheries rule

MOREHEAD CITY –The N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) will begin accepting public comment on Monday, Aug. 3, for a proposed rule that would set a five-fish recreational bag limit for Atlantic bonito.

The rule would also authorize the Director of the NC Department of Environmental Quality's Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) to implement additional management measures by proclamation with prior consent of the MFC.

The public may comment on the proposed rule at a public hearing or in writing.

Public Hearing
A public hearing will be held by WebEx on Aug. 26, 2026, at 6 p.m. A listening location will be established at the Division of Marine Fisheries' Central District Office.

The public may join the meeting online. Those who wish to comment during the hearing must register to speak by noon on the day of the hearing. Those who wish to speak at the listening location may sign up when they arrive.

WHO:	Marine Fisheries Commission
WHAT:	Public Hearing for Proposed Rules
WHEN:	Aug. 26, 2026, at 6 p.m.
WHERE:	Meeting by Web Conference Click Here for Links
LISTENING LOCATION:	NC Division of Marine Fisheries Central District Office 5285 Highway 70 West Morehead City, NC 28557

Written Comments
Members of the public may also submit written comments through an online form or through the mail to:

N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rules Comments
P.O. Box 769
Morehead City, N.C. 28557

Comments must be posted online or received by DMF by 5 p.m. Oct. 2, 2026.

Links to the public hearing registration form and online comment form, as well as text of the proposed rule and links to join the meeting, can be found on the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission's 2026-2027 Proposed Rules Webpage.

The proposed rule will be presented to the MFC for final approval in November 2026. If approved, the earliest effective date of the rule would be in 2027 pending legislative review.

For questions about the MFC rulemaking process, email Catherine Blum, rules coordinator for the DMF.

For More Information
Contact: Patricia Smith
Phone: 252-515-5500

NORTH CAROLINA REGISTER

VOLUME 41 • ISSUE 03 • Pages 245 – 332

August 3, 2026

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Contact List for Rulemaking Questions or Concerns

For questions or concerns regarding the Administrative Procedure Act or any of its components, consult with the agencies below. The bolded headings are typical issues which the given agency can address but are not inclusive.

Rule Notices, Filings, Register, Deadlines, Copies of Proposed Rules, etc.

Office of Administrative Hearings
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1711 New Hope Church Road — 984-236-1850
Raleigh, North Carolina 27609 — 984-236-1947 FAX

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Rule Review and Legal Issues

Rules Review Commission
1711 New Hope Church Road — 984-236-1850
Raleigh, North Carolina 27609 — 984-236-1947 FAX

contact:	Seth M. Ascher, Commission Counsel	seth.ascher@oah.nc.gov	984-236-1934
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	Christopher S. Miller, Commission Counsel	christopher.miller@oah.nc.gov	984-236-1935
	Alexander Burgos, Paralegal	alexander.burgos@oah.nc.gov	984-236-1940

Fiscal Notes & Economic Analysis

Office of State Budget and Management
116 West Jones Street
Raleigh, North Carolina 27603-8005
Contact: Julie Ventaloro, Economic Analyst — osbmruleanalysis@osbm.nc.gov — 984-236-0694

Fiscal Research Division
Legislative Office Building
300 N. Salisbury Street, Suites 619 and 400
Raleigh, NC 27603-5925
Contact: Brian Matteson — brian.matteson@ncleg.gov — 919-733-4910

NC Association of County Commissioners — 919-715-2893
215 North Dawson Street
Raleigh, North Carolina 27603
contact: Amy Bason — amy.bason@ncacc.org

NC League of Municipalities — 919-715-2925
424 Fayetteville Street, Suite 1900
Raleigh, North Carolina 27601
contact: Baxter Wells — bwells@nclm.org

Legislative Process Concerning Rulemaking

545 Legislative Office Building
300 North Salisbury Street — 919-733-2578
Raleigh, North Carolina 27611 — 919-715-5460 FAX

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NORTH CAROLINA REGISTER

Publication Schedule for January 2026 – December 2026

FILING DEADLINES			NOTICE OF TEXT		PERMANENT RULE			TEMPORARY RULES
Volume & issue number	Issue date	Last day for filing	Earliest date for public hearing	End of required comment Period/Latest date for public hearing	Deadline to submit to RRC for review at next meeting	RRC Meeting Date	Earliest Eff. Date of Permanent Rule	270th day from publication in the Register
40:13	01/02/26	12/11/25	01/17/26	03/03/26	03/20/26	04/28/2026	05/01/26	09/29/26
40:14	01/15/26	12/23/25	01/30/26	03/16/26	03/20/26	04/28/2026	05/01/26	10/12/26
40:15	02/02/26	01/09/26	02/17/26	04/06/26	04/20/26	05/28/2026	06/01/26	10/30/26
40:16	02/16/26	01/26/26	03/03/26	04/17/26	04/20/26	05/28/2026	06/01/26	11/13/26
40:17	03/02/26	02/09/26	03/17/26	05/01/26	05/20/26	06/25/2026	07/01/26	11/27/26
40:18	03/16/26	02/23/26	03/31/26	05/15/26	05/20/26	06/25/2026	07/01/26	12/11/26
40:19	04/01/26	03/11/26	04/16/26	06/01/26	06/20/26	07/30/2026	08/01/26	12/27/26
40:20	04/15/26	03/24/26	04/30/26	06/15/26	06/20/26	07/30/2026	08/01/26	01/10/27
40:21	05/01/26	04/10/26	05/16/26	06/30/26	07/20/26	08/27/2026	09/01/26	01/26/27
40:22	05/15/26	04/24/26	05/30/26	07/14/26	07/20/26	08/27/2026	09/01/26	02/09/27
40:23	06/01/26	05/08/26	06/16/26	07/31/26	08/20/26	09/29/2026	10/01/26	02/26/27
40:24	06/15/26	05/22/26	06/30/26	08/14/26	08/20/26	09/29/2026	10/01/26	03/12/27
41:01	07/01/26	06/10/26	07/16/26	08/31/26	09/20/26	10/29/2026	11/01/26	03/28/27
41:02	07/15/26	06/23/26	07/30/26	09/14/26	09/20/26	10/29/2026	11/01/26	04/11/27
41:03	08/03/26	07/13/26	08/18/26	10/02/26	10/20/26	11/24/2026	12/01/26	04/30/27
41:04	08/17/26	07/27/26	09/01/26	10/16/26	10/20/26	11/24/2026	12/01/26	05/14/27
41:05	09/01/26	08/11/26	09/16/26	11/02/26	11/20/26	12/17/2026	01/01/27	05/29/27
41:06	09/15/26	08/24/26	09/30/26	11/16/26	11/20/26	12/17/2026	01/01/27	06/12/27
41:07	10/01/26	09/10/26	10/16/26	11/30/26	12/20/26	01/28/2027*	02/01/27	06/28/27
41:08	10/15/26	09/24/26	10/30/26	12/14/26	12/20/26	01/28/2027*	02/01/27	07/12/27
41:09	11/02/26	10/12/26	11/17/26	01/04/27	01/20/27	02/25/2027*	03/01/27	07/30/27
41:10	11/16/26	10/23/26	12/01/26	01/15/27	01/20/27	02/25/2027*	03/01/27	08/13/27
41:11	12/01/26	11/05/26	12/16/26	02/01/27	02/20/27	03/25/2027*	04/01/27	08/28/27
41:12	12/15/26	11/20/26	12/30/26	02/15/27	02/20/27	03/25/2027*	04/01/27	09/11/27

*Dates not approved by RRC

This document is prepared by the Office of Administrative Hearings as a public service and is not to be deemed binding or controlling.

EXPLANATION OF THE PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

This Publication Schedule is prepared by the Office of Administrative Hearings as a public service and the computation of time periods are not to be deemed binding or controlling. Time is computed according to 26 NCAC 2C .0302 and the Rules of Civil Procedure, Rule 6.

GENERAL

The North Carolina Register shall be published twice a month and contains the following information submitted for publication by a state agency:

(1) temporary rules;
(2) text of proposed rules;
(3) text of permanent rules approved by the Rules Review Commission;
(4) emergency rules
(5) Executive Orders of the Governor;
(6) final decision letters from the U.S. Attorney General concerning changes in laws affecting voting in a jurisdiction subject of Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, as required by G.S. 120-30.9H; and
(7) other information the Codifier of Rules determines to be helpful to the public.

COMPUTING TIME: In computing time in the schedule, the day of publication of the North Carolina Register is not included. The last day of the period so computed is included, unless it is a Saturday, Sunday, or State holiday, in which event the period runs until the preceding day which is not a Saturday, Sunday, or State holiday.

FILING DEADLINES

ISSUE DATE: The Register is published on the first and fifteen of each month if the first or fifteenth of the month is not a Saturday, Sunday, or State holiday for employees mandated by the State Human Resources Commission. If the first or fifteenth of any month is a Saturday, Sunday, or a holiday for State employees, the North Carolina Register issue for that day will be published on the day of that month after the first or fifteenth that is not a Saturday, Sunday, or holiday for State employees.

LAST DAY FOR FILING: The last day for filing for any issue is 15 days before the issue date excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays for State employees.

NOTICE OF TEXT

EARLIEST DATE FOR PUBLIC HEARING: The hearing date shall be at least 15 days but not later than 60 days after the date a notice of the hearing is published.

END OF REQUIRED COMMENT PERIOD An agency shall accept comments on the text of a proposed rule for at least 60 days after the text is published.

DEADLINE TO SUBMIT TO THE RULES REVIEW COMMISSION: The Commission shall review a rule submitted to it on or before the twentieth of a month by the last day of the next month.

Board shall grant up to 200 additional hours if the applicant can demonstrate that further training or course-work related to the private protective services industry was received while obtaining the bachelor's degree.

(3) An applicant shall receive 1,200 hours of experience credit for a graduate degree. The Board shall grant an additional 300 additional hours if the applicant can demonstrate that further training or course-work related to the private protective services industry was received while obtaining the graduate degree.

(d) Persons licensed under Chapter 74D of the General Statutes of North Carolina may be issued a limited guard and patrol license exclusively for providing armed alarm responders.

Authority G.S. 74C-5; 74C-8; 93B-15.1.

SECTION .0700 - SECURITY GUARD REGISTRATION (UNARMED)

14B NCAC 16 .0705 UNARMED SECURITY GUARD REGISTRATION IDENTIFICATION CARDS

(a) The registration identification card shall be carried by the unarmed security guard registrant when performing the duties of a private protective services employee.

(b) The registration identification card shall be exhibited upon the request of any law enforcement officer or any other authorized representative of the Board.

(c) Registration identification card holders shall within five business days notify the Board upon receipt of any information relating to the holder's eligibility to continue holding such a card.

(d) The guard transfer online ~~form~~ form, a statement of the results of a statewide criminal history records search by the reporting service designated by the Board pursuant to G.S. 74C-8.1(a) for each state where the applicant has resided within the preceding 12 months, and fee shall be submitted to the Board by the employer within ~~10~~ 30 days of ~~the beginning of~~ permanent, non-probationary employment.

~~(e) Upon revocation or suspension by the Board, a holder shall return the registration identification card to the administrator within 10 days of the date of the revocation or suspension.~~

Authority G.S. 74C-5; 74C-11.

SECTION .1300 – ARMORED CAR SERVICE GUARD REGISTRATION (UNARMED)

14B NCAC 16 .1305 UNARMED ARMORED CAR SERVICE GUARD REGISTRATION IDENTIFICATION CARDS

(a) A registration identification card shall be carried by ~~an~~ the armored car service guard registrant when performing the duties of a private protective services employee.

(b) The registration identification card shall be exhibited upon the request of any law enforcement officer or any authorized representative of the Board.

(c) Registration identification card holders shall within five business days notify the Board following receipt of any information relating to the holder's eligibility to continue holding the card.

(d) The guard transfer ~~form~~ form, a statement of the results of a statewide criminal history records search by the reporting service designated by the Board pursuant to G.S. 74C-8.1(a) for each state where the applicant has resided within the preceding 12 months, and fee shall be submitted to the Board by the employer within ~~10~~ 30 days of ~~the beginning of~~ permanent, non-probationary employment.

~~(e) Upon revocation or suspension by the Board, a holder shall return the registration identification card to the Director within 10 days of the date of the revocation or suspension.~~

Authority G.S. 74C-3; 74C-5.

