

§ 143B-289.52. Marine Fisheries Commission – powers and duties.

(a) The Marine Fisheries Commission shall adopt rules to be followed in the management, protection, preservation, and enhancement of the marine and estuarine resources within its jurisdiction, as described in G.S. 113-132, including commercial and sports fisheries resources. The Marine Fisheries Commission shall have the power and duty:

- (1) To authorize, license, regulate, prohibit, prescribe, or restrict all forms of marine and estuarine resources in coastal fishing waters with respect to:
 - a. Time, place, character, or dimensions of any methods or equipment that may be employed in taking fish.
 - b. Seasons for taking fish.
 - c. Size limits on and maximum quantities of fish that may be taken, possessed, bailed to another, transported, bought, sold, or given away.
- (2) To provide fair regulation of commercial and recreational fishing groups in the interest of the public.
- (3) To adopt rules and take all steps necessary to develop and improve mariculture, including the cultivation, harvesting, and marketing of shellfish and other marine resources in the State, involving the use of public grounds and private beds as provided in G.S. 113-201.
- (4) To close areas of public bottoms under coastal fishing waters for such time as may be necessary in any program of propagation of shellfish as provided in G.S. 113-204.
- (5) In the interest of conservation of the marine and estuarine resources of the State, to institute an action in the superior court to contest the claim of title or claimed right of fishery in any navigable waters of the State registered with the Department as provided in G.S. 113-206(d).
- (6) To make reciprocal agreements with other jurisdictions respecting any of the matters governed in this Subchapter as provided by G.S. 113-223.
- (7) To adopt relevant provisions of federal laws and regulations as State rules pursuant to G.S. 113-228.
- (8) To delegate to the Fisheries Director the authority by proclamation to suspend or implement, in whole or in part, a particular rule of the Commission that may be affected by variable conditions as provided in G.S. 113-221.1.
- (9) To comment on and otherwise participate in the determination of permit applications received by State agencies that may have an effect on the marine and estuarine resources of the State.
- (10) To adopt Fishery Management Plans as provided in G.S. 113-182.1, to establish a Priority List to determine the order in which Fishery Management Plans are developed, to establish a Schedule for the development and adoption of each Fishery Management Plan, and to establish guidance criteria as to the contents of Fishery Management Plans.
- (11) To approve Coastal Habitat Protection Plans as provided in G.S. 143B-279.8.
- (12) Except as may otherwise be provided, to make the final agency decision in all contested cases involving matters within the jurisdiction of the Commission.
- (13) To adopt rules to define fishing gear as either recreational gear or commercial gear.

(b) The Marine Fisheries Commission shall have the power and duty to establish standards and adopt rules:

- (1) To implement the provisions of Subchapter IV of Chapter 113 as provided in G.S. 113-134.
- (2) To manage the disposition of confiscated property as set forth in G.S. 113-137.

- (3) To govern all license requirements prescribed in Article 14A of Chapter 113 of the General Statutes.
- (4) To regulate the importation and exportation of fish, and equipment that may be used in taking or processing fish, as necessary to enhance the conservation of marine and estuarine resources of the State as provided in G.S. 113-170.
- (5) To regulate the possession, transportation, and disposition of seafood, as provided in G.S. 113-170.4.
- (6) To regulate the disposition of the young of edible fish, as provided by G.S. 113-185.
- (7) To manage the leasing of public grounds for mariculture, including oysters and clam production, as provided in G.S. 113-202.
- (8) To govern the utilization of private fisheries, as provided in G.S. 113-205.
- (9) To impose further restrictions upon the throwing of fish offal in any coastal fishing waters, as provided in G.S. 113-265.
- (10) To regulate the location and utilization of artificial reefs in coastal waters.
- (11) To regulate the placement of nets and other sports or commercial fishing apparatus in coastal fishing waters with regard to navigational or recreational safety as well as from a conservation standpoint.
- (c) The Commission is authorized to authorize, license, prohibit, prescribe, or restrict:
 - (1) The opening and closing of coastal fishing waters, except as to inland game fish, whether entirely or only as to the taking of particular classes of fish, use of particular equipment, or as to other activities.
 - (2) The possession, cultivation, transportation, importation, exportation, sale, purchase, acquisition, and disposition of all marine and estuarine resources and all related equipment, implements, vessels, and conveyances as necessary to carry out its duties.

(d) The Commission may adopt rules required by the federal government for grants-in-aid for coastal resource purposes that may be made available to the State by the federal government. This section is to be liberally construed in order that the State and its citizens may benefit from federal grants-in-aid.

(d1) The Commission may regulate participation in a fishery that is subject to a federal fishery management plan if that plan imposes a quota on the State for the harvest or landing of fish in the fishery. The Commission may use any additional criteria aside from holding a Standard Commercial Fishing License to develop limited-entry fisheries. The Commission may establish a fee for each license established pursuant to this subsection in an amount that does not exceed five hundred dollars (\$500.00).

(d2) To ensure an orderly transition from one permit year to the next, the Division may issue a permit prior to July 1 of the permit year for which the permit is valid. Revenue that the Division receives for the issuance of a permit prior to the beginning of a permit year shall not revert at the end of the fiscal year in which the revenue is received and shall be credited and available to the Division for the permit year in which the permit is valid.

(e) The Commission may adopt rules to implement or comply with a fishery management plan adopted by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission or adopted by the United States Secretary of Commerce pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, 16 U.S.C. § 1801, et seq. Notwithstanding G.S. 150B-21.1(a), the Commission may adopt temporary rules under this subsection at any time within six months of the adoption or amendment of a fishery management plan or the notification of a change in management measures needed to remain in compliance with a fishery management plan.

(e1) A supermajority of the Commission shall be six members. A supermajority shall be necessary to override recommendations from the Division of Marine Fisheries regarding measures needed to end overfishing or to rebuild overfished stocks.

(f) The Commission shall adopt rules as provided in this Chapter. All rules adopted by the Commission shall be enforced by the Department of Environmental Quality.

(g) As a quasi-judicial agency, the Commission, in accordance with Article IV, Section 3 of the Constitution of North Carolina, has those judicial powers reasonably necessary to accomplish the purposes for which it was created.

(h) Social security numbers and identifying information obtained by the Commission or the Division of Marine Fisheries shall be treated as provided in G.S. 132-1.10. For purposes of this subsection, "identifying information" also includes a person's mailing address, residence address, e-mail address, Commission-issued customer identification number, date of birth, and telephone number.

(i) The Commission may adopt rules to exempt individuals who participate in organized fishing events held in coastal or joint fishing waters from recreational fishing license requirements for the specified time and place of the event when the purpose of the event is consistent with the conservation objectives of the Commission.

(j) The Commission may not adopt rules regulating cages, poles, anchoring systems, or any above-water frames or structural supports used to suspend or hold in place equipment or floating structures used for aquaculture as defined in G.S. 106-758. (1997-400, ss. 2.1, 2.2; 1997-443, s. 11A.123; 1998-217, s. 18(a); 1998-225, ss. 1.3, 1.4, 1.5; 2001-474, s. 32; 2003-154, s. 3; 2004-187, ss. 7, 8; 2006-255, ss. 11.2, 12; 2012-190, s. 5; 2012-200, s. 17; 2013-360, ss. 14.8(v), 14.8(w); 2015-241, s. 14.30(u); 2017-10, s. 2.1(b); 2024-45, s. 16.1(b).)