

# Recreational Fishing Alliance

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## **RFA CALLS FOR END TO DIRECTED OCEAN NET FISHERY OF STRIPED BASS Angler Advocacy Group Urges ASMFC To Address Wasteful Fishing Practices**

*February 10, 2011* - Two staggering fish kills by commercial trawlers fishing out of Oregon Inlet are just the tip of the iceberg as the state of North Carolina continues to promote fishing practices for Atlantic striped bass that are not only wasteful but filled with loopholes that encourage unreported landings.

In the past two weeks, recreational fishermen along the East Coast have watched in horror as videos and photos on websites and local news broadcasts showed thousands of dead striped bass floating in the wake of trawlers just off the beaches of the Outer Banks. A significant portion of the roe-filled spawning stock of this extremely valuable fish winters in this area, and is extremely vulnerable to commercial fishing gear.

Unfortunately, the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF) at the will of the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission (NCMFC), continues to allow commercial trawl and gillnet fisheries for striped bass, gear types that encourage high-grading and promote shameful rates of dead discards. "These two instances of massive dead discarding of striped bass are just the most recent to become public, and the outrage throughout the sportfishing community is reaching the boiling point," said Jim Donofrio, Executive Director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA). "North Carolina's continued failure to prosecute these fisheries in a responsible and sustainable manner amounts to aiding and abetting the wanton destruction of the striped bass resource."

Trawling and gillnetting, both highly effective gear types, frequently catch far in excess of a vessel's daily landing limit and have no place in the striped bass fishery. This has led to discarding incidents like these and many more that go unreported. According to the RFA, while NCDMF tries to make excuses for the waste, covers up the fish kills, and quietly instructs conservation officers to look the other way if they value their jobs. The damage being done to coastal striped bass stocks is undeniable and cannot be allowed to continue. "Look no further than NCMFC for blame. They have known about this issue for years but have failed to take any action to stop it," said Capt. Tim Barefoot, tackle manufacturer and RFA volunteer in North Carolina. "The time for action is now," Barefoot added.

"The impact this is having on the state's recreational fishing and tourism industries, and to commercial and recreational fishermen in other states who fish responsibly, is undeniable and totally unacceptable," Donofrio said. The RFA also points to the damage being done to the spawning success of striped bass which has been more notable in light of the continuing drop in the Young of the Year Indexes for Chesapeake Bay in recently years.

The RFA says that if North Carolina is to continue to allow a commercial striped bass fishery to exist in state waters, it must end all netting and make it exclusively a hook and line fishery so that kills like these -- and the hundreds of others that occur on a smaller scale each winter -- can be prevented. "There can be no more excuses, the entire fishing community is watching and demanding action," Donofrio said.

RFA is currently directing letters to both the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

(ASMFC) and the NCDMF to immediately begin work on regulations to prohibit the commercial harvest of Atlantic striped bass in ocean waters by no means other than hook and line. Currently, it's illegal in North Carolina to have striped bass harvested commercially on rod and reel, which is strange considering the low 8% release mortality rate for hook and line gear type as opposed to the 40%-plus mortality rates of many commercial net fisheries.

"RFA was so staunchly opposed to the recent proposals by ASMFC to increase the commercial quota for striped bass specifically because of these types of actions off the Carolina coast," said RFA's Jim Hutchinson, Jr. "This gross disregard for the striped bass resource was cited specifically in our arguments against the ASMFC proposal, and it's precisely why our recreational fishermen in my home in New York were fit to be tied when learning that our own state representatives voted in the minority to increase the quota," he added.

Hutchinson who is also president of the New York Sportfishing Federation said anglers in New York are happy that the rest of the ASMFC representatives voted down the proposal, despite the lack of response from within their own delegation.

"This is the kind of damage that's affecting the striped bass stock all the way up the coast," noted Capt. Barry Gibson, RFA's New England Director. "Some states are responding to the poor fishing by placing further restrictions, such as mandatory circle hooks, on recreational fishermen in the hopes that this will somehow turn things around. But until we address the real resource problems, such as the disgraceful slaughter off North Carolina, we're just spinning our wheels," Gibson added, saying it was time for swift and positive action.

#### About Recreational Fishing Alliance

The Recreational Fishing Alliance is a national, grassroots political action organization representing recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on marine fisheries issues. *The RFA Mission is to safeguard the rights of saltwater anglers, protect marine, boat and tackle industry jobs, and ensure the long-term sustainability of our Nation's saltwater fisheries.* For more information, call 888-JOIN-RFA or visit [www.joinrfa.org](http://www.joinrfa.org).