TITLE 15A – DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

***Notice** is hereby given in accordance with G.S. 150B-21.2 that the Marine Fisheries Commission intends to adopt the rule cited as 15A NCAC 03M .0524.*

Link to agency website pursuant to G.S. 150B-19.1(c): *https://deq.nc.gov/mfc-proposed-rules*

Proposed Effective Date: *Subject to Legislative Review*

Public Hearing:
Date: *August 26, 2026*
Time: *6:00 p.m.*
Location: *WebEx Register link: https://ncgov.webex.com/weblink/register/rd413a5ff71720d465fd9b2fe0fe71df9 WebEx Events meeting link: https://ncgov.webex.com/ncgov/j.php?MTID=md3d30700b6f0c3c5fe2ba5308cd59903 Webinar number: 2439 876 2166 Webinar password: 1234 Webinar phone number: 1-415-655-0003 Access code: 2439 876 2166 Listening station: Division of Marine Fisheries Central District Office, 5285 Highway 70 West, Morehead City, NC 28557*

Reason for Proposed Action: *The proposed rule adoption would implement a five-fish bag limit and otherwise delegate proclamation authority to the Fisheries Director to manage the Atlantic bonito (Sarda sarda) fishery, with prior consent of the Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) before a proclamation is issued. Landings of Atlantic bonito from the recreational sector have increased in state waters over the last 10 years, and North Carolina accounts for 22% of the overall coastwide landings. Trends in the number of recreationally harvested fish have increased while trends in the number of released fish have remained stable over this time. Atlantic bonito is incidentally caught by commercial fishers pursuing other species; there is not a targeted fishery at this time. Atlantic bonito has a limited shelf life as a fresh product and is not desirable in frozen form. Little information exists on the status of Atlantic bonito in North Carolina, so their stock status is considered unknown, and the species is not managed at either the state or federal level, except Massachusetts. The MFC is seeking to adopt a rule to have the*

ability to manage this fishery as more data continues to be collected and the apparent popularity of the recreational fishery increases.

Comments may be submitted to: *Catherine Blum, P.O. Box 769, Morehead City, NC 28557*

Written comments may also be submitted via an online form available at https://deq.nc.gov/mfc-proposed-rules.

Comment period ends: *October 2, 2026*

Rule(s) is automatically subject to legislative review: *S.L. 2019-198*

Fiscal impact. Does any rule or combination of rules in this notice create an economic impact? Check all that apply.

☐ **State funds affected**
☐ **Local funds affected**
☐ **Substantial economic impact (>= $1,000,000)**
☒ **Approved by OSBM**
☐ **No fiscal note required**

CHAPTER 03 - MARINE FISHERIES

SUBCHAPTER 03M - FINFISH

SECTION .0500 – OTHER FINFISH

15A NCAC 03M .0524 ATLANTIC BONITO

(a) It shall be unlawful to possess more than five Atlantic bonito per person per day for recreational purposes.
(b) The Fisheries Director may, with prior consent of the Marine Fisheries Commission, by proclamation and pursuant to 15A NCAC 03H .0103, impose any of the following requirements on the taking of Atlantic bonito:

(1) specify time;
(2) specify area;
(3) specify means and methods;
(4) specify season;
(5) specify size; and
(6) specify quantity, except as provided in Paragraph (a) of this Rule.

Authority G.S. 113-134; 113-182; 113-221.1; 143B-289.52.

TITLE 21 - OCCUPATIONAL LICENSING BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

CHAPTER 06 - BARBER AND ELECTROLYSIS EXAMINERS

***Notice** is hereby given in accordance with G.S. 150B-21.2 that the Board of Barber and Electrolysis Examiners intends to adopt the rule cited as 21 NCAC 06O .0202, and amend the rules cited as 21 NCAC 06O .0101-.0104, .0118, and .0121.*

Link to agency website pursuant to G.S. 150B-19.1(c): *https://www.bbee.nc.gov/news/rulemaking*

Proposed Effective Date: *December 1, 2026*

Public Hearing:
Date: *August 19, 2026*
Time: *10:30 a.m.*
Location: *By videoconference at https://bit.ly/august-2026-rulemaking-hearing or by telephone at 984-204-1487, conference ID 752 885 07#*

Reason for Proposed Action: *The board is increasing or establishing various civil penalties to improve the board's ability to prevent unlawful practice of barbering, electrolysis, and laser hair practice.*

Comments may be submitted to: *Dennis Seavers, 7001 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-7000; phone (919) 814-0641; email dennis.seavers@nc.gov*

Comment period ends: *October 2, 2026*

Procedure for Subjecting a Proposed Rule to Legislative Review: If an objection is not resolved prior to the adoption of the rule, a person may also submit a written objection to the Rules Review Commission. If the Rules Review Commission receives written and signed objections after the adoption of the Rule in accordance with G.S. 150B-21.3(b2) from 10 or more persons clearly requesting review by the legislature and the Rules Review Commission approves the rule, the rule will become effective as provided in G.S. 150B-21.3(b1). The Commission will receive written objections until 5:00 p.m. on the day following the day the Commission approves the rule. The Commission will receive letters via U.S. Mail, private courier service, or hand delivery to 1711 New Hope Church Road, Raleigh, North Carolina, or via email to oah.rules@oah.nc.gov. If you have any further questions concerning the submission of objections to the Commission, please review 26 NCAC 05 .0110 or call a Commission staff attorney at 984-236-1850.

Fiscal impact. Does any rule or combination of rules in this notice create an economic impact? Check all that apply.

☐ **State funds affected**
☐ **Local funds affected**
☐ **Substantial economic impact (>= $1,000,000)**
☐ **Approved by OSBM**
☒ **No fiscal note required**

SUBCHAPTER 06O – CIVIL PENALTY

21 NCAC 06O .0101 SCHEDULE OF PENALTIES

The rules in this Subchapter establish the schedule of civil penalties required by ~~G.S. 86A-27(c).~~ G.S. 86B-10(c). The amounts stated are the presumptive amounts that may be modified in accordance with ~~G.S. 86A-27(b).~~ G.S. 86B-10(b).

Authority ~~G.S. 86A-5(a)(6); 86A-27;~~ G.S. 86B-2; 86B-10.

Fiscal Impact Analysis of Proposed Atlantic Bonito Management Rule

Rule Proposal: 15A NCAC 03M .0524

Name of Commission: N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission

Agency Contact: Jason Walsh, Fisheries Economics Program Manager
N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries
3441 Arendell Street
Morehead City, NC 28557
Jason.walsh@deq.nc.gov
252-269-9299

Impact Summary: State government: No
Local government: No
Federal government: No
Substantial impact: No

AUTHORITY

N.C. General Statutes

G.S. 113-134.	Rules.
G.S. 113-182.	Regulation of fishing and fisheries.
G.S. 113-221.1.	Proclamations; emergency review.
G.S. 143B-289.52.	Marine Fisheries Commission – powers and duties.

Necessity: The need for management of Atlantic bonito (*Sarda sarda*) has emerged from growing concern among North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission (NCMFC) members and the public about increasing recreational fishing pressure and the absence of a rule to implement management measures for this species. North Carolina does not currently have any means to manage the Atlantic bonito fishery, and the MFC is seeking this proposed rule to be prepared if the fishery continues to expand.

I. Summary

Atlantic bonito landings from the recreational sector have increased in state waters over the last 10 years and North Carolina accounts for 22% of the overall coastwide landings. Additionally, trends in the number of recreationally harvested fish have increased while trends in the number of released fish have remained stable over this time (Table 1). Currently, there is no targeted commercial fishery for Atlantic bonito in North Carolina. Due to the opportunistic nature of the fishery, commercial trips typically land less than 50 pounds per trip, with trips exceeding 300 pounds making up less than 5% of the total number of trips in state and federal waters. Further, there does not appear to be an immediate biological concern for the Atlantic bonito stock since there is no evidence of size truncation in the commercial and recreational fisheries over the past decade, and most fish are caught at or above the size where fifty percent or more of the fish are mature (L_{50}), which is 15 inches fork length in Atlantic bonito, except in the most recent two years of recreational data (2023, 2024). Although current data do not indicate an immediate

biological concern, the available information is not sufficient to demonstrate that the recent increase in harvest is sustainable over the long term.

For that reason, the NCMFC is proposing a rule that would do two things. First, it would establish a five-fish recreational bag limit, which is intended primarily as a precautionary cap; based on current harvest patterns, it is not expected to have a major near-term effect because anglers are not commonly retaining that many fish per trip. Second, it would grant the Fisheries Director proclamation authority, with prior NCMFC consent, to implement additional management measures more quickly if future conditions warrant action. In practice, the five-fish limit functions as an early management threshold, while the proclamation authority creates a mechanism for faster response if landings or stock conditions change.

If adopted, the immediate practical effect of the bag limit is expected to be limited, because current harvest patterns indicate that anglers rarely retain that many fish per trip. It would also provide a management framework for responding to future variable conditions (N.C.G.S. § 113-221.1) in the fishery without the delay associated with additional rulemaking. In that sense, the rule's most significant effect is not a change in current fishing behavior, but improved management readiness if conditions are variable.

The measures are not expected to reduce participation in Atlantic bonito recreational fishing, as the majority of Atlantic bonito fishing is catch-and-release or consists of catches less than five fish per trip (Table 2), which will not be restricted by the proposed management measures. The effect on commercial fishing is likely to be minimal as Atlantic bonito have low commercial value in the United States (Table 3), and they are only incidentally caught by commercial fishers pursuing other species with gill nets and hook-and-line gear.

II. Introduction and Purpose of Rule Proposal

Atlantic Bonito Life History

Atlantic bonito (*Sarda sarda*) is a small tuna species in the mackerel/tuna family Scombridae. Its body is spindle-shaped, with bluish to greenish shades dorsally, fading to silvery below. The upper sides have numerous diagonal dark stripes, with underlying diffuse dark bars. Anglers often confuse Atlantic bonito with false albacore (*Euthynnus alletteratus;* also called little tunny) and skipjack tuna (*Katsuwonus pelamis*) due to similarity in size and coloration. In addition to general misidentification, there is also significant confusion regarding the use of the same common name for many of these species. Many people, including anglers, often use names like "bonito," "bonita," "little tunny,", and "skipjack" interchangeably, and these common names can vary regionally.

A predominantly coastal species, Atlantic bonito are found in the Eastern Atlantic from Oslo, Norway, to Port Elizabeth, South Africa, as well as in the Mediterranean and Black seas. In the Western Atlantic, they range from Nova Scotia, Canada, to the Gulf of Mexico, and south to northern Argentina, but are apparently absent from most of the Caribbean Sea (Collette and Nauen 1983). Atlantic bonito school with similarly sized Scombrid species (Yoshida 1980), and most likely migrate north during the summer and early fall and south in the winter, but there is a

lack of scientific documentation of these migrations. Current tagging studies are underway by North Carolina State University, the Nature Conservancy, and the American Saltwater Guides Association to conduct research on Atlantic bonito migratory patterns on the East Coast of the United States.

Interjurisdictional Atlantic Bonito Management

Little information exists on the status of Atlantic bonito in the Western Atlantic, and as a result their stock status is considered unknown. Internationally, small tunas, including Atlantic bonito, are assessed and managed by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) in the Small Tunas Species Group. Currently, the small tunas in the Atlantic are divided into five stock regions based on traditional ICCAT management areas: Northwest Atlantic, Southwest Atlantic, Northeast Atlantic, Southeast Atlantic, and Mediterranean. Atlantic bonito are one of 13 species in the Small Tunas Species Group. Of these 13 species, the seven most important, Atlantic bonito (31%), little tunny (18%), frigate tuna (13%) king mackerel (12%), Spanish mackerel (9%), bullet tuna (5%), and wahoo (4%), represent about 91% of nominal catches between 1950 and 2023. Although there is currently no ICCAT assessment or management plan for Atlantic bonito, it has been identified as a species for which more data should be collected for stock assessment (ICCAT 2019). Genetic studies have shown that there is genetic isolation between both sides of the Atlantic Ocean (Viñas et al. 2010), and clear heterogeneity among Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean populations (Viñas et al. 2020). These studies suggest that Atlantic bonito might have multiple stock units in the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea that disagree with the management areas adopted by ICCAT (Viñas et al. 2020).

National fisheries regulations in the Eastern Atlantic have recently been implemented. The Turkish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has set a seasonal ban on all recreational and sport fishing for Atlantic bonito along all coastal regions from April 1 to August 14. These regulations are part of a nationwide initiative to safeguard marine biodiversity during peak spawning months. Outside of this time frame, regulations are a minimum size of 25 cm (10 inches) with a 5 kg (11 lb) daily limit per angler (Sport Fishing Türkiye 2025).

