

## Community Profile

### Chincoteague, VA

By Bryan Oles

#### I. Community Description

The barrier island of Chincoteague is one of the most significant sites of both commercial and recreational fishing activity on Virginia's Lower Eastern Shore. The Town of Chincoteague, located in Accomack County, VA, encompasses the entire barrier island, which is approximately seven miles long and 1.5 miles wide. The island is separated from Assateague Island to the east by the Assateague Channel, Oyster Bay, and Assateague Bay. The waters of Chincoteague Bay, Chincoteague Channel, and the Queen Sound Channel separate the island from the mainland to the west. To the south, the Chincoteague Inlet provides access to the Atlantic Ocean. Chincoteague is reached via the John B. Wealton Memorial Causeway, Route 175. This is the only route into and out of Chincoteague. The only other road leading out of Chincoteague ends at the Assateague Island National Seashore Park.

The permanent settlement of Chincoteague took place after the island was divided between two wealthy families from the mainland in 1691. These early landowners considered Chincoteague to be good pastureland for livestock that was of growing economic importance to the colonies. The 30 families living on the island in the early 1800s still depended primarily upon cattle, and for over a century after the island's settlement livestock, coupled with subsistence farming and fishing, constituted the primary industry on Chincoteague. By 1860, however, seafood had replaced livestock as the island's primary industry. The land alone could not sustain the island's growing population throughout the 1800s and many turned to seafood production, which was becoming increasingly important to northern cities like Philadelphia and New York (Mariner 1996:41). Oyster harvesting and cultivation was of greatest importance in the early days of Chincoteague's seafood industry. The economic boon of seafood brought many new public services and infrastructure to the island throughout the mid- to late-1800s.

Three significant events made 1876 a "banner year" in the history of Chincoteague Island: the building of the first hotel, which was the earliest tapping of the island's potential for tourism; the coming of the railroad, which opened up the island's seafood trade to northern markets as never before; and an outsider's visit to the island which, when published, made both the island and the visitor famous. (ibid: 68).

The Atlantic Hotel promoted recreational fishing among other leisurely pursuits and had clientele across the Eastern seaboard. Its business was related to the establishment of the Worcester Rail Road that ran from Snow Hill, Maryland to Greenbackville, VA, which

was five miles across the bay from Chincoteague. Steamboats ferried passengers and products to and from Chincoteague during this time. Large quantities of oysters were shipped out on the railroad.

Visitors to the island were drawn by another event that remains essential to the island's identity and tourist industry today - pony penning. Penning was initially conducted by livestock owners in order to cull, claim, brand, break, and sell animals in their free-ranging herds (including herds of sheep) kept on the barrier islands. The earliest written account of penning comes from 1835, but the event was held throughout the 1700s on Assateague. Penning ponies on Chincoteague appears to have begun in the mid-1800s by two livestock owners who kept large herds on the island and by 1885 they were held on Assateague one day and Chincoteague the next. In 1923 the pennings were consolidated on Chincoteague and have remained a significant draw for tourism (<http://www.chincoteague.com/>).<sup>1</sup>

The railroad was also responsible for expanding the role of oysters and seafood in the local economy. The seafood of Chincoteague, most notably the oyster, became the backbone of the town for decades to come. Other important aspects of the seafood industry on Chincoteague included the clam harvest, menhaden factories, ocean pound net fishing, crabbing, and hand-lining.

In 1922 the causeway to Chincoteague was completed, thereby connecting the island with the mainland. This increased tourist trade on the island, including sport fishing. Chincoteague was a popular sport fishing destination since the establishment of the railroad. Tourists would go to the island in the fall to fish for bluefish and mackerel. With regular access via the causeway, rental properties grew in importance and a number of properties catered specifically to sportsmen who came to fish and hunt waterfowl. The causeway brought growth and development to the island until the Great Depression, during which many islanders turned to chicken farming. The poultry industry continued to grow in Chincoteague and on the Eastern Shore through the mid-1900s. World War II brought the presence of U.S. government installations including the Chincoteague Naval Auxiliary Air Station, which employed 4,500 people until it closed in 1959, and the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics station on Wallops Island, which later became NASA's Wallops Facility of the Goddard Space Flight Center.

Since the middle of the 1900s tourism has become the backbone of the local economy. Tourism was aided immensely by the establishment of a bridge between Chincoteague and Assateague in 1962. Prior to this, tourism was limited by a lack of beach access. With the establishment of the Assateague National Seashore in 1965, the number of

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<sup>1</sup> There are two herds of wild horses on Assateague Island, separated by a fence at the Maryland-Virginia line. The United States National Park Service manages the Maryland herd while the Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Company owns the Virginia herd, which is allowed to graze on the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge. Each year in July the Virginia herd is rounded up for the Pony Penning and Auction during the Chincoteague Volunteer Firemen's Carnival. This event has drawn thousands of visitors to the island over the years. The crowd in 1937 was estimated at 25,000 (<http://www.chincoteague.com/>). Chincoteague became known to the world through the success of the children's book *Misty of Chincoteague* (1947), by Marguerite Henry, which celebrated the pony penning.

visitors traveling through Chincoteague skyrocketed. Motels and related tourist infrastructure were developed very quickly in the years following the establishment of the bridge to Assateague. In 1985 the park received over two million visitors annually and tourism brought 24 million dollars to Chincoteague. This number exceeded 100 million by the mid-1990s. The growing tourist trade fueled the development of recreational fishing on Chincoteague. Today there are six marinas in addition to the dockage available at Curtis Merritt Harbor, at least half a dozen bait and tackle shops, and five public boat launches on Chincoteague.

The height of the newfound development evinced both positive and negative reactions from residents. Views were polarized over the changing image and identity of the island, some praising tourism and development as saviors of the town, others decrying the commercialization of a once proud heritage. Rising real estate costs and property taxes coupled with an influx of "come-heres" (those who are not originally from Chincoteague) created an out-migration of islanders who settled in subdivisions on the mainland (Mariner 1996:150). According to the 2000 Census, 1717 housing units of the 3970 total units (43.25%) in Chincoteague were used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use and house values averaged \$105,600 in 1999.

The maritime heritage of Chincoteague was being celebrated in the midst of its decline. The Seafood Festival was inaugurated in 1969, the Maritime Museum opened in 1972, and the Oyster Festival was kicked off in 1973. At the same time, oyster and crab production was plummeting. There were only four oyster shucking houses left in the mid-1980s. Today there is one shucking house and one that primarily repackages oysters. Gillnetting, dragging, and cultured clams have given the commercial seafood industry of Chincoteague a much-needed lift, but the seafood industry trails tourism in terms of revenue generated.

The town's character has retained a provincial charm despite the decades of development. There are no high-rise hotels or gaudy tourist attractions like those found just to the north in Ocean City, Maryland. The slower pace of the town is what brings people to Chincoteague, according to some. The Town of Chincoteague describes the island as "Virginia's largest family island resort" (<http://www.chincoteague.com/townhall/brochure.html>). The Chamber of Commerce bills Chincoteague as a "serene fishing village" and "Virginia's only resort island" (<http://www.chincoteaguechamber.com/>) - two images that, at times, co-exist in an uneasy relationship. The seafood industry is still an entrenched aspect of Chincoteague's social and economic life. There are two commercial packinghouses on Chincoteague, both located near the Route 175 Causeway off of Main Street. Most commercial boats are moored at Curtis Merritt Harbor at the south end of the island. In addition, there are a number of clam nursery/hatchery operations on the island and one oyster shucking house that remains.

Today, billboards advertising Chincoteague businesses greet visitors along the marshy length of the causeway that connects the island to the mainland. There is an ongoing debate among residents over the signs - some calling them eyesores and others defending

their need to make a living through advertising. Regardless of the outcome of this debate, tourism will remain a firmly entrenched aspect of the town's identity and economy.

## **II. Dependency and Engagement in the Fisheries**

### **A. Commercial Fishing**

#### History and Current Description

Early settlers on Chincoteague undoubtedly relied on subsistence fishing to supplement the living made from livestock and farming. Throughout the early 1800s, the seafood industry grew in importance until it was the primary employer by the mid-1800s. The industry was bolstered as markets opened up in places like New York and Philadelphia, and was facilitated by the establishment of the Worcester Rail Road in 1876, which assured access to distant metropolitan markets. The seafood industry of Chincoteague attracted new settlers from other seaside states including New Jersey and Delaware. Among the various fisheries, oyster harvest and cultivation was the most significant. In the late 1800s the oyster season was contributing over a quarter of a million dollars to Chincoteague's economy. Nearby waters of the Chincoteague Bay were leased as private oyster beds by the state, and some public land was set aside for the harvest of seed oysters. By the early 1900s there were six to eight oyster companies in operation. Oyster populations were hit by the screw bore parasite in the 1950s. The parasite, coupled with increasing pressure from oyster dredging, started the decline of the oyster industry (Mariner 1996). In 1985 there were only four shucking houses and today there is but one left on the island.

Other historically important dimensions of the seafood industry on Chincoteague included clamming, menhaden processing, ocean pound net fishing, crabbing, and hand-lining. Clams could be harvested year-round and thereby supplemented the income of many watermen. Clams became more important in the early 1900s. By the mid-1950s there were approximately 100,000 acres of productive clamming grounds and clams were the primary product of Chincoteague's waters. Today, cultured clams have taken on a significant role among the local fisheries. There is one major nursery/hatchery operation on Chincoteague and numerous clambers involved in cooperatives who work for various shellfish buyers. According to many informants, the clamming business has allowed watermen who have been forced out of fishing and crabbing by tougher regulations to stay on the water.

John Bunting built a menhaden factory on Chincoteague in 1881, which was followed by the establishment of two others in the same year. These companies went out of business in the late 1800s but menhaden factories were revived in the 1920s and operated for the next decade until sand filled Tom's Cove, preventing boats from reaching the docks.

