MEMORANDUM

TO: N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission

FROM: Meredith Wilson

DATE: October 23, 2013

SUBJECT: Summary of At-Sea Observer Program Public Hearing on Funding - Morehead City

The Division of Marine Fisheries held a public hearing regarding options for funding the At-Sea Observer Program. The hearing was held on Tuesday, October 22nd, 2013 at 6:00pm at the Crystal Coast Civic Center located at 3505 Arendell Street in Morehead City. The following attended:

Staff: Louis Daniel, Dee Lupton, Chris Batsavage, Don Hesselman, Suzanne Guthrie, Jacob Boyd, John Hadley, Christina Wiegand, Meredith Wilson, Captain Steve Anthony, Sergeant Carter Witten, Officer Brian Gupton
MFC: Chuck Laughridge, Joe Shute
Public: Michael Shutak, Ainsley Smith, Stevenson Weeks, Aundrea O'Neal, David Kielmeier, Bradley Styron, Matthew Godfrey, Tom Roller, Craig Harms, Brent Fulcher

Chris Batsavage called the meeting to order at 6:06pm. He introduced the DMF staff and Marine Fisheries commissioners that were present.

PRESENTATION: HEARINGS TO DETERMINE AN ADDITIONAL SOURCE OF FUNDING FOR THE AT-SEA OBSERVER PROGRAM

Chris Batsavage gave the prepared PowerPoint presentation which included information on the legislative charge to the division, benefits of the At-Sea Observer Program and its current needs, an outline of the Sea Turtle Incidental Take Permit, steps already taken by the division, and multiple options for further funding provided by staff. The presentation took approximately 15 minutes.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chris Batsavage opened the floor to public comment. He noted that speakers would not have a time limit as there were not many members of the public in attendance.

Speakers (in order): Stevenson Weeks, Bradley Styron, Tom Roller, Brent Fulcher

The majority of speakers asked questions regarding the At-Sea Observer Program and did not support or reject any increase in license fees. A couple speakers offered other comments regarding funding of the At-Sea Observer Program. These comments included:

- Fishermen should have a say in how the Observer Program is funded without having to write a blank check to DMF.

- DMF does not need fulltime observers. Flounder closes early and observers are moved to cover other fisheries, opening another can of worms and creating a bigger bureaucracy.
- The present scheme is not the way to go.
- Recreational fishing guides will be paying for some of this program through the new for-hire license fees. Fees should only be required from fisheries that need observing.
- DMF needs to get economic data showing the value of the fisheries and what it extrapolates out to be at the end user.

Chris Batsavage adjourned the hearing at 6:31pm.

Minutes for this meeting, including full individual public comment, will be available in a separate document at a later date.

cc:	Louis Daniel	Jacob Boyd
	Dee Lupton	John Hadley
	Chris Batsavage	Christina Wiegand
	Don Hesselman	
	Suzanne Guthrie	