In the United States, the only state that has adopted regulations for Atlantic bonito is Massachusetts. In May of 2025, the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries enacted the first-ever size and possession limits for both false albacore (little tunny) and Atlantic bonito. The minimum size limit for both species is 16 inches curved FL and reflects the estimated size-at-maturity for both species. Additionally, retention is limited to no more than five fish per person per day of both species combined and applies only to fish caught and possessed in state waters (0-3 miles). These new limits apply universally to all persons whether commercially or recreationally fishing; however, there are bycatch exemptions for commercial fish weirs and mechanized mackerel jigging operations, as sorting and discarding the bycatch would be unduly burdensome for these fisheries. Massachusetts has seen considerable growth in the fishery without the benefit of stock assessments, extensive understanding of species life history, or fishery management plans (FMPs) to control fishing mortality. As a result, the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries chose to adopt these precautionary management measures until a time when a more robust science and management program is implemented. The new possession

limits are designed to constrain recreational harvest approximately at current levels and discourage further expansion while curtailing the development of a directed commercial fishery (Commonwealth of Mass. DMF 2025).

Currently, there are no rules for management in place for Atlantic bonito in any other states, but some states are considering management. Management is not currently being pursued, though it has been discussed by the ASMFC, the SAFMC, and the MAFMC. At the August 2016 MAFMC meeting, council staff recommended the Council consider developing management actions for the species in the future (including a potential small tuna FMP), due to a high level of public concern for the species, particularly from the recreational sector. The ASMFC Interstate Fisheries Management Program Policy Board (Policy Board) tasked ASMFC staff in February 2022 to present an options paper on possible paths forward for management of Atlantic bonito and false albacore after concerns were raised regarding increased recreational harvest of juvenile fish in some state waters. Staff presented possible options for developing different paths to management for both Atlantic bonito and false albacore at the May 2023 ASMFC Policy Board meeting. The information also included the states' ability to regulate a species and timing to implement measures without an ASMFC FMP. ASMFC staff noted that if additional species were added to the ASMFC portfolio, it would increase the workload for ASMFC and state staff, some of which are already at full capacity. Although some member states are interested in management measures for these species, ASMFC's Policy Board decided not to pursue management at the interstate level. Similarly, management of Atlantic bonito through a small tuna FMP has not been pursued yet by a federal management body.

Proposed N.C. Atlantic Bonito Management

At its May 2024 business meeting, the NCMFC passed a motion to request N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF) staff develop an issue paper for Atlantic bonito management, including landings information and proposed rule language, using the previous sheepshead issue paper (February 11, 2013) as a model to follow. Discussions among commissioners noted concerns expressed by recreational stakeholders about angler behavior changing in targeting Atlantic bonito in more recent years and the potential need to implement a recreational bag limit. Further concerns expressed by the NCMFC identified limited information about Atlantic bonito in this part of the Atlantic Ocean and no measure of stock status for the population, and whether these recent increases in recreational catches may not be due to more fish, but rather due to changes in fishing tactics and new technologies available to recreational anglers to improve their success in catching Atlantic bonito when available in state waters. Commissioners did not express concern for commercial catches due to Atlantic bonito having a limited shelf life as a fresh product and not being desirable frozen as likely reasons behind no similar increase in commercial harvest. Potential waste of the resource was discussed, since there are no current limits on Atlantic bonito. The NCMFC also identified the need to learn more about the fisheries and develop rule language in order to implement regulations to get ahead of a potential problem. Commissioners continued discussions on Atlantic bonito at their August and November 2024, and May 2025 business meetings with an urgency to be proactive in their management and continued to stress the need to implement a bag limit in the recreational fishery.

At the August 2025 NCMFC business meeting, NCDMF staff presented background information, which outlined life history and catch characteristics of Atlantic bonito. Commissioners discussed that Atlantic bonito appear to behave differently off southeast North Carolina than in other locations along the coast, showing preference for structure and pondered if these preferences are associated with spawning thereby making Atlantic bonito more vulnerable to harvest. Commissioners mentioned that the presentation illustrated the increasing trends in the recreational landings with smaller fish being caught in recent years and discussed the potential for implementing both a bag limit and possibly a size limit on the recreational sector. A commissioner stressed that in their own capture of Atlantic bonito the fish have a mouth-to-gills structure more like Spanish mackerel and therefore the hooks are often closer to the gills creating higher potential for release mortality. The commissioner therefore expressed hesitation to consider a size limit as it could increase discards. Smaller Atlantic bonito appear later in the season often mixed in with Spanish mackerel and regardless will result in the catch of smaller fish. The stated intention behind the NCMFC adopting a rule to delegate broad proclamation authority to the Fisheries Director is to implement a recreational bag limit soon after the rule becomes effective. The NCMFC passed a motion for NCDMF staff to bring proposed rulemaking language for a five-fish recreational bag limit per person for Atlantic bonito to its November 2025 business meeting. At the November 2025 NCMFC business meeting several proposed rulemaking options were presented, followed by a brief discussion of next steps in the rulemaking process. At the February 2026 NCMFC business meeting, the NCMFC selected a management option that would implement a five-fish recreational bag limit and delegate the authority for the Fisheries Director to issue a proclamation to manage all other parameters of the commercial and recreational fisheries with prior NCMFC consent.

Summarizing the available data, landings from the recreational sector have increased in state waters over the last 10 years and North Carolina accounts for 22% of the overall coastwide landings. Additionally, trends in the number of recreationally harvested fish have increased while trends in the number of released fish have remained stable over this time. Currently, there is no targeted commercial fishery for Atlantic bonito in North Carolina. Due to the opportunistic nature of the fishery, commercial trips typically land less than 50 pounds per trip, with trips exceeding 300 pounds making up less than 5% of the total number of trips in state and federal waters. Further, there appears to be no biological concern for the Atlantic bonito stock since there is no evidence of size truncation in the commercial and recreational fisheries over the past decade, and most fish are caught at or above the L_{50} (15 inches FL) except in the most recent two years of recreational data (2023, 2024). Likewise, there is no biological evidence that higher harvest in recent years is sustainable. While these trends do not indicate the need for immediate management, it would be prudent to continue to monitor landings and collect additional biological information for this species.

The proposed rule delegates authority to the Fisheries Director to issue a proclamation to address variable conditions in the Atlantic bonito fishery to manage time, area, means and methods, season, size, and except for a bag limit of five fish per person per day for recreational purposes that would be set in rule. Implementation of the proposed rule, once in effect, would include formal monitoring of the commercial and recreational Atlantic bonito fisheries by the NCDMF. Formal monitoring would mean NCDMF annually providing a landings summary with trends in

the fishery, length frequency distributions, updates on any biological studies, and any changes in management that may occur at the state and federal level to the NCMFC at its first business meeting after July 1, typically occurring in August. Including NCMFC consent in the rule provides the opportunity during a public meeting for the NCMFC to review and discuss the proposed issuance of a proclamation since there is no baseline stock assessment of Atlantic bonito and no FMP to address adaptive management when landings are variable year to year.

III. Fiscal Analysis

The purpose of this document is to examine the potential economic impacts (costs and benefits) of the proposed Atlantic bonito management rule.

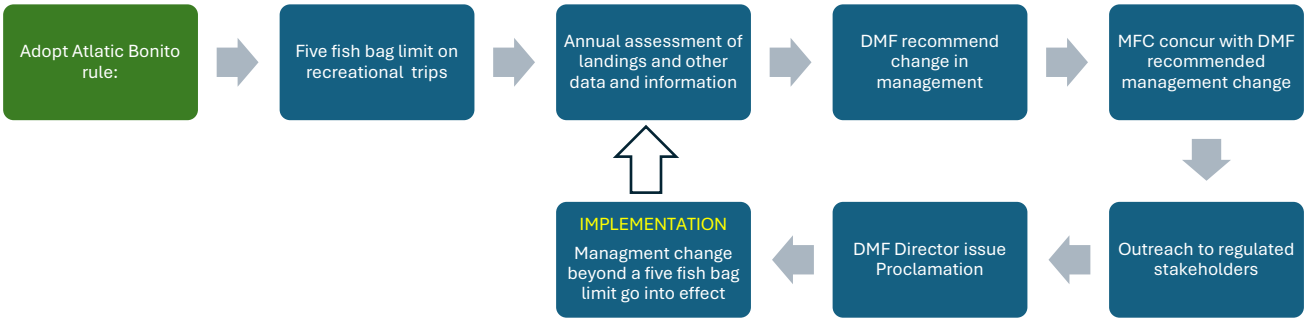
In the near term, the rule would impose a five-fish recreational bag limit. This restriction could reduce harvest for anglers who currently retain more than five Atlantic bonito per trip. However, NCDMF's collected data indicate that most recreational trips land less than five fish, and because many recreational Atlantic bonito fishing trips are catch-and-release and the available catch and trip data are imprecise, NCDMF cannot reliably estimate the magnitude of any resulting change in harvest, effort, or discards. Supporting data are provided in the companion document. "Atlantic Bonito Management Issue Paper" that was presented to the NCFMC at its February 2026 business meeting located here: [https://www.deq.nc.gov/marine-fisheries/marine-fisheries-commission/february-2026/atlantic-bonito-issue-paper/open].

The rule would also establish proclamation authority for the Fisheries Director, with prior NCMFC consent, to implement additional management measures if future conditions warrant action. Although any additional restrictions would depend on future biological or fishery conditions, establishing this framework in advance provides regulatory certainty to the regulated community regarding the types of measures that could be implemented. It may also improve compliance slightly if a proclamation is issued in the future, because stakeholders would already have notice of the potential management tools available. It is also possible that no additional management measures would ever be implemented beyond the five-fish recreational bag limit.

The costs to the regulated community would primarily consist of reduced harvest opportunities under the five-fish bag limit and any future restrictions that may be adopted through proclamation. Recreational fishers who do not retain Atlantic bonito, or who retain five or fewer fish per trip, would not be affected by the bag limit. The proposed rule is not expected to create costs for the State because enforcement of the bag limit and any future proclamation-based measures would occur through existing Marine Patrol duties without requiring additional resources.

The rule's primary long-term benefit would be to expedite implementation of additional management measures if changes in commercial or recreational trends, length frequency distributions, biological studies, or state and federal management indicate that further action is needed. Figure 1 below illustrates the steps that would follow adoption of the rule if additional management measures were later implemented through proclamation.

Figure 1. Steps from Adoption of Rule to Implementation



IV. Conclusion

Although the rule's near-term effects are expected to be minimal and its long-term benefits are not readily quantifiable due to data limitations and uncertainty about future conditions, the rule would provide three real advantages: (1) a precautionary harvest cap, (2) regulatory certainty about potential future management tools, and (3) faster, transparent response capability through proclamation authority with prior public NCMFC consent. These improvements would enhance NCDMF's ability to manage Atlantic bonito sustainably while preserving public participation in the process, ultimately benefiting both the species and North Carolina's marine resources users.

Because additional management measures may never be needed, and because the available data are highly imprecise, it is impractical to predict the likelihood of realizing costs and benefits associated with future proclamation-based management. Any such measures could be implemented only through the Fisheries Director's use of proclamation authority, with prior consent from the NCMFC. That prior consent would be considered at an NCMFC business meeting, where the public may attend and provide comment in advance of and during the meeting.

