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North Carolina Commercial Fishing Industry Taking a Spill



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CEDAR ISLAND, N.C. — The North Carolina Seafood Festival wrapped up Sunday night in Morehead City. A popular topic of conversation among festival-goers was commercial fishing in the state.

Cheaper imports, inexpensive foreign labor and consumers looking for a deal are taking a toll on the industry.

Bradley Styrons owns a small fish-house in Cedar Island.

"I buy fish, shrimp, clams, whatever comes in," Styrons said. He added, however, that not much comes in these days.

"What used to be a fairly good way of making a living has disappeared," he said.

Styrons puts part of the fault on hurricanes devastating the coast, but mostly he blames foreign competition for devastating fair trade.

"We're trying to compete globally, where we can't compete. We can't compete with Third World countries shipping seafood in here," he said.

North Carolina is in a five-year downward spiral when it comes to commercial fishing. Low prices for catch and increased regulations keep many fishing boats at the dock.

"The number of trips the fishermen are taking is down, and the landings are way down," Patricia Smith, with the North Carolina Marine Fisheries, said.

"A lot of people have had to get out and go find other employment," Styrons said.

"People are holding on to their licenses and what we're hearing is they are hoping they can come back at some point. They've been through bad times before, and they hope they can come back," Smith said.

But hope does not pay the bills, and it will take more than a good day on the water for the local industry to survive.

"The country has to decide, what do they want? Do they want in 10 years to be totally dependent on third world countries? Or do they want a viable industry in this country? That's the decision that has to be made. And we're running out of time," Styrons said.

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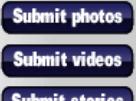


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