Ocean pound net fishing, which was introduced to the area by Lambert Ayers, a fisherman from New Jersey in 1901, became an important component of the seafood

economy in the early 1900s (Mariner 1996:76). Between 1914 and 1919 there were 13 fish companies operating 37 pound nets (ibid: 120). Significant catches included trout, sturgeon, perch, and flounder. By 1930 there were just four local companies employing a total of 100 men. The 1930s also witnesses the rising importance of commercial crabbing with the invention of the crab pot. Prior to this time crabbing was conducted on a small scale with trot lines. Crabbing continued to grow in importance through the 1960s.

Through the 1940s, 50s and 60s, the fishing industry began to decline in comparison to the ever-growing tourist trade. Even so, other fisheries have become important to the commercial industry on Chincoteague such as inshore gillnetting (shad, croaker, spot, trout, blues, striped bass, etc.), offshore gillnetting (monkfish), otter trawling (fluke and a diversity of species), dredging (crabs, scallops), and potting (sea bass, lobster, and conch).

Today there are approximately 15 to 20 local small-boat, inshore gillnetters on Chincoteague and a small number of bay clammers and crabbers. Other local boats include three sea bass potting boats, one of which also pots lobsters. A local fisherman assisted in the identification of federally permitted commercial boats. Among the 33 boats that listed Chincoteague as the principal port, sixteen were identified as commercial fishing boats, nine were identified as charter fishing boats, and two were said to be former commercial boats currently conducting research on horseshoe crabs. The remainder of the boats was not identified. Among the 16 commercial boats listing Chincoteague as principal port, three are known to be potters, seven work primarily as gillnetters, two work primarily as monkfish gillnetters, one is a dragger, and the other three were not identified. The crew for the sixteen commercial boats was estimated by the informant to be approximately 35-45. It is notable that these numbers do not include any of the many transient boats that land in Chincoteague, or those boats that list some other nearby port as "principal port." It further excludes the small inshore boats of Chincoteague that do not hold federal permits.

The port has two primary packinghouses and a third that is virtually non-operational. According to the owner, the collapse of the fluke dragging industry through regulations accounts for the business's decline. Most of the local gillnetters pack their fish onto their trucks at Curtis Merritt Harbor and truck them to one of the two fish houses or buyers on the mainland. Transients account for the majority of landings in Chincoteague. Among transients who land in Chincoteague are approximately ten monkfish gillnetters that are based in New England for much of the year, 20 transient draggers from North Carolina, New York, New Jersey, and Virginia, and a handful of longliners that are based in Wanchese, North Carolina. Scallop dredging has taken on a greater role in the Chincoteague seafood industry in recent years. The majority of the boats that land in Chincoteague are owner-operated.

In Chincoteague, boats operated by locals, mostly gillnetters, are diminishing while the transient fleet that visits Chincoteague has grown in comparison. Prior to 1990, there was a small local fleet of surf clam, ocean quahog boats, but these were sold after the fishery became based on Individual Transferable Quotas (McCay and Cieri 2000:123). A small

fish house with a "For Sale" sign still packs the catch of local inshore gillnetters, while a newer business up the road is attracting boats from other ports. Over half of the new packinghouse's business comes from boats that are not "from" Chincoteague, according to the owner. Vessel Trip Report (VTR) data for federally permitted vessels support these ethnographic findings.<sup>2</sup> Only 16% of the thirty federally permitted boats landing in Chincoteague in 2001 were local Chincoteague boats. These five boats accounted for less than half of all trips landed by federally permitted boats in Chincoteague in that year. Twelve boats came from North Carolina and others came from New Jersey (4), New Hampshire (2), Maryland (1), and other ports in Virginia (6).

The five boats listing Chincoteague as their principal port that provided VTR data for trips landed in Chincoteague in 2001 are, on average, 39 feet long, 14 gross tons, with an average horsepower of 387. They are older boats: 1969 is the average year built. They landed 86% of their trips in Chincoteague, but also ranged to other ports including Belhaven, Engelhard, and Hatteras, North Carolina; and Belle Haven, Oyster, Sanford, and Virginia Beach, Virginia.

According to 2001 VTR data, 83% of the trips landed in Chincoteague by federally permitted boats were attributed to sinking gillnets. The next highest percentage of trips is attributed to bottom otter trawl for finfish (6%), followed by scallop dredge (3%), handline (3%), conch pot (3%), drift gillnet (1%), and scallop otter trawl (1%).

Weighout data describe the percentage of value and poundage accounted for by each gear type associated with landings in Chincoteague. Table 1 shows that in 2001, there were three main gear types that accounted for 85% of the value landed. These include otter trawl, fish (35%), sinking gillnet (28%), and scallop dredge (22%). The diachronic perspective shows that otter trawl, fish has accounted for at least 35% of the value landed in Chincoteague since 1994. Sinking gillnet values have fluctuated between 5% (1994) and 33% (1999). Scallop dredging is a new fishery as illustrated by the lack of landings between 1994 and 1998.

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that VTR data do not include those boats that do not have permits to fish for federally managed species; hence they do not necessarily capture the small, local boats operating from Chincoteague. Even so, informants reported that non-federally permitted transients from other ports in Accomack and Northampton Counties, as well as Maryland and North Carolina participate in the inshore gillnet fisheries associated with Chincoteague in the autumn months.

Table 1: Port Activity by Gear Type and Landings, % Pounds and % Value, Chincoteague, VA, 1994-2001; Data source: N.M.F.S. Weighout

Negear	Gearcode	1994		1995		1996		1997		1998		1999		2000		2001	
		% pound	% value	% pound	% value	% pound	% value	% pound	% value	% pound	% value	% pound	% value	% pound	% value	% pound	% value
010	LLB	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
020	HND	0.1	0.1	0.001	0.001	0.01	0.002	1	2	0.1	1	0.03	0.1	0	0	0.3	1
040	LLP	0	0	1	1	0	0	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.2	1	1	2	2	1	1
050	OTF	39	52	22	36	33	44	26	45	42	49	41	49	53	53	43	35
052	OTC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
059	OTO	0	0	11	22	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
070		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.04	0.004	0	0	0.1	0.01
100	GNS	13	5	15	7	35	25	39	14	37	27	49	33	36	28	45	28
102		0	0	0	0	1	0.3	0	0	0	0	0.2	0.1	0	0	0	0
110	GNT	19	9	43	20	17	11	10	6	4	2	1	1	1	1	0.02	0.01
132	DRS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.3	0.2	1	7	6	22
180	PTO, PTX	0.01	0.02	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
181	PTF	2	4	0.4	0.1	0.01	0.02	6	11	8	14	1	2	2	4	2	3
183	PTW	0	0	5	3	6	2	0.2	0.1	2	3	3	9	1	2	0	0
200	PTL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.1	0.3	0	0	0	0	0.01	0.1	0.004	0.001
223		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.1	1	0.04	0.2
230		1	7	2	10	5	14	1	4	0.1	1	0.1	1	0	0	0	0
231		0	0	0	0	0	0	0.1	0.3	0.01	0.05	0.03	0.2	0.03	0.2	0	0
281		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.2	1
250	RAK	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.01	0.02	0	0	0.01	0.02	0	0
301		21	15	0.3	0.1	3	1	13	12	7	4	2	3	0.1	0.1	0	0
340		0	0	1	0.04	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
370	OTM	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
382		2	5	0.2	1	0.1	0.1	0	0	0.1	0.05	0	0	0	0	0	0
383		0	0	0.03	0.03	0.1	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.3	0	0
384		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.2	0.2	0	0	0	0
400	DRC	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
413		0.1	0.5	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2	0	0	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
999	OTH, MIX	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	0	0	1	1	2	2	2	6

Table 1 Gear Codes:

Negear	Gear Name
10	LOGLINE, BOTTOM
20	HANDLINE
40	LOGLINE, PELAGIC
50	TRAWL, OTTER, BOTTOM, FISH
52	TRAWL, OTTER, BOTTOM, SCALLOP
59	TRAWL, OTTER, BOTTOM, OTHER/NK SPECIES
70	HAUL SEINE, BEACH, COMMON
100	GILL NET, FIXED OR ANCHORED, SINK, OTHER/NK SPECIES
102	GILL NET, STAKE, OTHER
110	GILL NET, DRIFT, OTHER/NK SPECIES
132	DREDGE, SCALLOP, SEA
180	POTS + TRAPS, OTHER/NK SPECIES
181	POTS + TRAPS, FISH
183	POTS + TRAPS, CONCH
200	POT/TRAP, LOBSTER OFFSH NK
223	PICKS
230	BY HAND, OTHER/NK SPECIES
231	BY HAND, OYSTERS
250	RAKES, OTHER/NK SPECIES
281	DREDGE, OYSTER COMMON
300	POTS + TRAPS, CRAB OTHER
301	POTS + TRAPS, BLUE CRAB
340	CAST NETS
370	TRAWL, OTTER, MIDWATER
382	DREDGE, CLAM
383	DREDGE, CRAB
384	DREDGE, CONCH
400	DREDGE, SURF CLAM + OCEAN QUAHOG
413	TONGS AND GRABS, CLAM, PATEN
999	UNKNOWN

Weight data presented in Table 2 shows the changing percentages of value and pounds of species landed in Chincoteague between 1994 and 2001. It demonstrates that in 2001, scallops accounted for 33% of the landings, followed by fluke (23%), monkfish (15%), finfish (14%)<sup>3</sup>, and other (10%)<sup>4</sup>. When compared to past years, 2001 seems anomalous in that shellfish accounts for so little (1%). Shellfish has accounted for at least 6% and at most 28% of the value between 1994 and 2000. The increasing value of monkfish is clearly evident in the data as is the growing value of scallops. Other trends demonstrated by the data are the relatively stable, high value of fluke, and the decline in the percentage of value accounted for by dogfish, which was at a high of 12% of the total value landed in 1999.