Table 1. Recreational harvest (number of fish landed and weight in pounds) and releases (number of fish) and commercial harvest (weight in pounds) of Atlantic bonito from North Carolina for the period 1994–2025. Data with an asterisk is preliminary (up to October for recreational and up to September for commercial) and not included in averages. PSE is Percent Standard Error. (Source: Marine Recreational Information Program and North Carolina Trip Ticket Program)

	Recreational						Commercial	
Year	# Landed	PSE	# Released	PSE	Weight Landed (lb)	PSE	Weight (lb)	Total Weight (lb)
1994	11,860	48.2	18,933	48.6	23,712	56.7	37,372	61,084
1995	10,528	73.8	2,407	49.2	41,312	80.6	34,717	76,029
1996	864	58.2	10,845	56.1	5,394	71.9	16,267	21,661
1997	31,090	41.4	29,816	52.7	162,980	41.8	42,372	205,352
1998	13,513	68.4	8,836	72.7	145,837	87.7	21,352	167,189
1999	6,045	44.8	2,682	73	38,657	44.2	23,291	61,948
2000	13,617	93.4	9,257	58.4	69,579	89.9	13,343	82,922
2001	7,722	48.2	5,001	56.1	23,603	50.7	16,531	40,134
2002	28,728	64	30,165	65.7	97,115	66.1	15,456	112,571
2003	2,275	58.8	12,968	50.9	6,685	51.2	27,379	34,064
2004	10,274	56.6	19,082	39.3	48,251	57.3	9,302	57,553
2005	2,102	76.6	42,363	98.6	9,388	73.8	11,672	21,060
2006	1,037	102.4	2,755	51.4	4,457	102.4	9,770	14,227
2007	7,685	48.1	4,523	41.8	34,693	46.3	16,085	50,778
2008	5,230	56.8	23,411	61.1	39,093	61.8	16,576	55,669
2009	1,380	71.8	2,561	92.2	13,799	85.4	9,981	23,780
2010	447	42.4	16,583	41.6	8,019	47.1	15,686	23,705
2011	21,235	73.1	28,618	42.1	287,458	66.4	11,039	298,497
2012	6,913	37.1	7,858	35.6	95,947	49.3	11,343	107,290
2013	19,182	59.9	4,609	41.3	99,252	55.4	10,506	109,758
2014	18,379	49.3	59,926	62.7	91,227	53.6	9,081	100,308
2015	16,973	44.8	1,325	60.8	102,408	42.8	20,989	123,397
2016	3,411	64.7	10,196	45.2	22,127	60.3	14,838	36,965
2017	1,999	45.6	40,094	75.6	9,579	53	11,345	20,924
2018	12,577	42.5	11,745	66.4	42,879	49.7	13,848	56,727
2019	35,875	66.6	24,033	66.1	122,931	48.6	14,045	136,976
2020	52,337	50.9	23,818	55.3	179,803	47.9	15,926	195,729
2021	20,178	26.6	7,793	44.5	104,789	29.1	7,351	112,140
2022	12,301	45.4	11,763	70.7	70,411	45.7	6,576	76,987
2023	72,973	40.4	31,930	70.4	268,260	36.8	17,876	286,136
2024	61,813	34.4	7,513	48.6	130,686	43.2	12,100	142,786
2025	96,013*	26.9*	36,892*	27.5*	303,905*	28.6*	32,326*	336,231*
Average	16,469	56	16,562	58	77,430	58	16,581	94,011

A PSE value greater than 50 indicates very imprecise estimates.

A PSE value between 30 and 50 indicates using the data with caution.

A PSE value less than 30 indicates estimates have a relatively low margin of error.

Table 2. Maximum, minimum, and average recreational landings and release rates (numbers per trip) in North Carolina by area, 2011-2024. (Source: Marine Recreational Information Program)

		Landings			Releases		
Year	Area	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Minimum	Maximum
2011	State	1.7	0.0	1.7	0.5	0.0	0.5
	Federal	0.4	0.0	0.4	1.9	0.0	1.9
2012	State	0.8	0.0	0.8	1.1	0.0	1.1
	Federal	0.8	0.0	0.8	0.8	0.0	0.8
2013	State	2.4	0.0	2.4	0.3	0.0	0.3
	Federal	0.5	0.0	0.5	0.8	0.0	0.8
2014	State	1.7	0.0	1.7	3.6	0.0	3.6
	Federal	0.4	0.0	0.4	4.8	0.0	4.8
2015	State	2.9	0.0	2.9	0.1	0.0	0.1
	Federal	1.4	0.0	1.4	0.1	0.0	0.1
2016	State	0.5	0.0	0.5	0.7	0.0	0.7
	Federal	0.2	0.0	0.2	1.0	0.0	1.0
2017	State	0.2	0.0	0.2	9.2	0.0	9.2
	Federal	0.3	0.0	0.3	1.5	0.0	1.5
2018	State	1.2	0.0	1.2	0.8	0.0	0.8
	Federal	1.1	0.0	1.1	1.2	0.0	1.2
2019	State	3.0	0.0	3.0	1.7	0.0	1.7
	Federal	1.2	0.0	1.2	1.8	0.0	1.8
2020	State	3.8	0.0	3.8	1.0	0.0	1.0
	Federal	0.9	0.0	0.9	1.7	0.0	1.7
2021	State	1.3	0.0	1.3	0.6	0.0	0.6
	Federal	1.1	0.0	1.1	0.3	0.0	0.3
2022	State	1.1	0.0	1.1	0.2	0.0	0.2
	Federal	0.9	0.0	0.9	2.8	0.0	2.8
2023	State	2.9	0.0	2.9	2.2	0.0	2.2
	Federal	1.8	0.0	1.8	0.1	0.0	0.1
2024	State	2.0	0.0	2.0	0.3	0.0	0.3
	Federal	1.7	0.0	1.7	0.2	0.0	0.2

Table 3. North Carolina commercial landings in pounds by gear and value, 1994-2024. (Source: North Carolina Trip Ticket Program)

	Gear					
Year	Gill Nets	Hook & Line	Other*	Total	Value	Price/Pound
1994	30,848	5,742	782	37,372	$14,201	$0.38
1995	29,576	4,999	143	34,717	$6,943	$0.20
1996	5,880	10,015	372	16,267	$3,843	$0.24
1997	35,689	6,119	564	42,372	$9,455	$0.22
1998	17,030	4,260	63	21,352	$24,199	$1.13
1999	11,083	12,196	12	23,291	$20,832	$0.89
2000	6,240	7,089	14	13,343	$18,798	$1.41
2001	11,814	4,689	28	16,531	$10,433	$0.63
2002	5,058	10,384	14	15,456	$11,741	$0.76
2003	19,494	7,763	122	27,379	$18,563	$0.68
2004	5,521	3,706	76	9,302	$9,086	$0.98
2005	174	10,898	600	11,672	$7,286	$0.62
2006	5,501	4,099	170	9,770	$10,503	$1.08
2007	4,382	11,683	20	16,085	$20,403	$1.27
2008	8,310	8,101	165	16,576	$19,937	$1.20
2009	3,359	6,422	200	9,981	$14,060	$1.41
2010	12,985	2,435	266	15,686	$20,152	$1.28
2011	5,160	4,890	989	11,039	$20,041	$1.82
2012	7,173	3,879	291	11,343	$15,833	$1.40
2013	2,666	7,721	119	10,506	$15,460	$1.47
2014	3,969	4,771	341	9,081	$14,386	$1.58
2015	13,100	7,664	225	20,989	$32,905	$1.57
2016	10,487	4,346	6	14,838	$26,780	$1.80
2017	7,084	4,130	131	11,345	$20,261	$1.79
2018	8,248	5,552	48	13,848	$25,228	$1.82
2019	10,256	3,705	84	14,045	$15,556	$1.11
2020	10,824	5,062	41	15,926	$12,835	$0.81
2021	4,649	2,646	56	7,351	$16,620	$2.26
2022	4,689	1,775	112	6,576	$12,544	$1.91
2023	15,744	1,972	160	17,876	$30,287	$1.69
2024	8,583	3,279	238	12,100	$19,733	$1.63

*Other gear includes seines, trawls, and pound nets

Appendix I.: Proposed Rule Changes

15A NCAC 03M .0524 is proposed for adoption as follows:

15A NCAC 03M .0524 ATLANTIC BONITO

(a) It shall be unlawful to possess more than five Atlantic bonito per person per day for recreational purposes.

(b) The Fisheries Director may, with prior consent of the Marine Fisheries Commission, by proclamation and pursuant to 15A NCAC 03H .0103, impose any of the following requirements on the taking of Atlantic bonito:

(1) specify time;

(2) specify area;

(3) specify means and methods;

(4) specify season;

(5) specify size; and

(6) specify quantity, except as provided in Paragraph (a) of this Rule.

History Note: *Authority G.S. 113-134; 113-182; 113-221.1; 143B-289.52*

Appendix II.: Literature Cited

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Yoshida, H.O., 1980. Synopsis of biological data on bonitos of the genus *Sarda*. NOAA Tech. Rep. NMFS Circ. 432. FAO Fish. Synop. No. 118. 50 p.

Public Comments on MFC 2026-2027 Proposed Atlantic Bonito Rule
October 2, 2026

Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
10/1/2026 12:21	Abby Mcgregor	Ocean Springs	Mississippi	For	
10/1/2026 12:17	Adrian Draughn	Biloxi	Mississippi	For	I think a bag limit is essential for helping ensure the bonito fishery remains stable for future generations.
10/1/2026 12:19	Alena Anderson	Ocean Springs	Mississippi	For	
10/1/2026 13:17	Barton Lewis	Lynn Haven	Florida	For	Needs some kind of limit instead of making cat food
8/17/2026 0:00	Bennie L Braswell		North Carolina	For	[Online comment for August 2026 MFC business meeting:] I agree with the limit on Bonito. But not the overall policies currently in place
8/26/2026 18:00:00	Blane Chocklett		Virginia	For	[Provided public comment at August 26, 2026 MFC hearing for proposed rule]
10/2/2026 10:52	Blane Chocklett	Troutville	Virginia	For	I've been traveling to fishing coastal North Carolina for more than 30 years. Coastal North Carolina's fishing it produces. Coastal North Carolina is one of my favorite places to visit each year for the beauty and the fishing it offers. I support the proposed five-fish recreational bag limit for Atlantic Bonito and the Director's proclamation authority with Commission consent. Bonito are currently unmanaged in North Carolina. This rule sets a sensible baseline and lets managers respond if the fishery changes. Please approve it. Thank you for your time All the best Blane Chocklett
9/30/2026 20:52	Brendan Curley	Medway	Massachusetts	For	I'm a college student and angler who fishes for Atlantic bonito in Massachusetts every season. I support the proposed five-fish recreational bag limit and the Director's proclamation authority with Commission consent. Bonito are an important resource to me and to the fishing community around me, and I want to help protect them for the future. Please approve this proposal.

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October 2, 2026

Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
8/29/2026 8:49	Brian Sittlow	Westerly	Rhode Island	For	I support the implementation of an Atlantic Bonito 5 fish per day bag limit. Atlantic Bonito is a coast wide migratory species. The benefits of North Carolina's management decisions will have positive impact across the coast. Hopefully, states like RI and others will follow this pattern to manage conservatively and protect this species that so many enjoy. With kind regards, Brian Sittlow CAPT, US Navy (ret) Westerly, RI
10/1/2026 12:00	Brooke Rice	Traverse City	Michigan	Against	Proposing a 5 fish Bonita limit for anglers instead of removing all Regulations - the fishing industry needs some regulation for longevity- thank you
10/1/2026 12:22	Carly Standbridge	Ocean Springs	Mississippi	For	

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October 2, 2026

Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
10/1/2026 20:47	Chris Thompson	Hubert	North Carolina	For	Regarding 15A NCAC 03M .0524 ATLANTIC BONITO Comments in favor of the rule provided on behalf of the Cape Lookout Albacore Foundation which was founded for charitable and educational purposes, specifically aimed at conserving and understanding the coastal fisheries of North Carolina. Atlantic Bonito are an important seasonal fishery for many guides and recreational anglers on the North Carolina Coast. Ensuring the health of this species protects both the resource and the businesses that rely upon it and supports sustainable recreational fishing. The proposed management rule establishes a baseline for responsible harvest and is consistent with good stewardship of a public resource. Proactive, reasonable management of a healthy fishery is preferable to reactive, corrective management to a depleted one. The North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission Fiscal Impact of Proposed Atlantic Bonito Management Rule document published observed there are no management rules in place for Atlantic Bonito, and landings from the recreational sector have risen over the past 10 years. The document concludes that North Carolina accounts for 22% of the overall coastwide harvest of the species. This document concludes the proposed rule would, enhance the Department of Marine Fisheries' ability to manage Atlantic Bonito sustainably while preserving public participation in the process, ultimately benefitting the both the species and North Carolina's marine resources users. The Cape Lookout Albacore Foundation concurs with this rationale. A five-fish limit is a mild, practical first step. We support the flexibility provided to the Fisheries Director to respond rapidly should conditions change. Supporting the rule now mitigates the risk of more restrictive measures being required in the future. We urge the Commission to adopt the five-fish rule. What we do here in North Carolina can serve as an example to other states. Responsible stewardship is founded in ensuring future generations may enjoy the same opportunities we ourselves appreciate. The proposed rule enables us to do so, and to lead the way for others on the Atlantic Coast to do the same.
9/28/2026 18:20	Christine Gunshinan	New City	New York	For	Recreational bag limit 5 per day Atlantic Bonito Authority for the Div of Marine Fisheries Director to add measures with the consent prior by commission

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October 2, 2026

Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
8/7/2026 7:21	Chuck Ward	Atlantic Beach	North Carolina	For	I have witnessed large numbers of bonitos being needlessly harvested per boat out at AR315 simply because they are easy targets. These boats often host less than 4 fishermen each. This fish does not freeze or preserve well, so many of these fish may be discarded and not consumed. A 5 fish per person creel limit is reasonable and necessary. Thank you.
8/26/2026 18:00:00	Cody Rubner			For	[Provided public comment at August 26, 2026 MFC hearing for proposed rule]
9/28/2026 14:19	Craig Cantelmo	Cutchogue	New York	For	"I frequently fish for Atlantic bonito in North Carolina and support the proposed five-fish recreational bag limit and the Director's proclamation authority with Commission consent. Bonito are currently unmanaged in North Carolina. This rule sets a sensible baseline and lets managers respond if the fishery changes. Please approve it."
8/3/2026 13:07	Curt Bell	Oak Island	North Carolina	Undecided	In reference to the proposed Atlantic Bonito harvest limits. As long as commercial fisherman are allowed to pull nets in and around inland waters killing millions of fish belonging to all citizens and taxpayers of NC while making millions of dollars exploiting that public resource I don't think any limits should be imposed on recreational fisherman.
8/29/2026 21:21	Dan Ruede	Watervleit	New York	For	I am for setting a five-fish recreational bag limit for Atlantic bonito. Thank you for your time, and thank you for considering taking the necessary steps to give our oceans and fisheries the best possible chance they can have.
10/1/2026 12:22	Danielle Mcaree	Ocean Springs	Mississippi	For	
8/26/2026 18:00:00	Eddie Nickens			For	[Provided public comment at August 26, 2026 MFC hearing for proposed rule]
10/1/2026 14:20	Edward Pacheco	Virginia Beach	Virginia	For	There should be limit on Atlantic Bonita all along North Carolina and all the US eastern shore line.

