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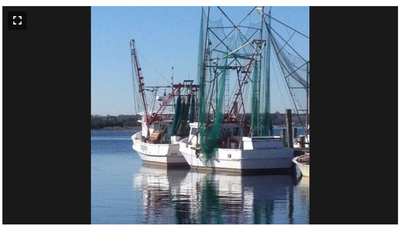
House rejects shrimp trawling ban, citing industry concerns

KATHLEEN HOPEWELL NEWS-TIMES · Jul 1, 2025 · 0



The shrimp trawling fishery is under fire again as group calls for legislature to enact inshore ban.

RALEIGH — Last week, North Carolina House Republicans effectively halted the procedure of House Bills 441 and 442 into law by refusing to take them up for a vote of concurrence, following amendments in the Senate that would establish a Shrimp Trawling Transition Program in H.B. 441 and ban shrimp trawling in estuarine waters and nearshore waters, within a half mile of N.C.'s coast in H.B. 442.

While consensus says the bills are dead this session, Rep. Celeste Cairns (R-Carteret) would not "characterize the Bill as 'officially dead.'" She instead says that, "It will not be heard by the House in its current form, and there is little time and no appetite to do anything in the [short-]term."

When a bill amended in a committee of the second chamber is not approved by the original chamber, a conference committee is typically appointed to reconcile differences between chambers.

Rep. Ed Goodwin's office (R-Chowan) raised a flag for potential attempts to sustain the ban through a conference committee, stating they "would not be surprised if the Senate tried to sneak in the Conference report. But with the public outrage [...], I don't really see that happening."

Similarly, Rep. Cairns said, "Technically, the bill could still be moved, but the House's decision to not hear the amended Bill signals, to me, that additional threats to the shrimp industry have passed for this session."

Prior to the bill's rejection in the House, when the ban seemed imminent, many including Rep. Maria Cervania (D-Wake) and Sen. Hanig, pointed to the N.C. Collaboratory study on N.C. fisheries and fisheries governance, presuming it would provide empirical guidance on in-shore trawling policies.

Some were even under the assumption that the Senate's urgency arose to pass the bills in advance of the study's June 30 presentation to the General Assembly. The study's lead researcher and UNC Institute of Marine Sciences Director, Joel Fodrie, explained to the Carteret News-Times that such claims, "could not be further from the truth."

A substantial portion of the study's cover letter is dedicated to debunking those claims, reading, "Because this specific issue was out of the scope of this study, this report neither advocates for nor opposes a ban on shrimp trawling."

It continues, noting, "Multiple comments by legislators in both chambers of the North Carolina General Assembly [...], as well as statements circulating in the media, suggested the Senate was aware of the contents of this report and this advance knowledge drove actions to amend the legislation to include a shrimp trawling ban prior to the report's release. These statements remain untrue and undermine the credibility of this multi-year research study carried out by nine researchers across four UNC System campuses."

Absent an empirical determinant of in-shore shrimp trawling impacts that would inform shrimp fishery policies, as the Collaboratory study had been alleged to provide, legislators are considering responses to future iterations of the ban.

Rep. Pricey Harrison (D-Guilford) mentioned discussions with her colleagues, Reps. Keith Kidwell (R-Beaufort) and Cairns about "resurrecting the Joint Commission on Seafood and Aquaculture, a legislative committee formed in the past to deal with these contentious allocation issues," as well as it being, "long past time to review the 1997 Fisheries Reform Act." Rep. Harrison asserts: "Either or both efforts could help keep these struggles out of the political fray (where campaign money unfortunately plays a larger role) and in the hands of stakeholders who should be involved in shaping the regulatory landscape."

Rep. Cairns also shares that, "All nine of the coastal legislators in the House stood shoulder-to-shoulder to protect the shrimpers from such a complete and dramatic assault on the industry." She continued by noting that the nine had met with House Leadership and they "plan to continue discussions with stakeholders during future sessions," as well as "meet as a group" to "inject reasonable and educated decisions into the debate on how best to sustain our fisheries and maintain our robust commercial and recreational fishing communities."

Rep. Harrison further contends, "My hope is that we pull together a committee of stakeholders to hash out a solution. The legislature should not be deciding these issues."

Reps. Cairns' and Harrison's suggestions just so happen to echo the second of five total recommendations put forth by the Collaboratory report, though not specifically regarding shrimp fisheries, which suggests, "Enhanc[ing] stakeholder participation, trust, and management transparency," perhaps offering a way forward that is simultaneously evidence-based and supported by representatives who seek to preserve the heritage and practice of in-shore shrimp trawling in North Carolina.

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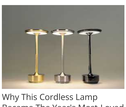

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