Table 2: Port Activity by Species Landed, % Pounds and % Value, Chincoteague, VA, 1994-2001

Species	1994		1995		1996		1997		1998		1999		2000		2001	
	% pound	% value	% pound	% value	% pound	% value	% pound	% value	% pound	% value	% pound	% value	% pound	% value	% pound	% value
OTH	18	8	9	3	19	11	8	4	6	2	9	6	11	6	24	10
WHT	0.4	1	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.1	0.03	0.4	0.1	0.04	0.02	0.0003	0.0002	0.2	0.03
MNK	0.3	0.3	1	2	6	6	2	3	27	24	11	18	12	21	13	15
FLN	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.04	0.05	0.03	0.004	0.004	0.05	0.1	0	0	0.01	0.005
PEL	2	1	4	2	4	3	1	1	1	0.4	1	1	2	1	2	1
FF	24	17	49	24	25	20	22	22	14	19	4	8	7	11	22	14
TUN	0.01	0.001	1	1	0	0	1	2	0.1	1	0.01	0.03	0	0	0.03	0.03
FLK	24	42	29	53	31	41	25	45	29	40	10	30	23	38	23	23
DOG	3	0.4	0.0	0.002	2	0.2	27	6	5	1	37	12	30	7	0.1	0.01
LOB	0.01	0.1	0	0	0	0	0.1	1	0.001	0.01	0.003	0.02	0.01	0.1	0	0
SCL	0.02	0.1	0.02	0.1	0	0	0.001	0.01	0.01	0.1	0.03	0.3	2	9	9	33
SQL	1	1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.01	0.01	5	6	1	2	2	2	5	3
SHF	25	28	8	14	13	19	14	16	12	7	27	23	12	6	1	1
OQ	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SWD	0	0	0.004	0.02	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
EEL	0.005	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.002	0.001	0	0	0	0	0	0
TIL	0.0004	0.0002	0.0005	0.0003	0	0	0	0	0.0005	0.001	0	0	0	0	0.01	0.004

Species Codes:

- OTH Species other than those listed below
- WHT whiting (silver hake)
- MNK monkfish
- FLN flounders: winter flounder, witch flounder, yellowtail, american plaice, sand-dab, flounders, southern flounder
- PEL pelagics: bluefish, butterfish, king mackerel, menhaden
- FF finfish: atlantic croaker, scup, black sea bass, weakfish, striped bass, spot
- TUN tuna: bluefin tuna, big eye tuna, albacore tuna, yellowfin tuna
- FLK summer flounder
- DOG dogfish
- LOB lobster
- SCL scallop
- SQL squid: loligo and illex
- SHF shellfish: blue crab, horseshoe crab, panaeid shrimp, quahogs, conches, channeled whelk, oysters
- OQ ocean quahog and surf clam
- SWD swordfish
- EEL American eel
- TIL tilefish

<sup>3</sup> The "finfish" category includes Atlantic croaker, scup, black sea bass, weakfish, striped bass, and spot.

<sup>4</sup> The "other" category includes all species other than those accounted for in weighout data categories (whiting, monkfish, flounder, pelagics, finfish, tuna, fluke, dogfish, lobster, scallop, squid, shellfish, surf clam and ocean quahog, swordfish, eel, tilefish).

## Seasonal Round

There is great diversity in the seasonal movements and activities of fishermen who land in Chincoteague both within and between different fisheries and from year to year. According to informants, the diversity is a result of unpredictable and changing regulatory requirements in conjunction with the seasonal movements and availability of target species.

Most of the local watermen work on the water full-time through the year. Among these small, locally-based inshore boats, a diversity of gear may be utilized. For example, inshore boats might dredge for crabs in the winter and then set gillnets for the remainder of the season. Those involved in shellfish aquaculture can work on the beds year-round. Leasing bottom from the state for shellfish supplements the income of fishermen at certain times of the year. The major season for the oyster harvest is September through December, but cultivation is a year-round activity. One fishermen explained that he gillnets for shad and striper from February to mid-April, sea trout and bluefish in April and into May, black drum in May, shark in May and June, spot in July, croaker August through November, and then back to striped bass in November and December. He changes his gear in January and February to dredge for crabs.

Another fisherman was careful to note that fishing out of Chincoteague is an intercept fishery - it depends on the weather, tides, and seasonal changes. Fishermen cannot depend on the calendar, which is why regulated seasons may conflict with fish availability. "You have to live it and do it, you can't be selective - the fish ride the eddies up and down the beaches and they overlap and vary. This is why the old fishermen are still fishing because they can read the environmental signs."

There is a good deal of movement north and south along the Lower Eastern Shore, and movement between seaside and the Chesapeake Bay. Some will start fishing for croaker in the Chesapeake Bay in May and stay there until October or November and then move to Chincoteague for the fall. Other gillnetters will come up to the region from other ports in Accomack and Northampton Counties, and as far south as North Carolina to fish here in the fall.

One gillnetter explained that he fishes out of Hatteras and Wanchese, North Carolina, for croaker and trout from December through February and then moves back to Chincoteague to fish for shad February through April, trout March through May, striped bass in April and May, smooth dogfish mid-April through mid-June, shark in June and July, spot and trout through August, and croaker through the fall. He hauls out once a year in Crisfield, Maryland. He explained that he used to fish exclusively for dogfish, a fishery that allowed other fishermen to fish in their own fisheries without competing. Now that regulations have curtailed dogfish fishery, more fishermen are chasing the same fish at the same time, such as croaker. This behavior results in a "derby" fishery, which gluts the market and lowers the price per pound. Another informant explained that some gillnetters will crab during the summer rather than fish, depending on regulations and the pressure from other fishermen. Ten years ago the local inshore fleet did not have so many

regulations that dictated the fishing seasons. For example, sea trout has been a problem because the season is closed precisely when the fish are in area waters (December 16 through April 1). By the time the season opens, the fish have already moved from Chincoteague waters.

The seasonal movements and target species of the offshore boats are also diverse, depending on gear type, regulations, and seasonal movements of fish. A local potter explained that he pots for sea bass March through November, but is limited by the quarterly system of allocation. In his opinion, the sea bass quotas encourage derby fishing in which there are a few weeks of high landings followed by six weeks of no landings. This disrupts the markets and encourages dealers to look overseas for foreign products. He also gillnets offshore for monkfish November through May. He has had to travel further north to avoid monkfish area closures that restricted the use of gillnets over 8" mesh.

Other more transient boats come and go in accordance with the days at sea allowances and other considerations. For example, the captain of one boat described how he fishes for groundfish in New England August through February depending on weather and days at sea allowances. In 2002 he said that they would fish for groundfish from August until November because they have fewer days at sea due to regulatory cutbacks. He gillnets monkfish April through July, but may continue monkfish gillnetting throughout the year. In the past he fished for croaker, spot, and trout in the summer and shifted to dogfish in the winter, but regulations have made this unprofitable, if not impossible in the case of the spiny dogfish.

According to a local fish packing house, the seasonal fluctuations in product and the movements of fishermen are the result of regulations and the movements of fish. Flounder, for example, floods in during the first and fourth quarters of the regulatory calendar (both sides of the New Year) primarily due to the closure of the spiny dogfish fishery, which was the bread and butter of the area during the winter. Monkfish landings are highest in the months of April through June. Significant landings of smooth dogfish and shark are made in May and June, croaker and spot come between July and October; trout landings are significant in April and May, and again in October through December; and striped bass landings are concentrated in February, March, and, if the quota allows, the fall.

The fishermen interviewed agree that most of those who fish out of Chincoteague, including local and transient crew, are full-time fishermen who do not rely on land jobs. Two fisherman, however, remarked that stringent regulations have indeed put fishermen out of business or made the winters difficult, and another said that he knows fishermen who "bang nails" part-time to make ends meet. One fisherman said that he went to work at a dock during the winter one year when the spiny dogfish fishery was closed. Those who relied on this fishery would shift to crab dredging, but that has been closed to those with no history in the fishery. "That is why the bars are full in the winter." Another local fisherman said that many have gotten out of the business to work in the chicken plants or the sea clam processing plant in Mappsville. Others have gone into construction or

whatever is available. He has witnessed a 20-30% decline in watermen in the Accomack and Northampton counties over the past five years. He attributes this decline to regulations including the 200 fish/year quota on striped bass; the eight-month closure on weakfish; the total closure of spiny dogfish; and the 16-17 new blue crab regulations over the past five years.

Shellfish aquaculture has allowed some watermen to continue working on the water rather than get a land job. Further, according to one clam cultivator, there are among the clammers those who have already made their living on land who clam as a retirement pastime or income supplement.

### Crew Description

Chincoteague has 122 individuals employed in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, which make up 5.44% of employed individuals, a large percentage compared to other areas. A number of fishing households on the island have deep genealogical connections to early Chincoteague fishing families as well as others that have settled more recently. One interviewee estimated the number of commercial fishing families in Chincoteague at 35-50, and another gave an estimate of 40-50, including the crabbers and shellfish farmers. One said that at least 10% of families in the area have at least one family member working in the industry. Others would not hazard a guess. One informant who assisted in identifying federally permitted boats from the National Marine Fisheries Service permit list provided information that places the number of crew (captains and deckhands) at 39 to 48. It should be noted that this does not include the small inshore boats that are not federally permitted, the shellfish farmers, or the transient boats that are registered in myriad ports. In 2001, only five boats listing Chincoteague as principal port provided VTR data. The data indicate an average crew of two on these vessels. The 10 crew represent only a very small fraction of the total number of fishermen that operate out of Chincoteague.

Each informant pointed out that Chincoteague is an important port for transients from other parts of the coast, making it difficult to estimate the number of families that are dependent on the industry of the area. In addition to the locals with historical ties to Chincoteague, the island is home to transients who fish for part of the year in Chincoteague and rent houses and apartments. One informant told of the smooth dogfish fishermen from North Carolina who rent homes on the island. Other fishermen who land in Chincoteague live up and down the Eastern Shore in towns such as Saxis, Onancock, Greenbackville, Crisfield, Wattsville, Sanford, Parksley, Onley, and Silver Beach.

The number of fishing families on Chincoteague is said to be decreasing as the regulations make it more and more difficult to make a living from the water. The area used to depend more on local boats, but the transient fleet has become larger than the local fleet. Recruitment to the industry is hampered by the licensing structure and limited entry systems, as well as the regulations that limit the profitability of fishing. According to one informant, there is a two-year wait for a state permit and federal permits require you to buy someone out. In addition gear-specific state licenses are

needed as are permits for landing fish. Crab dredging, for example, is closed to new entrants and would require buying out a license holder. This fisherman wryly remarked, "I guess you can still go and catch minnows in minnow pots or silver sides in haul seines."