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October 2, 2026

Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
8/5/2026 7:34	Glenn Anderson	Bunnlevel	North Carolina	Against	Really?? Another restriction for the weekend fisherman? I don't keep bonito, but that's not the point. The Atlantic bonito is not endangered. In fact, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Atlantic Bonito is way down at the bottom of their list, number 7 of 7 assessed categories, and that category is named Least Concerned (LC). A "Least Concern" species is a species that has had their population status fully evaluated and categorized by the IUCN as not being a focus of wildlife conservation because the specific species is still plentiful in the wild. This new proposal of yours has nothing to do with conservation, but displaying your authority. Who harvests fisheries indiscriminately, the commercial or recreational fisherman? If you were truly interested in conservation of any fisherie, you petty tyrants would have done so decades ago, by putting severe restrictions on trawlers which rape the very marine ecosystem they travel through each and every trip. Maybe I'm wrong, but it seems the commercial fishery in general doesn't have as many restrictions as the recreational fisherman who only goes out a handful of times per year. The commercial fisheries measure their catch in metric tons, rather than a few pounds by the recreational fisherman who wants a few meals. My vote is absolutely NO, on this proposal. Glenn Anderson, Lifetime Sportsman License XXXXXXX
10/1/2026 12:04	Ian Devlin	Norwalk	Connecticut	For	I am for new protective regulation of Atlantic Bonito.
10/2/2026 10:34	Jack Sherman	Sneads Ferry	North Carolina	For	Highly advise making a limit for bonito. They are very difficult to freeze well. Lots of these fish are wasted each year.
8/7/2026 16:29	Jacob Presley	Dallas	North Carolina	For	I believe the fish limit is more than enough. These fish are usually not eaten just used as bait from my experiences. They provide a good sportfish and most not keeping them are catching them for sport rather than bycatch and using them as bait as the ones that keep them. The flounder rules are ridiculous though. So I am suspect if this just favors commercial fishermen in some way I don't know. I do know enough about the way the coastal fisheries mafia families operate when it's a fish they want to rape. But Bonito aren't one of those right?

Public Comments on MFC 2026-2027 Proposed Atlantic Bonito Rule
October 2, 2026

Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
8/26/2026 18:00:00	Jake Hardy	Durham	Maine	For	[Provided public comment at August 26, 2026 MFC hearing for proposed rule]
10/2/2026 15:59	Jake Hardy	Durham	Maine	For	Subject: Support for proposed Atlantic bonito rule, 15A NCAC 03M .0524 Dear Members of the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission, I support proposed rule 15A NCAC 03M .0524: a recreational possession limit of five Atlantic bonito per person per day. I am commenting from out of state because I've loved my spring and fall trips to Hatteras and Cape Lookout. When the redfish and bluefish don't cooperate, bonito can save a fishing vacation. The landings are the reason to act now. From 1994 to 2024, North Carolina's recreational landings averaged about 16,500 fish a year. The preliminary 2025 estimate, through October, is about 96,000 fish, close to six times that average. The three highest years in the series are 2023, 2024, and 2025. That increase happened with no bag limit, no size limit, and no stock assessment. The Division's issue paper states that there is no biological evidence that the higher harvest of recent years is sustainable. It also reports that in 2023 and 2024 about 59 percent of the bonito harvested recreationally were smaller than the size at which half the fish are mature. A possession limit is the least the state can do until better information exists. Five fish costs anglers very little. The division's fiscal analysis found that most recreational trips land fewer than five bonito, because anyone who's tried to eat a frozen bonito knows they turn to mush. Adopting this rule would would help prevent the waste of a valuable resource. Thank you, Jake Hardy
8/28/2026 20:27	James E Adamo	Dafter	Michigan	For	High time to start protecting our unregulated fisheries. Thank you for taking action!

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October 2, 2026

Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
9/29/2026 12:37	Jeanne Kispert	New York	New York	For	I support the proposed five-fish per person, per day recreational bag limit. This establishes a necessary, proactive baseline to ensure the long-term sustainability of the fishery amid rising recreational landings. I agree with granting the Division of Marine Fisheries Director the authority to implement additional measures, provided it strictly requires the Commission's prior consent. Any additional restrictions must remain data-driven, formally approved by the Commission, and paired with clear public outreach and a reasonable transition timeline before taking effect. Thank you for your dedication to managing North Carolina's marine fisheries and for considering these comments before the October 2, 2026, public comment deadline.

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October 2, 2026

Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
9/28/2026 16:31	Jeannette Damitz	Staten Island	New York	For	I support establishing a five-fish daily recreational bag limit for Atlantic bonito in North Carolina. I also support giving the Division of Marine Fisheries Director the authority to implement additional management measures by proclamation with prior approval from the Marine Fisheries Commission. As recreational fishing pressure continues to increase, having a reasonable bag limit in place would provide a basic management framework for Atlantic bonito while still allowing anglers to enjoy the fishery. A five-fish limit seems like a practical starting point that would have little impact on most recreational anglers while helping prevent unnecessary increases in harvest. I also believe it is important for fisheries managers to have the ability to respond quickly if conditions change, rather than having to wait for a lengthy regulatory process. Establishing these measures now would give North Carolina a better foundation for managing the fishery responsibly in the future. Thank you for considering this comment and for your work managing North Carolina's marine fisheries.

Public Comments on MFC 2026-2027 Proposed Atlantic Bonito Rule
October 2, 2026

Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
8/4/2026 12:28	Jefferson Rives	Charlotte	North Carolina	For	At the February meeting, Commissioner Hobgood observed that the Commission is too often reactive instead of proactive, and that protecting and preserving fish stocks is one of the Commission's core duties. I agree completely. Waiting for measurable decline before acting has been the pattern across too many North Carolina fisheries, and it has not served this state well. Bonito currently has no state bag limit. Establishing one now, while the stock is healthy, is precisely the precautionary management that prevents future crises instead of reacting to them after the fact. The proclamation authority in this rule matters just as much as the bag limit. It preserves the Division's ability to respond quickly to new information without a full rulemaking cycle each time conditions change. That adaptive capacity should be protected, not restricted. I urge the Commission to adopt this rule as proposed.
8/26/2026 18:00:00	John Mauser			For	[Provided public comment at August 26, 2026 MFC hearing for proposed rule]
8/5/2026 7:40	John McQuaid	Raleigh	North Carolina	For	I support limits on Bonito, and the other provisions of the rule. However, I don't think it goes far enough. I support a three fish per day limit. Bonito doesn't freeze well and I don't keep more that I can eat in one meal.
8/17/2026 0:00	Joseph J Francis		North Carolina	Against	[Online comment for August 2026 MFC business meeting:] Why should NC MFC or DMF have a roll in managing Atlantic Bonito as a migratory fish species with a brief stay along the NC Coast in the spring? It's not like either agency has a proven track record of properly managing our NC Fisheries over the last couple of decades or longer. Other than being poorly managed ! If any management is to be done on Atlantic Bonito it should be done as groups of states along the Southeast Atlantic and also the Northeast.
8/26/2026 14:43	Joseph Harris	Creedmoor	North Carolina	For	I just wanted to say that as a dedicated conservationist and an avid fisherman, I support limits for Atlantic Bonita. Thank you for the opportunity to voice an opinion.

Public Comments on MFC 2026-2027 Proposed Atlantic Bonito Rule
October 2, 2026

Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
8/26/2026 18:00:00	Joseph Harris	Creedmoor	North Carolina	For	[Provided public comment at August 26, 2026 MFC hearing for proposed rule]
8/26/2026 13:29	Joseph McClure	Spartanburg	South Carolina	For	Pass the bonito limits!
10/1/2026 12:11	Justin Kim	Biloxi	Mississippi	For	I am commenting on proposed rule 15A NCAC 03M .0524, and I believe that this is a good change to ensure the health of the Sarda sarda stock which is a valuable recreational fishery and also previously had no regulations.
9/29/2026 20:48	Justin William Ragsdale	Newport	North Carolina	For	Five per person is more than enough. I would add: No captain mate limits allowed on charter. Max boat limit of 20.
8/28/2026 15:54	Keith Goodman	Naples	Florida	For	These fish are critical links in the chain of our oceans. They are too often overlooked in management practices and deserve significant management action. Please enact these new rules for the future of our kids kids ability to enjoy the resources we know and have too often come to take for granted.
10/1/2026 14:13	Ken Eiler	Beaufort	North Carolina	For	I have been a salt water fly fisherman for 25 years The Bonita is a great fish for both catching and eating Please protect them!
8/16/2026 17:12	Kevin Zyvoloski	Raleigh	North Carolina	For	I support this change.
10/2/2026 14:54	Kitri Schaefer	York	Maine	For	I am an angler up and down the east coast. I care about the health of our fisheries and support the proposed five-fish recreational bag limit and the Director's proclamation authority with Commission consent. Bonito are currently unmanaged in North Carolina. This rule sets a sensible baseline and lets managers respond if the fishery changes. Please approve it.
10/1/2026 19:16	Kyle Chanitz	Boones Mill	Virginia	For	With 5 bonito a day per anger it is more than a fair regulation
8/25/2026 12:24	Kyle Schaefer	York	Maine	For	With Atlantic Bonito increasing in both harvest and importance to anglers I support instating the 5 fish per day limit on Bonito. This common sense measure will help to ensure that this fishery is enjoyed for the long haul rather than exploited by few in the short term. Thank you for the time and for your proactive approach to fisheries management! Abundance for all is the dream. Best, Kyle Schaefer

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October 2, 2026

Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
8/26/2026 18:00:00	Kyle Schaefer	York	Maine	For	[Provided public comment at August 26, 2026 MFC hearing for proposed rule]
10/2/2026 11:15	Kyle Schaefer	York	Maine	For	I fish for Atlantic Bonito on the east coast of the US in multiple states and I strongly support the proposition of the 5-fish rec bag limit and the Dirctor's Proclamtion Authority with Commission consent. Bonito are currently unmanaged and this fish deserves to be conseved and managed in a manner that will allow anglers to fish for them for years, and decades to come. We want to avoid overharvest by a subculture of folks that are removing dozens and dozens per day and most fish don't even end up getting eaten. This rule proposes a sensible baseline for management and protects against extreme overharvest. Thanks!
8/7/2026 7:16	Kyle van Althuis	Leland	North Carolina	Against	This a perfect example of government overreach. You feel you have a resource problem but have no real scientific data to support your feelings. Responsible institutions with the mandate of managing natural resources make scientific inquiries, gather data, and then propose informed regulations. Stop, study, and then come back and revisit this. These fish belong to the entire public of NC, not just the ones with boats. I [one of the few with a boat] should be able to share an abundant resource with my friends and family [the ones without a boat], on the very few days I'm able to target these fish during their brief visit to our coast.
8/3/2026 20:25	Mac Currin	Washington	North Carolina	For	I support setting a bag limit on bonito as well as adaptive management that might allow further restrictions if warranted and approved by the MFC. Thank you for proactively managing a previously unmanaged species.

