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Subject: Cobia Fishing

Good Afternoon,

My name is Parker Slaybaugh and I am a resident of Virginia but have grown up visiting the Outer Banks of North Carolina and I am there a significant portion of the summers. When I was young I would do everything I could to live down there and spend as much time possible fishing with my father, brother, uncle, and other family members. We have photos from when I was as young as 7 years old on the pier with my father fishing hoping to catch a Cobia. We grew up with my father teaching us how to "pin fish" for Cobia from the piers of the Outer Banks. We did it so often that many of the locals took us under their wings and even when my dad wasn't able to fish due to work constraints they would let us come out there and fish along side of them. Fishing from the pier for Cobia has grown into a passion and a love of mine. To be quite frank it kept my brother and I out of a lot of trouble. It gave us something to do instead of looking for something else to pass the time, something else that likely would have lead to mischief. Now as an adult I continue close relationships with many of those same locals and spend many weekends on the pier enjoying each others company and hoping to catch a Cobia.

My story is the one of many that come to the Outer Banks. I am reminded of another teenager who was coming out every day just to bottom fish and he often came out and asked us about what we were doing by fishing with 2 poles (anchor rod and fighting rod) at the end of the pier. We explained to him and told him we were fishing for Cobia. He was intrigued and we later learned that his father would drop he and a friend off at the pier every day during that vacation just so he would not have to deal with him. His father was more concerned with doing whatever else he was doing. Many people on the pier felt sorry for this young guy who loved to fish but had a father who refused to do it with his son. Later that day while he was fishing on his bottom rig he started yelling he had hooked a Cobia. Skeptical, we walked over thinking like most people he had hooked a stingray. Surprisingly, this kid had in fact hooked a small Cobia. We helped him get it up on the pier and even though it was under sized he was happy as could be to have caught a prized Cobia. The next day a group of fishermen pitched in to but this kid his own supplies so he could pin rig with the rest of us while he was on the pier. He didn't catch anything that week but several weeks later he came back and caught his first keeper Cobia. That friendship grew into a mentorship between that kid and some of the other elders on the pier. Two years later that same boy came back down and by this time was a pin rigging pro. This time he landed a 90 pound breaking pier records up and down the coast. He was walking on the moon he was so happy and proud of what he had accomplished.

I see myself in him, my dad showed me the love of fishing and our small group of friends taught him the love of fishing. The love of fishing is first taught from the beaches and piers, not from a boat. Most people like myself aren't fortunate enough to own a boat to chase Cobia up and down the east coast. Many of us are anchored to a few wooden planks or a pile of sand. And quite honestly, we catch very few Cobia. Last year at Jeannette's Pier people fished that pier for Cobia mostly ever day between May and October. We maybe caught 20 Cobia, but the fellowship and the friendships that are formed there are more valuable than the Cobia. But, the Cobia are the common thing that connects us all.

I write this to you to beg you to consider making an exception for people fishing from land. We account for a very small percentage of the Cobia caught, but the Cobia that we catch mean way more because so much more time and effort goes into catching a fish of that size from a pier. Think about hauling a 90 pound Cobia up and over the rails on a pier. We rarely catch a Cobia from the pier before June 15th. Being so close to the beach the fish don't reach that close to the beach until Mid to late June. If a June 15th season is forced on the piers also that will effectively be the end of any Cobia fishing from the pier. Some of my favorite memories from the Outer Banks are laying around on the pier hoping one of our reels start screaming with a Cobia bite. I write this to you to tell you my personal story, but I also write this to you on behalf of many many people who love the sport of Cobia fishing who aren't able take a boat out, and with this season closure the sport of Cobia fishing will be taken away from us 100%. I have signed the names of many other friends who support this email below.

One may say well you can still fish for Cobia from the pier and release them. The problem with this how are you going to get a 40, 50, 60 pound Cobia up 30 feet on a pier without killing it? No drop net is big enough to haul a fish that size up over the railings on a pier. You have to use multiple gaffs to get a fish that size up to the pier. Gaffing a fish like that will mortally wound it, and a dead fish will be forced to be thrown back into the water and go to waste. So that would mean people would likely have to cut their lines while the fish is still in the water, most anglers likely wont want to do that. Please consider the logistics of this ban on pier fishing for Cobia.

One other thing we ask for you to consider is this. Why not implement a tagging system for Cobia statewide or for the whole east coast. If you harvest a Deer you must tag it and report it over the phone system. Why not do the same thing for Cobia and only give each angler 2 tags for the YEAR. That could greatly cut down on the number of fish kept and would allow you to choose when and what fish you want to keep. That would keep the charter boats in business too because most of their clients only fish once a year and if they only have 2 tags for the year and are limited to one fish per day, you are cutting down drastically on the number of Cobia killed. This would allow the season to be kept open all year.

In closing, I understand something must be done, but the bulk of the fish are being caught by boats. Us pier fishermen account for very few fish. Please make an exception this group of fishermen, because this is a great avenue for making sure teens are set out on the right track. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you!

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