Few fishermen are encouraging their children to get into the trade and those who are currently active feel that they are the last generation. The crew is aging, according to one middle-aged informant. "No one wants to get into it - you have to be smart to fish but dumb to want to." He contends that there are only half a dozen fishermen younger than he and many more in their 60s and 70s who are still fishing. "Most die with their boots on like cowboys". As a result, most boats in the area have small crews - one mate or none at all. Captains will sometimes fish with each other when they need the help rather than hire a deckhand. Like elsewhere in the mid-Atlantic, the uncertainty associated with changing regulatory and natural environments, unpredictable pay and risky work conditions, coupled with the limited opportunities for moving from mate to boat owner, limit the allure of fishing for younger generations.

### Infrastructure

Chincoteague is an important port for offshore, transient boats because it offers one of the few deep water inlets on the Eastern Shore (the others being Wachapreague, which is accessed by a long, winding channel, and Ocean City to the north). While there are some private docks leased to fishing boats, Curtis Merritt Harbor offers the principal dockage in Chincoteague. The Harbor, which features 70 slips and access to the Chincoteague Inlet, is operated by the Town of Chincoteague. It was originally built for commercial interests. Local commercial fishermen along with local party/charter boats get first priority for the slips, followed by local private boat owners, then commercial fishermen from elsewhere in Accomack County, and then all other categories. There is a 500 person waiting list for private boats but currently no wait for local commercial boats. The Curtis Merritt Harbor Committee voted to assign charter and party boats the same priority status as commercial boats. Most local boats that dock at the harbor also unload their catch at their slip, put it into coolers, and truck it in their own vehicles to fish packers. Others land their catch directly at the two fish packing houses located to the north and south of the causeway. Some keep their boats at these docks, while many smaller boats are traileed to and from any of the five public ramps associated with the Town.

One of the problems for commercial fishermen on Chincoteague is the lack of adequate gear storage space. Most locals store gear on their own property because they are not allowed to keep it at the harbor. This is frustrating according to one fisherman, especially in light of the fact that the harbor was originally intended for commercial use. Fishermen use pick-ups and flat bed trucks for hauling gear to and from their boats.

The land to the north of the causeway was once owned by an ocean clam company, American Original. It was bought by a group of people who wanted to hold it until the town could purchase the property. During this time the land was rented to one of the packing houses and it was used for boat dockage. The town recently bought it and plans

to turn it into a recreational facility and park with slip space for sport and charter boats - something that the town thought would be attractive to tourists and other charter businesses.

The commercial infrastructure on Chincoteague has been on a steady decline over the years. Presently, there are two fish packing house. While one is doing well, the second is just hanging on, and a third recently went out of business. According to one informant, it had been going out of business for many years due to a seasonal lack of product that resulted from stringent regulations. Within the past 15 years most of the oyster houses went out of business. The number plummeted from over a dozen to two. One of the remaining operations is primarily engaged in repackaging and the other is a shucking facility. There is also one major shellfish aquaculture operation on the island.

The largest fish packing facility on Chincoteague has been in operation for over 10 years. It began as a cooperative between three fishermen and is currently owned by one of the original three. They buy most of the fish they pack and sometimes get a packing fee for those who pack on board. The facility employs three dock workers and has a dock for unloading, ice machine, and two coolers in addition to related loading and packing materials. The operation's daily capacity is over 80,000 pounds but they are not at full capacity due to seasonal fluctuations in product and regulations, especially those governing flounder landings. The business packs a greater diversity of fish than it used to in the past. Flounder, scallops, and monkfish are among the more lucrative species, but all of the various fish that are brought in are important to the business. Regulations on many of the fish make it necessary to diversify. Scallops have become important over the past year and monkfish has been vital for the past five years. Prior to the fishery's closure, spiny dogfish, or "horndogs", used to be important to the operation in winter. Despite this closure, the business is receiving more boats than they did in the past, especially transients. They pack approximately 15 local and transient gillnetters; 10 monkfish gillnetters based out of New England; 20 transient dragnets from North Carolina, New Jersey, and New York that supply them with a variety of products including scallop, flounder, squid, and sea bass; three local sea bass potters; a handful of longliners from Wanchese, NC; and two blowfish potters who send their product to New York markets.

The iced/fresh product is sold to a variety of local, regional, and national markets. Some of the scallops and finfish are marketed to local restaurants and retailers. Monkfish and many other products go to New York, scallops to New Bedford and Philadelphia, and a variety of product is shipped to markets in North Carolina and Hampton, Virginia. Product is shipped via local trucking firms that are paid a per carton shipping fee or by the pound, and North Carolina markets send their own trucks.

This operation prides itself on the fair prices it pays for product in comparison to docks in places like Cape May and Hampton Bays. It receives the business of one Cape May boat precisely for this reason. The business's low overhead keeps costs low and the prices fair. All of the business's purchases are spot-purchases and are not based on contracts, but they do involve long term social and economic relationships. It is not uncommon for the business to provide loans of money or vehicles for use by suppliers.

The other commercial packing house on Chincoteague is on property that, at the time of fieldwork, was for sale. The facility packs the catch of a handful of the older, local gillnetters and a few clambers as well. Some feel that it is just a matter of time before this operation goes out of business.

There is one major shellfish aquaculture operation on the island that raises clams and oysters. The business, which has operated for over 30 years, has a nursery and a hatchery, and also purchases shellfish from local watermen. The business also allows members of shellfish cooperatives to use their grounds and get a take of the proceeds. The business tends the largest planting grounds on Chincoteague. They use their own brood stock to seed the grounds. The shellfish are grown, harvested, graded and then sold throughout the world. Roughly 70% of the product is grown on the company's grounds, 20% is purchased from middlemen and 10% from processors for repackaging. Oysters are sold shucked and live, and the clams are sold live. This business used to be the only operation with a certification to sell internationally. They also supply local restaurants, markets, and events such as the Oyster Festival.

The business used to employ 120 people between 1984 and 1990 when the operation also included a fish packing facility. Fluke regulations, declining fish populations, and diseased oysters hurt the business. Clams, however, have grown in importance. According to the owner, Chincoteague has the only grounds in the world that do not get closed down due to heavy rains because there is such a good flush and high water quality. Today the operation employs roughly 25-30 oyster shuckers between September and January. Half of these employees are women, all are African American, and many are part of an aging work force. There are also up to 12 clam diggers, six or seven clam graders and a foreman. The owner explained that it is difficult to find and keep employees because the work is physically demanding and many of the younger folk on the island are leaving to go to college. Most of the employees live on the island or just across the causeway on the mainland in towns such as Atlantic and Horntown.

Overall, the commercial fishing infrastructure on Chincoteague has declined in recent years, but it remains a very important aspect of the local economy and identity. Among the businesses related to the industry that have disappeared include a propeller reconditioning service and a marine railway. In addition, hardware stores in the area no longer carry marine hardware.

### Economic Networks

The mobility that characterizes the fishing fleet of Chincoteague is responsible for the geographically broad and extensive economic networks in which fishermen, processors, dealers, and related businesses are embedded. Commercial fishermen, packing house owners, and related business owners were asked to detail their economic ties to other businesses and to provide information that reveals the range of these networks. To begin with, fishermen do not sell their catch exclusively to packing houses on the island. In fact, many travel great distances in order to take advantage of better prices. Destinations

include a major fish packing operation in Painter, VA approximately 30 miles south, a dealer 60 miles away in Whitehaven, MD, and numerous retailers up and down the eastern shore. Some still peddle their fish to local neighborhoods where, for generations, people have relied on local watermen to supply fish at a fair price.

Commercial fishermen detailed the networks that support their operations. Two local companies, including Mason Oil and Shore Stop gasoline stations, provide fuel for the boats in Chincoteague. Bagwell Oil in Onancock, VA is also utilized by the fleet. Ice is provided by the local docks and the fish packing facility in Painter, VA, and it is also purchased from Seaford Ice in Seaford, DE. A fisherman who has his own cooler relies on refrigeration service from Pocomoke, MD. All of the fishermen interviewed rely on local individuals for welding services, or else perform the necessary work themselves. Electronic and navigational equipment is purchased from and serviced by Shore Electronics in Onancock, VA, and two businesses in Ocean City - L and L, and Martek. Fishing supplies are obtained at Melson Marine in Davis Wharf, VA or Buddy Carson in Crisfield, MD on the bayside, but gear is also ordered from suppliers up and down the coast including Mike Keller in Manio, NC, Ocean Products in Hampton, VA, IMP in New Bedford, MA, and Heath in Crisfield, MD. Safety at sea equipment is obtained from the Vain Brothers in Norfolk, VA and Melson Marine in Davis Wharf, VA. Melson Marine is also a popular place to haul out, as is Crisfield (some have lifts come over from Crisfield to Chincoteague) or Ocean City, MD. The local Meatland provides provisions for fishing trips. There are a few choices for insurance including Hall-Richardson on the Eastern Shore, Flagship in Norfolk, VA, and Tawes Marine Insurance in Crisfield, MD. The most fishermen-friendly bank for obtaining loans according to informants is Farmers and Merchants Bank-Eastern Shore, which has six locations on the Eastern Shore. Some are said to keep their own books, while others rely on local firms, or a business located in Pocomoke, MD.

The commercial packing houses and aquaculture operations have obvious economic ties with the local watermen and transient suppliers. They also have economic ties with the fuel companies, trucking firms, refrigeration services, the local hardware shops, electricians, carpenters, and other contractors, and local restaurants that purchase product. One of the business owners explained that he tries to build close ties with local businesses in order to support growth and development on Chincoteague. These businesses are also linked with local retail markets and restaurants in addition to the nationwide and international markets that are supplied with product.