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October 2, 2026

Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
10/1/2026 12:04	Madison Dunigan	Port St. Joe	Florida	For	There needs to be regulation such as a 5 fish limit per angler on Atlantic Bonita. These are an important species of fish and putting protections in place so that their populations can continue to thrive and anglers can continue to enjoy them should be a priority.
8/26/2026 17:05	Mario Campo	Madisonville	Louisiana	For	Re: Support for Proposed Atlantic Bonito Bag Limit (15A NCAC 03M .0524) Members of the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission and Division of Marine Fisheries Staff, Immense gratitude is extended to the Division of Marine Fisheries and the Marine Fisheries Commission for the consideration of novel fisheries management actions regarding Atlantic Bonito. This comment serves to document strong support for the proposed management action that would establish a five-fish recreational bag limit per person, per day - along with the technical ability for the Fisheries Director to implement additional measures by proclamation pursuant to 15A NCAC 03H .0103 and prior consent of the Marine Fisheries Commission. Atlantic Bonito can widely be considered a data poor species, particularly in North Carolina, where a large knowledge gap exists and stock status is considered practically unknown. It is pertinent that proactive management takes priority status rather than delay for a formal stock assessment considering targeted trips, and recreational harvest of Atlantic Bonito in North Carolina waters have increased. Despite increased harvest, a creel limit of five fish should not immediately place a negative utility on anglers considering the implementation of the proposed management action regulating harvest to five Atlantic Bonito per person per day can be considered quite modest, thus not limiting public access. In closing, thank you to the Division of Marine Fisheries Staff, along with the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission to consider active management action for an increasingly popular species, that little scientific information is known of. Implementation of this action will allow for active management of a valuable species, while laying the groundwork for future formal stock assessments, and ultimately promoting a resilient future for the Atlantic Bonito fishery. Thank you for your continued work on behalf of North Carolina's marine resources. Respectfully, Frank Mario Campo

Public Comments on MFC 2026-2027 Proposed Atlantic Bonito Rule
October 2, 2026

Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
8/26/2026 18:00:00	Mario Campo	Madisonville	Louisiana	For	[Provided public comment at August 26, 2026 MFC hearing for proposed rule]
10/2/2026 12:14	Mario Campo	Madisonville	Louisiana	For	Re: Support for Proposed Rule Setting a Five-Fish Recreational Bag Limit for Atlantic Bonito and Related Management Authority Dear Members of the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission, I write in strong support of the proposed rule establishing a five-fish recreational bag limit for Atlantic bonito (Sarda sarda) and authorizing the Division of Marine Fisheries Director to implement additional management measures by proclamation, subject to the Commission's prior consent. This is a measured, science-informed, and overdue step toward responsible stewardship of a shared coastal resource. Currently, North Carolina has no bag or size limits and no formal management framework for Atlantic bonito. Recreational landings have risen in recent years, and the state accounts for a meaningful share of the coastwide harvest. Leaving a popular and increasingly targeted species entirely unregulated is inconsistent with the principles of precautionary and adaptive fisheries management. Experience along the Atlantic coast has repeatedly shown that waiting for a comprehensive stock assessment before acting can allow fishing mortality to rise unchecked, increasing the risk of localized depletion and longer recovery times once a decline becomes evident. The proposed five-fish limit is appropriately modest. Available information indicates that most recreational trips do not currently retain this number of fish; therefore, the immediate reduction in harvest is expected to be limited. At the same time, the rule establishes a clear, enforceable baseline and provides a durable management tool. The accompanying authority for the Director to implement additional measures by proclamation, with prior Commission consent, provides the flexibility managers need to respond to changing conditions without unnecessary delay. This combination of a defined starting point and adaptive capacity represents sound policy. North Carolina's action would also complement existing measures in Massachusetts for bonito and false albacore. Coordinated state-level steps help protect a migratory resource that does not recognize jurisdictional boundaries. Proactive management is preferable to reactive measures taken only after clear evidence of decline. I urge the Commission to adopt the proposed rule. Doing so demonstrates a commitment to sustainable recreational fisheries, aligns with the precautionary approach embedded in modern fisheries policy, and helps ensure that Atlantic bonito remain available to future generations of anglers and coastal communities. Thank you for the opportunity to comment and for your continued attention to the responsible management of North Carolina's marine resources. Respectfully, Mario Campo Deputy Director of Fisheries Science and Policy American Saltwater Guides Association
10/1/2026 13:23	Matt Bynum	Colorado Springs	Colorado	For	I am for the proposal to limit the take of Atlantic Bonito. I believe they are an important species that need protection.

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Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
8/4/2026 4:04	Matt Torcasso	Durham	North Carolina	For	After doing some research, I am for a daily bag limit on Bonito to protect the fish from being harvested irresponsibly.
10/1/2026 12:23	Matt Virden	Ocean Springs	Mississippi	For	
8/26/2026 18:00:00	Michael Ellison			Against	[Provided public comment at August 26, 2026 MFC hearing for proposed rule]
10/1/2026 12:41	Mike Cartechine	Boston	New York	For	For limiting the number of Atlantic Bonita
10/1/2026 19:14	Morgan Wilson	Buchanan	Virginia	For	
10/1/2026 12:23	Nate McGregor	Ocean Springs	Mississippi	For	
8/25/2026 17:44	Newman Weaver	Georgetown	South Carolina	For	
10/1/2026 12:18	Olivia Gathright	Biloxi	Mississippi	For	I like bonito
8/28/2026 16:50	PARKER MAUCK	WESTPORT POINT	Massachusetts	For	I am a saltwater guide located in Westport, Massachusetts. The entire east coast of the U.S. shares the False Albacore and Atlantic Bonito resource. As such we all have a role and a responsibility to respect the species that inhabit our own state waters as well as the waters of other states. I support conservation measures to protect False Albacore and Atlantic Bonito. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.
10/1/2026 17:35	Patrick Robinson	Middlefield	Ohio	For	It's definitely time for these fish to have some kind of regulation to ensure these fish have healthy populations for the future. Thanks for taking the time to hear from the public!
8/4/2026 14:34	Pembroke Nash	Kernersville	North Carolina	For	I agree that Atlantic bonito need protection and a 5 fish per person bag limit is fair to fishermen and will protect the stock. These are an incredible seasonal target that should be managed for abundance, not maximum extraction.
8/7/2026 8:14	Pete Boelte	Wilmington	North Carolina	For	We should be proactive and regulating the take of Atlantic Bonito so that we do not have to end up with draconian restrictions like we have had to do with southern flounder because of the mismanagement of the fishery
8/26/2026 18:00:00	Ray Jarvis			For	[Provided public comment at August 26, 2026 MFC hearing for proposed rule]
10/1/2026 12:18	Ray Paull	Biloxi	Mississippi	For	

Public Comments on MFC 2026-2027 Proposed Atlantic Bonito Rule
October 2, 2026

Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
8/31/2026 9:59	Richard Beare	Clayton	North Carolina	For	this action makes sense to protect the species before the need arises. Given the lack of positive management results to protect the various species over the decades. My hope is this proposal puts in place a trigger instead of a reactionary response after the stock is in destress.
10/1/2026 18:34	Richard Formato	Wytheville	Virginia	For	We come fish every season - for 30 years - there needs to be a limit.
8/26/2026 20:51	Roger Davis	Columbia	South Carolina	For	I support the proposal for a bag limit of 5 for the Atlantic bonito. Thank you
8/26/2026 7:45	Sam Boyce	Wilmington	North Carolina	For	I appreciate MFC taking a proactive approach to managing this fishery. 5 Atlantic Bonito is a good starting point. As we learn more about the fishery status, you will be able to adjust as needed.
8/25/2026 9:31	Scott Davis	Charleston	South Carolina	For	As a retired fishing guide and fishing store owner in SC, the amount of anglers that headed to coastal North Carolina yearly was staggering. The economic impact that a fishery creates cannot be denied and these fish are important to the guides, shops, marinas, lure makers, restaurants etc that rely on their seasonal presence. I am absolutely for imposing a limit on bonito. 5 fish is a liberal bag limit for a fish that notoriously doesn't freeze well. As we all know there is percentage of people that will catch and kill everything you allow them too; with a fish that arrives in such big numbers (like Albies and Bonito) their protection becomes important as fishing pressure continues to grow. They are too valuable to become garden fertilizer or crab bait due to a simple lack of freezer space. Thank you sincerely to the members of the Marine Fisheries Commission and the Division of Marine Fisheries staff for considering such important regulations.
8/26/2026 18:00:00	Scott Davis	Charleston	South Carolina	For	[Provided public comment at August 26, 2026 MFC hearing for proposed rule]

Public Comments on MFC 2026-2027 Proposed Atlantic Bonito Rule
October 2, 2026

Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
10/1/2026 15:29	Sean Cosgrove	Washington, DC	District of Columbia	For	I support the rulemaking to create a five fish recreational fishing limit for Atlantic bonito. Recreational landings have been rising, and North Carolina accounts for a meaningful portion of the coastwide harvest. Leaving a popular and increasingly targeted species completely unregulated is not sustainable management. The proposed five-fish limit is modest. The immediate impact on harvest will be limited. At the same time, the rule creates a permanent baseline and gives managers a tool to respond if conditions change. That combination of a clear starting point and the ability to act quickly is the kind of common sense approach we need more of along the Atlantic coast. A five fish limit for Atlantic bonito presents a solid management solution for now and the future
10/1/2026 16:01	Sean Cosgrove	Washington, DC	District of Columbia	For	This comment pertains to the adoption of the proposed Atlantic Bonito Management Rule. Recreational landings have been rising, and North Carolina accounts for a meaningful portion of the coastwide harvest. Leaving a popular and increasingly targeted species completely unregulated is not sustainable management. The proposed five-fish limit is modest. The immediate impact on harvest will be limited. At the same time, the rule creates a permanent baseline and gives managers a tool to respond if conditions change. That combination of a clear starting point and the ability to act quickly is the kind of common sense approach we need more of along the Atlantic coast. Thank you for the ability to offer this comment. Sincerely, Sean Cosgrove Washington, DC

Public Comments on MFC 2026-2027 Proposed Atlantic Bonito Rule
October 2, 2026

Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
9/30/2026 17:17	Sheldon Batsavage	Morehead City	North Carolina	For	i support the proposed rule for Atlantic bonito. I think that five fish is enough for recreational anglers because they do not taste good and do not freeze well and i would like to see them around for a long time.
10/1/2026 20:45	Spencer Young	Lynchburg	Virginia	For	The fish need protection and limits to maintain a sustainable fishery.
10/1/2026 13:33	Stewart Gordon	Newport	North Carolina	For	I support the bag limit for Atlantic bonito. This fishery must be managed and maintained. Thank you.
9/29/2026 8:04	Susan Bertoline	Floral Park	New York	For	I support a five fish daily bag limit for Atlantic bonito in North Carolina. With a lot of fishing stocks in deep trouble these fish are being targeted more often and need precautionary protection. In addition, I support approving authority to the Div of Marine Fisheries Director to add management measures by proclamation, with the Commission's prior consent. This will allow a quicker response, if needed. North Carolina has a great fishery that they should protect for their residents and those that travel there for the fishing opportunities. Thank you for your consideration, Sue
8/26/2026 18:00:00	Tony Friedrich	Grasonville	Maryland	For	[Provided public comment at August 26, 2026 MFC hearing for proposed rule]