### Social Networks and Community Relations

Like elsewhere in the mid-Atlantic, economic ties among fishermen, packing houses, dealers and buyers are also imbued with a social dimension. These ties are built on long standing relations of trust, reciprocity, and fairness. One of the local packing houses provides loans to fishermen and has, at times, even lent vehicles to suppliers who needed transportation. This same packing house sponsors a party every October for suppliers and any other fishermen from the area who wish to come. They host fishermen from New Hampshire to North Carolina, and according to one fisherman who packs there, the

owners maintain a "my house is your house" mentality. Commercial fishermen also maintain strong ties to the local community through peddling fish. Neighborhoods in and around Chincoteague have been visited by peddlers for generations and some continue to depend on the peddlers for fresh fish even though the practice has declined over the years.

Commercial fishermen interviewed view their community in terms of both occupation and place. One gillnetter explained that he feels a part of a fishing community by virtue of the assistance and information that is shared among fishermen. "We are all tied together by the profession; we learn from each other and help out one another." Others interviewed expressed similar sentiments, pointing out that despite the personal disagreements that may flare from time to time, the fishermen of Chincoteague get along well, and assist one another regardless of gear type. One interviewee emphasized the cooperation that marks relations among fishermen in Chincoteague, and characterized fishermen in the area as the most honest, hard working people one can meet. Some of the local fishermen participate in the Eastern Shore Working Waterman's Association, gathering for monthly meetings and representing the interests of the area to management. One of the members of the association explained that fishermen in Chincoteague tend to get along regardless of gear type. He said that Chincoteague's history and identity is built on fishing, and that locals take a pride in that identity and sense of community. Even transient fishermen interviewed viewed Chincoteague as a fishing community, but their own sense of community is more deeply tied to the fishing grounds that they use. "Fishing grounds bring people together. It is a community on the water. The ground holds its own community."

Fishermen have intimate ties to the larger community of Chincoteague, and most of those interviewed feel that the town supports and depends on fishing. Many of the fishermen on Chincoteague have deep genealogical connections to the island and its people. Bonds of kinship link a number of the fishermen in the area. There are also father-son fishing crews among the commercial fleet. In addition, the sense of community is shared among fishermen from different segments of the industry who interact on a regular basis through both work and leisure activities. During an interview at a local waterfront restaurant, two fishermen introduced the interviewer to numerous patrons who had some tie to the water, and greeted many other members of the community.

While fishermen recognize the predominant role of tourism in the economy, they do not believe that it conflicts with commercial fishing, emphasizing how a number of watermen and fishing families own tourist-related businesses including restaurants. Many of those who operate tourist-related businesses began making a living on the water, according to one fisherman. In addition, local seafood business owners participate in the local community by making donations, supplying local events, and participating on government boards. The relationship between commercial fishing and the community at large, including tourists, is considered to be friendly. As one fisherman put it, "People like to eat fish and they come to the docks looking to buy seafood. The growing population of new comers to the area has started to complain about commercial fishing ruining their views and such, but it is not like it is in other places."

If there is a frayed aspect of the social fabric on Chincoteague, it is located in the relationship between commercial and recreational fishermen. Descriptions of the relationship between these two categories ranged from "its pretty good" to "its bad." Most agree that there are few gear conflicts: "No one is burning nets or sinking boats." Typically, the conflict is manifest over the differing perceptions on the user effects upon fish stocks. As one commercial fisherman put it, "They feel that the commercial fishermen catch all the fish, and we KNOW they are catching all the fish."

Part of the problem relates to spatial crowding. A local gillnetter explained that there are more people than ever coming to the area for recreation, which has put more people on the water in boats. This situation makes it difficult for commercial fishermen to find fishing grounds that are not being fished by recreational fishermen, which has resulted in more gear conflicts. Commercial fishermen do use the grounds at night which reduces some of the competition.

Expressions of the conflicts are limited - one fisherman said that they do not have radio communication with recreational boats. Another fisherman explained that gear conflicts are heightened when the croaker come into the inlet. The fish will be stacked from top to bottom, along with the fishermen. Gillnetters will try to avoid the recreational fishermen but gear conflicts do occur. One woman tried to get gillnets banned in the inlet but failed. Some people also complain about the gear that is left at Curtis Merritt Harbor.

Commercial fishermen feel that the negative public perceptions are related to the activities of environmental and sport fishing organizations that generate bad press for commercial activities. One fisherman who sells bait to recreational anglers said that he hears a lot of negative remarks about commercial fishermen. He said that the Coastal Conservation Association is bent on having trophy fish for recreational anglers and that they malign commercial fishermen for catching large fish. "They call commercial fishermen 'white booted thugs' in their online chat rooms."

One further dynamic that marks the social relations among fishermen and members of the community at large involves the distinction between "Chincoteaguers" and "come-heres."<sup>5</sup> Locals who trace their ancestry to founding families on the island are referred to as Chincoteaguers. They tend to view anyone who is not born on Chincoteague, or from a Chincoteague family as a "come-here" or outsider. The island is increasingly being populated by come-heres, resulting in conflicts over island identity and behavior. For example, the battle lines over the billboards dotting the landscape along Route 175 were drawn between locals who wanted them for business promotion and come-heres who felt that they spoil the aesthetics of the marsh land. A much more serious and relevant battle has been fought between these two groups over clam aquaculture. Certain come-heres who purchased waterfront property have attempted, through legal motions and lawsuits, to prevent clambers from working the beds in front of their property. These beds are

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<sup>5</sup> The term "come-here" is employed by long-time residents of Virginia's Eastern Shore to denote outsiders who have settled or purchased property in the area. It connotes a person who does not share the values of the local people and who seeks to colonize the area with the culture and society of his or her original home.

leased from the state and include bottom extending from the low water mark. Clammers mark their beds with PVC pipe which, according to some of the waterfront property owners, spoils their view and the aesthetics of the area. (See Profile on Eastern Shore for further discussion on this topic).

Discussion: Community/fisheries dependency and engagement

Chincoteague is a fishing community in spite of the prominent role of tourism in the local economy. Unlike the commercial fishermen in Ocean City, MD, Chincoteague fishermen do not feel ambivalent about the role and importance of commercial fishing in the island's society and economy. Each of the industry representatives interviewed, from commercial fishermen to shellfish aquaculturists and seafood dealers, expressed the view that the seafood industry is an essential aspect of the island's identity and economy. Rather than view the island as being dependent on the tourist industry, informants in the fishing industry see tourism as being dependent on the island, including its history and character as a fishing village. Tourists are said to come to the island for the seafood and its charm as a sleepy fishing community.

According to fishermen, the town's inhabitants and representatives take pride in the town's historical and present day connection to commercial harvest of fish and shellfish. Commercial watermen are featured in local and statewide television commercials, a work boat is emblazoned on the Town of Chincoteague seal, and the Curtis Merritt Harbor stands as a testament to the support the industry receives and the money the industry brings to the town. The harbor brings in grant money for dredging and upkeep of the waterways which benefits everyone who uses the water. According to a member of the harbor board, the money is granted by virtue of the economic value of commercial landings of boats using the harbor. The local government has also demonstrated support for the industry by helping to fund non-native oyster studies.<sup>6</sup>

The maritime identity of Chincoteague is manifested in numerous examples of expressive culture. The island hosts a number of festivals that celebrate the area's maritime heritage including a Seafood Festival in May, sponsored by the Eastern Shore of Virginia Chamber of Commerce; a Blessing of the Fleet during Memorial Day weekend; and an Oyster Festival on Columbus Day weekend, sponsored by the Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce. The town features the Oyster and Maritime Museum, a non-profit educational institution that was founded in 1965 by a group of island women. The museum, which was opened in 1972 and expanded in 1996, explores the role of oystering and the seafood industry in the history and culture of Chincoteague. Finally, the island's attachment to a maritime heritage is represented by a cross at Veteran's Memorial Park that is dedicated to those lost at sea.

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that, although the majority of those interviewed felt positively about the support provided by the town, one industry representative felt that the town no longer cares about commercial fishing now that it depends so heavily on tourism.

Representatives from both the Town of Chincoteague and Accomack County describe commercial fishing as a vital component of the town's economic well-being and cultural identity. The county representative explained that tourism ranks higher among island industries, but fishing is still very important. The 2000 Census indicates that the industries employing the most individuals in 1999 were art (20.6%), retail trade (15.9%), and construction (13.6%), all of which are related to the tourism industry. Like the fishermen interviewed, the county and town representatives explained that the fishing industry enhances tourism. Visitors enjoy the atmosphere, visit the docks to watch the boats unload, and buy product at the dock. The county representative noted that fishing families are in need of assistance due to the burdensome state and federal fisheries regulations that are limiting harvests and making it difficult for families to make a living from the water. This was corroborated by a gillnetter who said that few if any fishermen can rely on a single income from the water. All the fishermen he knows in the area have working wives who are employed in real estate, local government, or some other profession. According to one fisherman, the county is conservative, but does not provide enough support to the commercial industry. "The Virginia Shellfish Growers Association has a lot of political pull because aquaculture is well supported, but there is not much support for commercial fishermen. The fishermen are supplying food just like the farmers but don't have the same political pull." According to a representative from the Accomack County Administrator's Office, the county firmly supports the working watermen and has made motions in the past to allow fishermen the same tax credits made available by the state of Virginia to farmers. The town and county have also promoted state funding for the establishment of seafood vendors at the farmer's market. To date these efforts have been unsuccessful.

As evidence of the prominent role and presence of fishing on Chincoteague, the county representative noted that the draw bridge spanning the Chincoteague Channel opened over 1,200 times between December 31, 2003 and June 1, 2003, in order to allow passage of the larger fishing vessels. This does not capture the activity of the numerous smaller inshore boats. This high level of activity has had consequences for the traffic on the island, which gets backed up due to draw bridge operation. A representative of the town explained that the congestion has prompted the town to investigate the possibility of implementing scheduled openings, which may conflict with fishing vessel travel. The issue will be resolved once the bridge to the island is diverted north of the commercial fishing docks to Maddox Boulevard, but the funding for that project is not expected until 2008, according to an Accomack County representative.

The Town of Chincoteague is demonstrating a concern for the future of the commercial industry in its plan for the property just north of the bridge. This area, which was once owned as a clam dock by American Original, was bought by a group of people who wanted to hold it until the town could buy it. During this time, waterfront space was rented to a local fish packing house that used it for boat dockage. The town recently acquired it through a T-21 transportation grant and other funding sources and plans to create a waterfront park with slip space. According to a town representative, the park will include roughly 300 feet of dockage for transient sport boats, and 175 feet of dockage and bulkhead will be set aside for larger commercial vessels. The mayor and the town council

are said to be cognizant of the importance of commercial fishing and are supportive of the industry. According to the town representative, most of the waterfront where the industry's infrastructure is based is zoned commercial, the least restrictive zoning category. However, one industry representative opined that zoning laws are restrictive and that the town is attempting to do away with tractor-trailers that are needed for storage.

A representative from the Town of Chincoteague explained that the town is experiencing a revival of sorts in the seafood industry. Transient boats from other ports are being attracted to the area by the infrastructure that is available and aquaculture is making a large contribution to the seafood industry. "It is a revival that we need because it is part of the island's heritage." He does not believe that it will ever reacquire the role it once enjoyed as the preeminent industry on the island, but he feels that commercial fishing will always have a place. Unlike other mid-Atlantic fishing communities wherein fishermen are made vulnerable to waterfront redevelopment and forces of gentrification, the fishermen of Chincoteague feel secure in their place. However, they are similar to fishermen in most other communities in that they feel vulnerable to the constraints posed by burdensome regulations that prevent recruitment to the industry. As one local Chincoteaguer put it, "The big problem for the industry is the aging population of fishermen and the lack of recruitment. No one wants to get into it."

## **B. Recreational Fishing**

### History and Current Description

The interest in sport fishing on Chincoteague dates to the mid-1800s.<sup>7</sup> The establishment of the Atlantic Hotel in 1876 drew tourists, among them sport fishermen, to the area. Sport fishermen could reach the area via the Worcester Rail Road that ran from Snow Hill, Maryland to Greenbackville, VA, and then take a steamboat ferry to the island. A visitor to the island in 1913 remarked that, "many people come down in the autumn for the bluefish and the mackerel" (cited in Mariner 1996:124).

The completion of the causeway to Chincoteague in 1922 provided permanent access to the mainland that encouraged an increase in tourist trade including sport fishing. Rental cottages catering to sport fishermen were built, and some evolved into sport fishing clubs. The Old Dominion Club, which was built on the East Side in the 1920s, eventually became the Chincoteague Yacht and Fishermen's Club in the 1950s. Chincoteague has for many years been described in guidebooks as a commercial fishing town with a strong sport fishing presence. One guidebook from 1936 states: "The inhabitants here gain livelihoods by fishing commercially and by catering to tourists, chiefly sportsmen who come to fish" (cited in Mariner 1996:135).

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<sup>7</sup> This description of the early history of sport fishing on Chincoteague is detailed by Mariner 1996:124-125.

Guide services have always had a place in the sport fishing industry on Chincoteague. Today there are approximately 24 charter fishing boats operating out of Chincoteague. The boats are split between those that run strictly inshore (11), offshore (9), and those that run both inshore and offshore (4). The inshore (summer) flounder fishery has always been important to the area and remains a mainstay of the inshore charter fleet. Sea trout was more important in the past, but recent declines have shifted attention to species like croaker which have been making a comeback. Croakers are very important fish during the doldrums of the summer when fluke are more scarce and difficult to catch. In the past few years, rebounds in the striped bass population have lengthened the season for charters on Chincoteague into the fall. Charter captains report that the inshore fluke fishery has always been significant on Chincoteague, but the number of inshore charters has increased noticeably over the past decade. One captain explained that when he first started working from Chincoteague in the early 1990s, there were approximately 10 charter boats. Offshore charter fishing is a much more recent development on Chincoteague. Among offshore charters, the most important species include bluefin tuna, yellowfin tuna, and a variety of shark. Offshore bottom and wreck fishing for sea bass and tautog is also important to the area.

Chincoteague does not sustain a party boat fleet. In recent years, two party boat operations have gone out of business. Charter captains report that the business is good on the weekends, but there is not enough volume over the week throughout the season to sustain these operations. Among the charter boats that work out of Chincoteague, approximately half are owned and operated by full-time captains.

The fishing around Chincoteague is not the best in the world, according to one charter captain. He described his experience fishing on the Chesapeake with another charter captain, during which he caught more types of fish in seven hours than his boat lands in an entire week out of Chincoteague. The flounder fishing is excellent in the spring and fall, croaker have picked up in the past few years, and stripers have made a comeback, but otherwise inshore fishing in the area is geared more toward tourist, family fishing. He and others fish out of Chincoteague primarily for the location, quality of life, and low cost of living. To begin with, Chincoteague is close to the fishing grounds - 25 miles to offshore grounds and very close to productive inshore areas. The cost of living is much lower than some coastal areas and the town has a relaxed pace that is excellent for families.

In addition to the charter fleet on Chincoteague, there are numerous public ramps that allow access for private boat owners and piers for shore based fishing. The town operates five ramps and also maintains a walking pier at Memorial Park on the east side, and shore access on the west side at the town dock. Much of the private, recreational fishing boat activity takes place in the coastal bays and channels where summer flounder are targeted along with striper and croaker. Shore based fishing on Chincoteague is also focused on summer flounder and whatever people can catch. Surf fishing on Assateague Island has its own special following, and many are said to be exclusive surf fishermen. The Assateague surf offers a variety of species, the most popular of which include striped bass, bluefish, black drum, and red drum.

## Seasonal Round

The winter on Chincoteague does not usually provide the best recreational fishing opportunities. During warm winters like the one in 2001, the striped bass were in the area over the entire course of the winter. Private boat owners target striper in the winter with eels and artificial bait, focusing attention on the back bays near the bridges, Queen Sound, and Assateague Channel. This form of fishing can last through March. Summer flounder fishing begins to pick up in April. Private boats and charters begin making trips to the Chincoteague Bay flats, drifting bullhead minnows, squid, and shiners for summer flounder. Flounder fishing continues through the spring and summer, but fishermen begin to shift focus to the deeper channels when the water warms in June and July. Occasional sea trout are caught in the spring as well. In 2002, the flounder season was very poor according to the locals as a result of the mild winter and high temperatures. Spring also features the arrival of striped bass in the surf and the inlet. Offshore chumming for shark begins in May and June, depending on water temperatures, and large bluefish are often caught while targeting shark at this time. Lately, when the flounder fishing slows in the summer, fishermen have been looking forward to the arrival of croaker, which have been thick in recent years. Bait fishing with squid for croaker in the inlet and back bays has made up for the lack of flounder that are caught during the late summer doldrums. Offshore bottom and wreck fishing for black sea bass and tautog also begins in early summer. Baits include squid, clam, and peeler crab for sea bass and green crab for tautog. Triggerfish and spade fish can also be caught on wrecks at this time. Offshore fishing picks up in July with tuna fishing. Bluefin and yellowfin tuna, as well as mahi mahi can be caught trolling the offshore canyons and structures such as Lumpy Bottom, the Parking Lot, Hotdog, and the Fingers. This pattern of activity lasts through August and September, but the summer flounder fishing improves in the month of September at the same time that the croaker are leaving the inshore waters. Inshore flounder fishing and offshore tuna fishing can last into November if the weather allows. The striped bass migration in the fall attracts surf fishermen as well as private boats and charters that target these fish in the inlet.

According to a charter boat captain, the season for the charter fleet usually begins at the end of March when flounder season opens and lasts until the New Year. There are very few charters booked after the second week of November, but the rebound of striped bass has resulted in more trips in November and December. In the past, mackerel fishing in early March used to be important to the area, but no one books trips for mackerel. There is not enough demand and because of the longer travel distances, the cost of gas is prohibitive. Inshore charters have the most success on flounder in the months of April, May, and June and again in the fall, especially during October. Many other species are caught by anglers onboard charter boats, but these fish are not specifically targeted. They include bluefish, weakfish, red drum, and black drum. Red drum are available into the fall and some have talked about advertising trips for them, but there is little interest among the clientele. According to one charter captain, there are a lot of overlooked fisheries in the area because people who like to fish for those species have historically gone elsewhere. For example, striper fishing is best known in the Chesapeake Bay,

Delaware Bay, and to a lesser extent, Ocean City, Maryland. The recreational black drum fishery is concentrated at the Bay Bridge Tunnel. Red drum are the focus of fishing effort in places like Virginia Beach, Rudy Inlet, North Carolina, and the Bay Bridge Tunnel. Few consider Chincoteague to be a hotspot for these species. Some charter boats will begin to target sea bass in May on the offshore wrecks. Inshore, the sea bass rarely reach the legal size minimum. Tautog fishing also begins in May for the charters. They are caught on green crab, sand fleas, clam, and squid. Offshore charters begin taking both shark trips and tuna trips in June. The local fleet mostly chunks for tuna rather than trolling. The offshore tuna season could last into November, but the local charter fleet typically wraps up the season in September. According to one captain, the clientele lose interest in them and fishermen do not like to be offshore by themselves. Offshore tuna trips in July result in the capture of a lot of other species such as cobia, amberjack, king mackerel, and mahi mahi. July is also an important month for croaker among the inshore charters. The run of croaker coincides with a diminished summer flounder "bite", and becomes a necessary event to keep clientele coming. The inshore charter season has been extended by the renewed interest in striped bass. Among the full-time charters that stay in the water, striper fishing in the inlet and channels by drifting eels or using artificial baits can be productive in October and November.