Public Comments on MFC 2026-2027 Proposed Atlantic Bonito Rule
October 2, 2026

Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
10/2/2026 12:45	Tony Friedrich	Grasonville	Maryland	For	Subject: Support for proposed Atlantic bonito recreational bag limit, 15A NCAC 03M .0524 The American Saltwater Guides Association supports the Marine Fisheries Commission's proposed five-fish recreational bag limit for Atlantic bonito, and we support giving the Division of Marine Fisheries Director proclamation authority to add time, area, season, size, and method measures with the Commission's prior consent. Thank you to the Division and the Commission for moving this. North Carolina has no bag limit, no size limit, and no management framework for Atlantic bonito. Putting a real possession limit in rule, before this fish is in the same shape as the stocks already in trouble, is the right use of the Commission's time. The staff work to get a fiscal analysis and a notice of text in front of the public was greatly appreciated. Five fish is enough. A limit of five matches what Massachusetts already did and what anglers can actually use. Atlantic bonito is an outstanding fish to eat the day it is caught. It does not freeze well, and it does not hold in a cooler the way a flounder or a black sea bass does. Past a couple of fish per person, the rest is waste. Leaving the recreational fishery unlimited has meant coolers of 40 and 50 fish on a good day, for a species with no assessment and no size limit. That is not a fishery; it is wanton waste. If people didn't behave badly, we wouldn't have to do this. It is also the wrong time to leave any coastal fish unmanaged. Southern flounder, spotted seatrout, and striped bass are already carrying reductions, closures, or failed year classes. Bonito should not be the fish people turn to when everything else is tight, with no ceiling on the kill. A five-fish bag does not close the season. It stops the waste and gives the Division a tool if the fishery changes. Please adopt the five-fish recreational limit as proposed, and keep the Director's proclamation authority tied to prior Commission consent. We will support this rule at final action in November. Tony Friedrich Policy Director American Saltwater Guides Association

Public Comments on MFC 2026-2027 Proposed Atlantic Bonito Rule
October 2, 2026

Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
8/4/2026 9:46	Will Anders	Raleigh	North Carolina	For	I think this rule is long overdue and if anything may not be restrictive enough. These are fish that are only here for a short time so we need to do our part not to over harvest during the short time they're here, and they also don't really freeze so nobody should need any more than this (or even this much). Given the long term failures of conservation and the public displays of lack of respect for the fishery health (just check instagram), I would much rather see a strong regulation in place now so that we don't lose yet another resource like has happened with flounder, spot, gray trout, etc.
8/4/2026 17:55	Will Brown	Wilmington	North Carolina	Against	I'm 50 years old and I have been saltwater fishing in NC for my entire life. New regulations on a previously unregulated species concerns me. Do we actually know anything about Atlantic Bonito: stock viability, maturity age, distribution, angling pressure? Is there a stock assessment, and if so how credible is it given this is a highly migratory ocean going species? I'm worried that the fishing public of NC is getting more and more rules that are not based on any scientific study. The state should not be in the business of regulating every species that swims in its waters. The state should not be implementing arbitrary rules just because there are not any current regulations for a given species.
10/2/2026 11:44	William Coffey	Boone	North Carolina	For	

Public Comments on MFC 2026-2027 Proposed Atlantic Bonito Rule
October 2, 2026

Created	Name	Address: City	Address: State	Are your comments for or against the proposed rulemaking?	Please enter your comments on proposed changes to the rules and cite the rule or rules on which you are commenting.
8/4/2026 7:36	William Phillip Loughlin	Pink Hill	North Carolina	Against	In regard to proposed limits on the take of Atlantic bonito: I do recognize that some fishermen are taking too much liberty with the fishery (some of these guys literally fill their boats), but I believe going from no limit to five fish seems a bit restrictive, especially considering the Atlantic bonito are only in our area for a short time each season. I would, however, support a more liberal limit, as I think it's a good idea to curb the excesses. Maybe 10-12 fish per person (similar to Spanish mackerel) is a better solution. After reading the proposed rule and reasoning, I don't see anything there to suggest the population is quantifiably impacted. Where is the actual science here? Less than 1/4 of all total landings occur in NC. Using similar anecdotal evidence, I would argue that the catch has consistently increased in the past 10 years as evidence that the Atlantic bonito are actually doing quite well. These fish grow rapidly and reproduce prolifically. Basing the limit on the suggestion that Atlantic bonito don't keep well in the freezer is ridiculously subjective and unscientific. To summarize, I agree that currently increasing and unrestricted take of the Atlantic bonito is probably not sustainable, but there is no evidence to support a strict limit of five fish per day. Give the commission power to regulate, but limit that regulation to evidence-based criteria. Set a more liberal limit (10-12 per person) to increase buy-in from the recreational fishermen, and then apply science to determine if more or less regulation is required to protect the fishery.

N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission
August 2026 Quarterly Business Meeting
Written Public Comment

Name	**State/Province**	**Please type your comments in the box below.**
Joseph J Francis	North Carolina	Why should NC MFC or DMF have a roll in managing Atlantic Bonito as a migratory fish species with a brief stay along the NC Coast in the spring? It's not like either agency has a proven track record of properly managing our NC Fisheries over the last couple of decades or longer. Other than being poorly managed ! If any management is to be done on Atlantic Bonito it should be done as groups of states along the Southeast Atlantic and also the Northeast.
Bennie L Braswell	North Carolina	I agree with the limit on Bonito. But not the overall policies currently in place Apparently regulations implemented over many years have not had positive outcome, with exception of redfish stocks. North Carolina has 2 regulatory agencies that do not work together. N. C. Division of Marine Fisheries has provides recommendations from scientific studies that are mostly ignored by the N. C. Marine Fisheries Commission that makes the regulations. I'm sincerely disappointed to see regulations dictated so biased in favor of big commercial entities. This mismanagement arrangement has produced regulations with a distinct bias in favor of commercial fisheries, at the expense of the recreational fishermen and N.C. General Public. 1. Recreational fisherman have bycatch counted against their quota of harvested fish. 2. Commercial fisheries bycatch is not counted against their quota of harvested fish. 3. I read deeply into the commercial regulations that stated harvested catch sold outside of the state do not count against their quota. 4. NC is the only state on the east coast that allows trawling and gill netting in our inshore waters. Other states have recognized that this practice destroys the emerging young fishes and fish biomass, fish stocks do not recover due to this practice. 5. Rockfish are not allowed to be harvested by recreational fishermen for the last 3 years in my area. 6. Flounder are now not allowed to be harvested by recreational fishermen after several years of reductions. Commercial harvesting continues. 7. Speckled trout are now being overfished. Reductions in harvesting are starting with commercial bias being proposed. Going back 20 years or so, people fishing the lower Neuse River, Pamlico Sound were able to catch plenty of fish species. Spot, Croaker, Grey Trout, Striped Bass and other species. These areas are now void of bottom fishes worth catching, Striped Bass, Flounder, are not allowed to be harvested by recreational fishing. Grey Trout, one per day. Now Speckled trout are technically being overharvested. I am reminded of the definition of insanity, and plead with you as my representative to discontinue allowing mismanagement of our fisheries in this manner. The inland commercial trawling and gill netting will continue to deplete our states fisheries for everyone. Including themselves!

MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION
SUMMARY OF PUBLIC HEARING FOR PROPOSED RULES

DIVISION OF MARINE FISHERIES
CENTRAL DISTRICT OFFICE, MOREHEAD CITY, N.C.
AND VIA WEBEX
AUGUST 26, 2026, 6 P.M.

Marine Fisheries Commission:	A Hobgood (online)
Division of Marine Fisheries Staff:	Chris Batsavage (online), Makenna Beehler, Catherine Blum (online), Lynn Ewart, Brian Gupton, Eddie Mann, Tina Moore, Lucas Pensinger, McLean Seward (online), Savannah Starling (online), Hope Wade
Public:	Sue Bertoline, Mario Campo, Blane Chocklett, Scott Davis, Michael Ellison (in person), Tony Friedrich, Jake Hardy, Joseph Harris, Ray Jarvis, John Mauser, Eddie Nickens, Cody Rubner, Kyle Schaefer
Media:	None

Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) member A Hobgood, serving as the hearing officer, opened the public hearing for MFC proposed rules at 6 p.m. The MFC proposed one rule for adoption. Public comments on the proposed rule are scheduled to be presented to the MFC at its November 2026 business meeting prior to its vote on final approval of the rule. The proposed effective date of the rule will be determined by the legislative review process no earlier than the 2027 legislative session, as the rule is automatically subject to legislative review. The hearing was a formal process to receive public comments only about the proposed rule as published in the *N.C. Register*.

The reason for proposed action for this rule was published in Volume 41, Issue 03 of the *N.C. Register*. The comment period for this rule ended at 5 p.m. October 2, 2026. The public could submit comments via U.S. mail to the Division of Marine Fisheries, P.O. Box 769, Morehead City, NC 28557; written comments could also be submitted via an online form available on the Division of Marine Fisheries website, on the "2026-2027" proposed rules webpage.

Commissioner Hobgood opened the floor for the public to provide comments.

Tony Friedrich: "Can you all hear me ok? Not coming through? Okay, thank you so much. Okay. I'd like to thank the state agency, everyone who worked on this. It means a lot to us. My name is Tony Friedrich. I'm the president of the American Salt Water Guides Association. We, first first things first, we are doing a little bit of science on bonito. We did a lot of science on albies. We were able to tag about two dozen last year in North Carolina to get an idea on their movements, you know, and, and who knows what you find out when you put a telemetry tag in the fish. So, we we are deploying more in New England, and there are a lot of, you know, middle middle-sized to good-sized bonito around. There was clearly a good spawn and they've proven to be a fish that our, the clients of our guides, love to target. This five fish rule is gonna be incredibly beneficial to the state of North Carolina. If you have six people on a boat, you can take home 30 bonito still, but you're not gonna waste them. I think we've all seen the pictures, and I think that's all, we all know kind of why we're here, that there was a little a little bit of excessive harvest going on with a fish that you really can't freeze and you really can't save. And we want these fish around for our

guides and for recreational anglers this year and next year, the year after that. Hopefully we'll get a great spawn and hopefully everyone will be able to enjoy them. And again, we just like to thank the state of North Carolina for going through this process and putting common sense rules in place that'll benefit everyone in the long term. So, thank you again for all your hard work. We appreciate it and thank you for letting us comment tonight."

Scott Davis: "How's everybody? Can you hear me? Can you hear me ok? Okay, great. I think Tony sold my notes. He pretty much hammered my sentiments exact. I'm from Charleston, South Carolina, I'm a guide and a shop owner, and I'm the South Carolina representative for the Salt Water Guide's Association. Just to echo him, I'll be really brief. I think the five fish limit is is needed as a very good step towards towards everything. We need conservation and and more fish in the water. So that's all. I appreciate you letting me comment."

Cody Rubner: "Hello, can you all hear me? Awesome. Thank you. My name's Captain Cody Rubner. I'm gonna keep things short and sweet as well as I'm sure you guys have a bunch of meetings that go far too long and will try not to contribute to one of those tonight. Like but I fully support the five fish bag limit for bonito. Just you know keeping everything short and sweet and focus on common sense, the reality is that five fish per person especially like previous speakers said multiple anglers in a boat, it's a lot of fish that comes home. The last time that I actually got to target bonito was with my nephew and it's a memory I hold dearly. We were up off Cape Cod, obviously migratory fish in the same fish even though outside of North Carolina waters, we kept a handful for the family and it was more than enough, and that would have been less than just a single person's bag limit within this context, so fully support this. I've grown up around fisheries that were on their way back after at the reaching the brink and now they're on their way back down to the brink. And so, watching fisheries go up and go down and reality is a lot more going down than they are going up right now. So anytime we have an opportunity like this to lay a foundation that says, hey, why don't we just only take so much and just keep enjoying it and be able to enjoy it for a really long time. I think it's pure common sense. So, like I said I'll keep everything short and sweet, thank you for the opportunity to comment."

Mario Campo: "Hey, good afternoon, everybody. My name is Mario Campo. I'm from South Louisiana, but I've been following this closely. I'm also with the American Saltwater Guides Association. I'll keep this short and sweet as well. I strongly support the proposed management action, especially considering that I think Bonito is a data poor species in itself, and you know a large knowledge gap exists for the species, I think that these proactive management measures is pertinent especially for future management for this species. So, so, I would like to thank, I'd like to thank North Carolina's Marine Resources for their continued hard work on behalf of these resources, and and thank you. That's all."

Jake Hardy: "Hi, my name's Jake Hardy. I'd like to thank, thank you like everyone else here. I, I am from Maine, well living in Maine now, from Massachusetts and New York and also with ASGA (American Saltwater Guides Association). And like everyone else here, and a lot of recreational anglers, I've become a big fan of bonito especially as other species that we rely on decline. They're a blast on light tackle and I'll add that they really are delicious seared fresh, and five fish bag limit is more than reasonable for any honest angler. I've watched coolers get filled well past what any family can eat and without a bag limit, that kind of waste is just baked into this fishery. So, yeah, to keep it short and sweet, I just want to highlight the DMF's main source of information for this is annual landings and that can't tell you whether there's more fish out there or just more fish or more anglers targeting and catching them. So, whatever's driving the recent spike, none of us can really say for sure and that uncertainty is the argument for this rule, not a reason to delay or wait. So, thank you for your time."