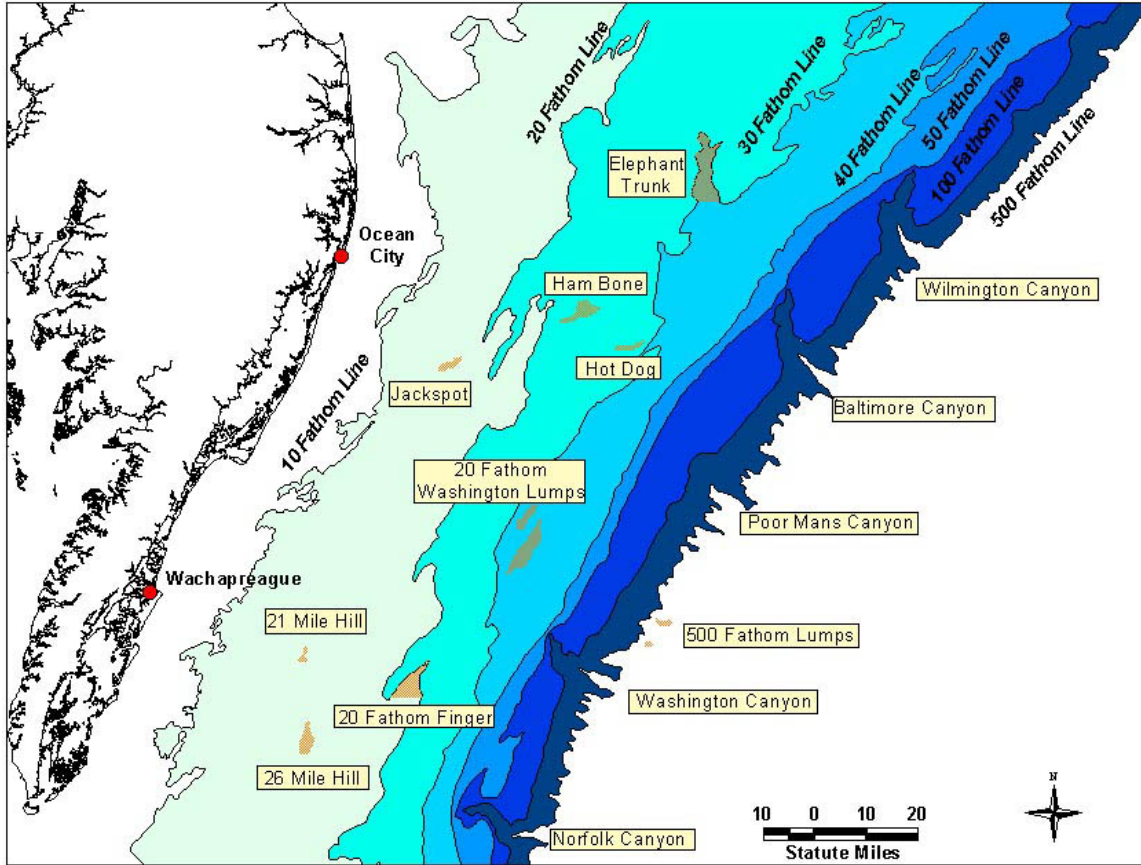
### Fishing Grounds

Fishing grounds vary in accordance with the seasons, the species targeted, and the gear type. Charter boats, private pleasure craft, and shore-bound anglers frequent different fishing grounds depending on a host of factors including the time of year, species available, angler preferences, and weather, to name a few.

Among the shore-based anglers, there are few access points on Chincoteague proper. There is a small walking pier at Memorial Park located on the Assateague Channel. There is also a bulkhead for fishing at the town dock on the Chincoteague Channel. One of the local marina/tackle shops offers pay fishing from an 800' pier on the Chincoteague Channel. Assateague Island is a popular destination for surf casters. The Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge provides access to the island for a \$5.00/vehicle fee. There are no licenses required to fish on the island, but a free permit can be obtained by those who wish to fish overnight. Off-road vehicle permits cost \$70.00/year.

Inshore boat anglers fish the Chincoteague Inlet, and the many coastal bays and channels including Chincoteague Bay, Queen Sound Channel, Chincoteague Channel, Assateague Channel, and Tom's Cove. There are favorite hotspots for flounder such as 'Gun Boat Slough'.

Offshore fishing grounds range up to and beyond 30 miles and include wrecks, open bottom marked by particular underwater features and contours, and the offshore canyons. Some of the favorites include Lumpy Bottom, the Parking Lot, the Hotdog, and the Fingers. The following map depicts some of these offshore fishing grounds.



<http://www.dnr.state.md.us/fisheries/fishingreport/canyons.html>

### Angler/Cientele Description

According to local sport fishing industry representatives, recreational fishing on Chincoteague is dominated by tourists who come to the island for vacation. One informant estimates that 80% of the fishing in the area is represented by families on vacation. Further, they believe that the vast majority of recreational fishermen come to the area from Pennsylvania. Others come to fish Chincoteague waters from the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area, New Jersey, Delaware, and New York. The fishermen who come from places like Pennsylvania are said to enjoy the area for its small-town, laid-back atmosphere. They do not want to experience the congestion and aggravation that is associated with nearby resort towns like Ocean City, MD. Locals say that the visitors do not tell their neighbors about the place because they want to keep it secret and undeveloped.

Besides the vacationing tourist, other categories of fishermen on Chincoteague include the older, retired men who fish for flounder in the bays, and the experienced fishermen who trailer their private fishing boats to the area. Serious (summer) flounder fishermen are said to frequent the area in May. While flounder fishermen are considered to be the

consistent "money makers" for the sport fishing industry of the area, "tuna-fishing diehards" are said to have saved the area in 2002 when the flounder fishing was poor.

Recreational fishing in the area is marked by a diversity of races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic status levels. According to one informant, there are not a lot of blacks who fish in the area, despite the island's proximity to nearby black neighborhoods such as Horntown. He hypothesized that this is due to their interest in weakfish and the lack of good weakfish fishing around Chincoteague. While there is a range of socioeconomic status levels, those with a higher income are more often associated with the offshore tuna fishing than with inshore flounder fishing.

The recreational fishermen who frequent the area are said to keep and eat what they catch for the most part. Those who are staying for a week in a hotel may catch and release, but by and large people want to keep the fish they catch.

A charter boat captain described the clientele of the local fleet. The majority of inshore clients are families with children who come to the area for a weekend, or a week and just want to be out on the water. In the summer, most of the clients are on a week-long vacation. They get more weekend visitors in the spring and rarely get business from day-trippers. The clients are mostly white, although they do receive some black and Asian clients. Charters in the area see more women clients relative to other fishing ports. According to this captain, the women often out-fish men because they are patient, allowing the fish to get hooked; whereas men are too ready to set the hook before the fish has the bait in its mouth. Clients come primarily from Pennsylvania and Maryland, but they get occasional charters from Delaware, New Jersey, Virginia, New York, and North Carolina. The clients represent the full spectrum of socioeconomic statuses. Some appear to be downright poor, while others appear very well-off. Most want to catch flounder, but some just want to catch anything. This is especially the case among the families who bring their children. Asians are said to have a culture that values any fish no matter what the species or the size. "They want to keep whatever they catch, and say that they do not understand the regulations. But it is their culture to eat everything they catch - a lot of minorities are like that." He estimates that 50% of his business is based on return clients. Another charter captain estimated that 60-75% of his business is based on return clientele. He indicated that some of his clients fish with him as many as 20 times a year. The boats in the area advertise through brochures, local papers such as the Beachcomber, and through word of mouth. According to one captain, the charter fleet has changed its attitude towards clientele since he started fishing 10 years ago. At that time the boats would not go out if they did not have four people, but lately boats will go out with two passengers and charge by the head.

### Crew Description

It is difficult to get an accurate number of the people involved in the charter boat industry due to the movement of people in and out of the profession. The Chincoteague Island Charterboat Association estimates that there are 30 members of the association. This number, of course, does not include mates, dock hands, and the staff at marinas and other

essential infrastructure. Most of the boats in the Chincoteague fleet are owner-operated, but there are a few co-ownership arrangements in which one of the co-owners runs the boat in the absence of the other. The inshore boats typically run without a mate. Among offshore boats, one mate is the norm. Two of the offshore boats are operated by husband-wife teams. At times, captains will accompany each other as mates when trips are not booked. Most recruit their crew through word of mouth. The turnover rate of crew is said to be high. Mates are typically paid on a per trip basis (the average is \$50.00), and also receive tips. Some of the larger boats have a mandatory tip charge of 10-15% but the tips usually depend on the clients.

One charter captain estimates that 50% of the boats operate full-time from April until December. The other half are part-time, weekend charters and short season charters, operating between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Most charters are finished by the 1st of October. There are only three or four who operate later than this. Some of the charter captains who live locally guide hunting trips in the fall. Among those who live elsewhere, many return to land jobs, such as plumbing or teaching after Labor Day. There are fewer than 10 charter captains who live on the island. Most of the captains live elsewhere and come to stay on the island during the fishing season. They may own a second home on Chincoteague, rent local property, or bring a trailer. One charter captain explained that he owns a place in town where he lives from the end of April until the 2nd week in September. He moves back to Baltimore where he has another job during the fall and winter. Like other charter captains who move to the area permanently or on a seasonal basis, he enjoys the relaxed atmosphere, affordable living, and unhurried pace of life on Chincoteague.

The boats in the charter fleet on Chincoteague represent a range of commitment to and dependence on sport fishing as a livelihood. There approximately one dozen full-time captains who make a living from charter boat fishing as well as those who engage in it as a hobby or tax write-off. One captain who works a land job during the fall and winter explained that there are too many expenses for a part-time operation to make money. There is a booking fee of 10% to the marina, hundreds to thousands of dollars in repair expenses, paint bills in excess of \$1000.00, not to mention slip fees, gasoline, equipment, and bait. On average he may gross up to \$20,000, which would not be enough to continue if he had boat payments on top of the expenses. Even so, people are trying to enter the business all the time and many wind up failing.

### Infrastructure

There is a substantial recreational fishing presence on Chincoteague as evidenced by the number of businesses that cater specifically to sport fishing. Roughly six privately owned marinas provide slip space to charter boats and private boats. A number of these marinas also feature bait and tackle sales as well as lodging for visitors, indicating the close integration between the tourist trade and the recreational fishing industry. In addition to the marinas there are at least three other bait and tackle shops on the island in addition to the hardware stores and gasoline stations that sell fishing equipment. There is one major

marine supply and repair shop on the island, a wholesale bait market, and a number of fishermen who catch and sell bait to the recreational fishing businesses.