Kyle Schaefer: "Oh, well, well thank you. I, I appreciate the the time. I do not have constraints I didn't I didn't I thought that was kind of the way to signal I'm here to to comment. So I don't mean to jump

anybody, but here I go. I am, my name's Kyle Schaefer. I've been a longtime fishing guide up here in New England. I'm also a lodge owner, down in the Bahamas as well and been in this fishing industry my, my whole life. And just want to thank you guys for the opportunity to comment here. I think this is a, a fantastic, proposal with the five fish bag limit. It makes a ton of sense for anglers that want to catch and release. And, and anglers that want to catch and and take home and, and have some some wonderful fish for their family. I think coming from the the New England perspective, it's really cool to see states in the south even proposing measures like this because I think it just, you know, I see it as a way to kind of de-risk our future fishing up here in New England as well. I think it really, you know, being a migratory stock, things that are happening in the Southeast are, you know, heavily affect this up here in New England and so it's, it's great to see you guys taking a proactive approach here and just want to thank you for the time and clearly say I'm in support of the measure, so thank you guys."

Michael Ellison: "Well, I have a different perspective, I've been in the ecosystem restoration business for 30 years. I've been a division director at, at DENR/DEQ. I've been executive director of the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, the natural resources trustee from the state of North Carolina delegated authority, and I currently serve on the Environmental Management Commission. I am representing myself. I just wanted to give you an idea of where my perspective comes from. I don't know why you need to regulate. The the data do not support because you don't have enough data. There's no targeted commercial fishery. There's no biological concern. No valid data compel regulations. I don't think that Massachusetts, North Turkey are, are, provide models for intelligent regulation at North Carolina. You have no concerns about commercial fishing impacts. And perhaps recreational landings may have apparently possibly increased because so many other fisheries are so strictly regulated. I think the delegation of the commission's authority to the division director, I believe that's an abdication of your responsibilities, with all due respect, the commission is charged with passing rules. The rule making process is deliberative, extensive, detailed, and it takes time and when the legislature prescribed the rule making process that commissioners go through, they did it intentionally so that rules would not be rushed through. And yet in awarding the director proclamation authority to change the rule, you remove the opportunity for public comment, you remove the requirement for regulatory impact and net assessment and fiscal analysis. And it, the the director should, cannot be as easily removed from their position. They do not have the accountability that you as a commissioner have, either directly or indirectly. You're, you're appointed by a political officer who is voted into office by the public, and you have a limit on your term. State employees are much more secure in their positions. So I, I don't believe that the proclamation authority is a good idea. But I think it bypasses a critically important process set forth in statute. Your fiscal analysis having read countless dozens of fiscal notes and and RIAs, it seems kind of bogus. Your in, your your data indicate, they don't demonstrate, they indicate that most recreational trips keep less than five fish. There's no targeted commercial fishery, so if you're, if the recreational fishers are not keeping more than five fish, I don't know why you need to set a rule of five fish and set everything up for a rapid reduction in that limit. Like I said, the data, data do not support the need for for regulation. The fiscal note states that you cannot reliably estimate the magnitude of the changes proposed today or changes that might be established by proclamation in the future. That's not a fiscal analysis. You don't know how many people, if, if by proclamation the limit goes down to two fish and all the other limits that the commission in many cases rightly and in some cases questionably, but all the other limits people might just not fish as much because it's not as much fun. So, I guess like I said, I , I, I don't think, it seems like you're regulating just to regulate, and I understand the idea of being proactive and in many cases that's warranted, but if there's not a problem, setting up a division director by proclamation to make major changes in a recreational fishery, I, I just don't think that's a good idea. Thank you."

Blane Chocklett: "Yes, can you hear me? Okay am. Okay, as you said, my name's Blaine Chocklett, and I've been in the fishing industry for 35 years. I'm an ambassador for a lot of brands in the outdoor and fishing industry, including Yeti, Patagonia, Posta sunglasses. And part of my role as an ambassador for them, is conservation, right? And part of what I do, being a guide for 35 years, I have quite a few clients

that I'll take and post trips all over the world, including the state of North Carolina, which I've been doing since 1998. And a lot of what happens with me as a host to, to take clients to fisheries is how well those fisheries do for my anglers and what the abundance of fish, right? And I have a unique perspective on this because I've traveled to Cape Cod, I've seen bonito up there, seen bonito in North Carolina. And a lot of my trips have changed over the years because many fisheries are not as good as they used to be, whether it's overfishing, water quality, whatever it may be, and certain things, whether it's environmental, a lot of things we can't control, but what we can control is fish regulations and making it right for everyone. And I, I do really appreciate the fact that North Carolina is being proactive on trying to regulate bonito because I do feel like the world's getting smaller, you know, fisheries are on the decline for the most part and selfishly for me as an angler and as a host, to show people the different great areas in North Carolina. I've been all over the world and North Carolina is one of my favorite places to go. And Atlantic bonito, just like false albacore, did not have regulations on them, and the fact that you are being proactive on this, I really love that fact because I think these fish are such a great fish and the fact that there isn't any regulations on them. I think it's very important to be proactive on that and for the future of the guides that work on them daily when they're in season and when they come inshore, but also for the future, for my son I have a 10 year old son that loves to fish and I want him to be able to see healthy fisheries in the future. And for me, I just want to say thank you for bringing this up and I appreciate your time, so I'm in favor of it. Thank you."

Ray Jarvis: "Yep, can you hear me? Sorry I was muted there. Great. Yeah, thanks for your time. I appreciate North Carolina proposing these rules and I'm definitely in favor of the five fish. I live in Massachusetts. I'm a fishing guide up here. I also worked with the American Saltwater Guides Association and being up here in Massachusetts, we enacted proactive measures on false albacore and bonito. You know, because we kind of rely on those species up here, especially myself as a guide and in the face of a declining striped bass population, you know, taking proactive measures is the exact reason, you know, why we have fish kind of, you know, for the in the future, I want my son to be able to catch fish and you know, being proactive about all this stuff is definitely, you know, a light and a dark tunnel. I think that we've seen plenty of different fisheries come back and decline and, you know, without the lack of science or data behind the species by, you know, being proactive, it's the exact reason why we should be arguing that there is no science or data to do this is the exact reason why we should be doing it because rather than waiting for a problem, we're kind of nipping it in the bud here. So, sorry for my confused thoughts there, but I appreciate you taking the steps to implement the five fish measure and, I'm in support of it, so thank you for your time."

Eddie Nickens: "Hey there. Can you hear me? Super. Eddie Nickens here. I'm a longtime North Carolina native. I have a house in Raleigh, and a very little house in Morehead City. I've been fishing the albacore and bonito and all the goodness down there since 1990. I am an independent journalist, but an editor-at-large for Field and Stream, a contributing editor for Garden and Gun, and editor-in-chief of Tail, which is the planet's last remaining print fly fishing salt magazine. I think this issue is a matter of accessibility, and easability, and deliciousness. These fish are easy to get to. They're pretty easy to catch and they're awesome on a plate. And I have been frankly horrified by what I've seen inside and outside Beaufort Inlet over the last two years inside with a number of fish. They're just being brought in and laid out as brag boards day after day after day, and outside just an incredible increase in the number of people that are going to these very easy to access inshore reefs that we have, artificial reefs that we have outside of these inlets. And so, I commend the Commission for taking this up. I think this five fish, precautionary limit is supported by the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation and it's supported by the North Carolina State Constitution, which requires that we, that we manage not for this generation but for future generations. And I think this is a fabulous chance and a fabulous example of the Commission looking ahead because tomorrow is coming quicker than any of us want. The number of boats that are gonna be on our coast is gonna go up quicker than any of us can imagine. Just this week there's been reports of the proposed 200 slip marina that might be going into Radio Island right there in Morehead (City) and

Beaufort Inlet. More concerning that is, that I know for a fact that half the season ticket holders for UNC football, they've recently bought boats because they don't want to go the game, so they're headed for Beaufort Inlet this fall. We're gonna see more and more anglers out there, which is wonderful that North Carolina has these resources. But we do need some precautionary guardrail regulations on some of these species. When you have no regulations, the temptation is to think that there's no holds barred, that nothing matters. Wasted fish don't matter. Catch all you want, kill it all you want, cripple all you want. Because these fish have no value, and that's not the case. And the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission has the opportunity to say these fish do have value and we don't know all the answers, but this is a great and and stride at first step in, in reaching a level of understanding so we can manage these fish for future generations. So, I fully support this proposal. Thank you."

John Mauser: "Hey everybody, first off, thank you for putting this together and allowing us to be able to express our thoughts on this tonight. I am a local here on the Crystal Coast of North Carolina. I've been guiding here and chasing Atlantic bonito in the springtime for about 15 years. In the last couple years, it's become a bigger and bigger important part of my season from late March through early May with my clientele. It's the main thing we target in the month of April. Fifteen years ago when I would go out and fish and, and bonito are a structure-oriented fish, they're either on, generally, most of the time, on hard bottoms or they're on artificial reefs or other wrecks. And so, 15 years ago if you went out of Beaufort Inlet and you went and fished some of the wrecks, you know, 8:00 A.M. in the morning, you might see 20 people out there fishing. You go out there last year by 8:00 A.M. there was 50 to 60 boats on any given artificial reef right off of Atlantic Beach. And as technology has increased over the last few years, the amount of fish that are being harvested per boat has increased greatly. Ten years ago, you would troll or you would drift or cast for these fish, and you might catch five or 10 fish per boat on a good day. Nowadays, you go out there and there'll be 20 boats spot-locked directly over the structure. They will have four or five lines out with live bait, and now those numbers have climbed and some of these boats are catching a hundred Atlantic bonito per day on these wrecks. And the issue with that is not how many they're catching but how many they're keeping. And although myself, I can bring home two and my wife and I and my kids can eat it for dinner and have some left over the next day and we're not gonna freeze that fish because it's such a good fresh fish, some of these boats are keeping 50, 75, 100 of these fish per day, and it's made me sick the last couple years to see some of these anglers that are just going crazy with this, and I know these fish are going to waste, and since these fish are targeted over these certain structure areas, it's making it, you know, you're depleting a certain source. It's not like a Spanish mackerel or a bluefish or an albacore that is spread from miles and miles up and down the coast and you can have your own to target. They're all being pulled from certain areas that they congregate and it's making it harder and harder to catch them because of the technology. The fish gets smart and the areas get depleted. So, I think five fish is more than enough for any person to eat for a couple days and that's all they're good for honestly. You think about Spanish mackerel and bluefish. They're all, you know, and bluefish weren't regulated for a while, but now they're regulated. We have tons of Spanish mackerel. We have, the bluefish have made an unbelievable comeback from how they were in the '80s and '90s when they got depleted. Atlantic bonito is, just with the amount of boats that are coming out now, I see the same thing happening with no regulations on these fish. It's getting easier and easier to target them. People can figure it out and they can catch 50 a day. I don't want us to be in the same position we were 15 years ago with bluefish where you couldn't find a bluefish over two pounds in North Carolina. So, I am very much for the five (per) person limit or the five fish per person limit that you guys are looking at. I think it's smart, and I understand the gentleman, I think it was Mike who's, who was against it. I totally understand his thoughts on that and not having this science, but I've just for years now seen us wait and wait and wait for the science until the fishery's depleted and overfished, and I've also seen us have a science, something, think about flounder and not move quickly enough on it 'til the fisheries depleted, and basically there has to be a moratorium. So, I am all for trying to be proactive and and put a limit on these fish because although most people are respectful of not needing to keep more than three or four of these fish per day, some people have just completely gone crazy with the amount of Atlantic bonito they're killing, and I think this

will be something that helps us keep this amazing fish around for our kids and our grandkids. So, thank you so much for allowing me to talk. I appreciate your time tonight."

Joseph Harris: "Yes, can you hear me? Okay, my name is Joe Harris. I am a North Carolina resident born and raised here and fishing on the coast all my life. I just wanted to express my thanks for y'all especially and I am totally in favor of the five fish limit. And I would also like to say that I do appreciate that Blaine Chocklett and Eddie Nickens pronounced the fish correctly. It is an "Atlantic bonita," even though it does have an "O" on the end, that's just the way we say it. So, I am in favor and thank you all very much for for having us the ability for us to express our concerns. Thank you so much."

Sue Bertoline: Ms. Bertoline had technical issues and was unable to provide her comments during the hearing. Staff provided the information to her about other ways to share her comments with the MFC within the stated deadline.

Seeing no additional members of the public in attendance to provide public comments on the proposed rule, Commissioner Hobgood closed the hearing at 6:36 p.m.

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