The town of Chincoteague provides slip space for recreational and charter boats at Curtis Merritt Harbor. The harbor was originally intended for use by commercial fishing boats but has since provided access to charter and private boats. The Curtis Merritt Harbor Committee voted to assign charter and party boats the same priority status as commercial boats. Commercial boats and charter boats are given first priority for slip space, followed by local private boat owners, then commercial fishermen from elsewhere in Accomack County, and then all other categories. There is a 500 person waiting list for private boats, demonstrating the demand for slip space in the area. Informants note that the limited number of slips available is one reason why the recreational industry in the area has not grown larger. Most of the marinas are small operations that do not support a large number of slips. The area cannot host large tournaments because there is simply nowhere to put the boats. In addition, the island's recreational fishing industry could benefit from having more marine repair businesses. One of the two engine repair shops is on the verge of closing and other services are said to close early on weekends.

Many boats are trailed to and from Chincoteague waters. The town owns five boat ramps which are located at Curtis Merritt Harbor near the southern tip of the island, at the Town Dock just south of the draw bridge, at Memorial Park on the East Side road, Fir Landing off Deep Hole Rd., and East Side Road just north of the Memorial Park ramp. The East Side boating facility, which offers a boat launch and trailer parking, was recently opened and the Town Dock was given a new ramp and bulkhead. An annual ramp permit (\$20.00) must be obtained by boat owners in order to use any of these facilities. Some boat rental businesses also have their own boat ramps and slips. (<http://www.chincoteaguechamber.com/recreat.html>)

Facilities for shore based fishing are limited to the Town Dock bulkhead where people can go to fish and crab, and the walking pier at Memorial Park. A private, fee-based pier on Chincoteague Channel is operated by one of the local bait and tackle dealers.

Informants note that the industry has been growing, especially since the 1990s. There was one boat rental business that failed as a result of the development of a hotel, but the increase in tourism has brought more charter businesses and marinas to the area. Some feel that competition is good for the recreational fishing in the area because it draws more clientele. Others feel that the increased number of potential clients coming to the area is negated by the greater number of charter services available to them. According to one informant, the town had hoped to attract more charters and private boats to the area by developing a waterfront park north of the drawbridge. It is said that the town planned to encourage charter operations to relocate to the new facility in order to attract more business to the area. This park is going to be the first sight for visitors arriving to the island. There are two main problems associated with this idea, according to a charter captain. First, the site of the intended park is much further away from the Chincoteague Inlet than the current location of boats at Curtis Merritt Harbor. Second, the current and wave action in the Chincoteague Channel can be rough on boats and hence it is not the

best place to moor. A town official reported that approximately 300 feet of waterfront space is going to be devoted to finger piers for sport boats.

### Economic Networks

Individuals and businesses involved in the recreational fishing industry on Chincoteague have important economic ties to the local community. Charter boats, for example, are intimately dependent on the marinas that provide them with slip space. The charter boats typically purchase gasoline, bait, ice, and equipment from the marinas at which they dock. A local oil company, Mason Oil, supplies most of the marinas. Some of the charter boat operations purchase bait from local commercial fishermen. In addition to these obvious economic ties, the industry relies on secondary tourist businesses to attract clients, creating a symbiosis between the recreational industry and other retail and service industries on the island. Restaurants, motels, rental properties, camp grounds, convenience stores, gasoline stations, and a host of other businesses benefit from, and help to sustain, the sport fishing industry of Chincoteague.

Even so, many of the economic ties that sport fishermen and businesses maintain extend well beyond the island. Ice is supplied to the marinas by companies in Salisbury, MD (Reddy Ice) and Seaford Ice in Seaford, DE. While most minnows come from local fishermen, other bait is bought from suppliers such as Horn Island in Ocean City, MD and Wilcox Bait in Newport News, VA. Due to the lack of engine and boat repair services on the island, boat owners must go elsewhere, such as Ocean City, MD, or Quinby, VA. Electronic equipment is obtained through many different channels including catalogs, Boat America in Alexandria, VA, Henry's Tackle in North Carolina, Ake Marine in Ocean City, MD, Boater's World in Salisbury, MD, and a host of other locations in which the people live. Electronic repairs may be taken to businesses such as L and L in Ocean City or Virginia Beach, but often electronics are less costly to simply replace. Fishing tackle and equipment may be purchased locally, but many have economic ties with suppliers in their own home towns. Many recreational fishermen would rather buy equipment for a low price at Wal-Mart than get the personalized service offered by area tackle shops that charge more. There is no railway on Chincoteague, so many boats will hire hydraulic trailers to come to Chincoteague from Crisfield and Princess Ann, MD, or else take their boats to Ocean City, MD, Greenbackville, VA across the bay, Wachapreague, VA, or Oyster, VA. In addition, many people don't like to store their boats in Virginia due to the 1% personal property tax, so they often register and store their boats in other states like Maryland.

### Social Networks and Community Relations

Recreational fishing is considered by members of the industry to be a very important part of Chincoteague's economic and social life. The area businesses such as restaurants and hotels may not realize the contribution that fishing makes to their operations, but informants contend that sport fishing is essential to the island's identity, which is what draws tourists to the town. Aside from the pony penning, which does draw thousands for a short period of time, recreational fishing and water sports, in general, are the main

attraction. There is no boardwalk, amusements, or nightlife such as that found in Ocean City, MD. Sport fishing is especially important in the spring and fall, when many of the visitors are coming specifically for the fishing.

There is some tension between the local Chincoteaguers and the come-heres who are part of the recreational fishing industry. According to one come-here, the locals decry tourism, the outsiders that it brings, and the crowding on the water that results, while simultaneously depending on them. Many of the locals have investment properties and other tourist related businesses that are rooted in the tourist trade. Others, however, note that the town, including the local Chincoteaguers, recognize the importance of the recreational industry and support it. The town council has gone to meetings across the bay in support of the fishermen and their interests and the County Supervisors are also noted for their involvement in promoting sport fishing interests. According to one informant, the town does need to renovate Curtis Merritt Harbor where approximately 25-35% of charter boats are docked. In 2003, the town acquired over \$1 million from various sources for use in renovating the harbor. It should be noted that in 2002, for the first time the majority of members of the town council were come-heres.

Relations among recreational fishermen are said to be good overall, but there are some problems with people who bring their boats to the area with no knowledge of the local waters. Some end up running aground or capsizing and often need assistance. One week prior to the fieldwork conducted for this report, a 14' aluminum skiff sank in the inlet under the weight of five large adults. One of the local charter captains rescued two of the passengers who were swept out into the ocean.

Charter captains are said to be very helpful to one another and other boaters on the water. Prior to the establishment of the Chincoteague Island Charterboat Association, it is said that there was little cooperation among the captains. Since the founding of the association, charter captains communicate on the radio with each other, share information, and generally provide assistance when needed. Occasionally they have to deal with operations that threaten the reputation of the island as a whole. One captain in particular was cited as having a terrible business ethic that drove customers away from the island. He allegedly lied to both customers and other captains about his catches, and mistreated his clients. Maintaining good relationships with clients is essential to the charter boat businesses.

Social relationships among charter crews and other recreational fishing businesses are mediated by economic ties and loyalties. It is not uncommon for charter captains to socialize among the other patrons and clients of the marina at which their boats are kept. Marinas supply charter boats with needed ice, gas, bait, and equipment in addition to booking trips for them. The economic bonds are reflected in social attachments between charter captains and marina operators who may hang out together in the shops or have dinner on occasion.

Fishing tournaments are another indicator of the importance of sport fishing on Chincoteague, and an expression of community relationships. The local marina/bait shops

sponsor the island's fishing tournaments, not the town itself. Competition among these businesses is reflected in the sponsorship of separate tournaments that target the same species. East Side Marina has a flounder Tournament on the first weekend in June; Anchor Inn has a flounder tournament in June for its hotel guests; Capt. Bob has a tuna tournament in July and also hosted what was referred to as a "sweet revenge" shark tournament, the title referring to a competition this marina had with another area marina that hosted a shark tournament of its own. Barnacle Bills has a June shark tournament and a July tuna tournament. Capt. Steve Bait and Tackle has a surf fishing tournament in September or October. The tournaments provide an arena for the display of both the cooperation and conflict that characterizes the recreational fishing community on Chincoteague.

Other local events provide an opportunity for the expression of social relations among recreational fishermen. The annual Blessing of the Fleet, held on Memorial Day weekend, is attended by charter captains and their families. In the past, the captains and their families would gather for a cookout following the event, but this no longer takes place. One of the local marina/bait and tackle businesses hosts a Christmas party each year for the area fishermen. In addition, members of the charter association have the opportunity to gather and socialize during monthly meetings.

There are no locally based fishing clubs or associations that informants were aware of besides the Chincoteague Island Charterboat Association. Recreational fishermen in the area are affiliated with other regional clubs such as the Assateague Mobile Sportfishermen Association (AMSA), which features beach clean-ups, a scholarship program, outdoor expo, and numerous other social functions. Some are also members of the Maryland Saltwater Sportsman's Association.

According to local representatives from the sport fishing industry, relationships among recreational and commercial fishermen are improving. Some local charter captains have met informally with commercial fishermen in order to discuss issues such as netting practices, the timing of fishing practice, and the sharing of fishing grounds. These meetings have been conducted in an attempt to minimize gear conflict and confrontations between recreational and commercial fishermen. In addition, charter captains explained that they often have to educate their clients, who tend to place the blame for poor catches on commercial practices. According to one charter captain, for example, the 2003 summer flounder fishery was poor not because commercial draggers wiped out the fish, as some clients would contend, but because of the weather patterns, water temperatures and fish movements.

It is reported, however, that some recreational fishermen on the island have a poor opinion of commercial fishermen. Part of the animosity towards commercial fishermen is related to the privileged position of commercial fishing in the town's history, identity, and political process. According to one recreational representative, "Commercial fishermen can do no wrong here on this island." He feels that the island's historical connection to commercial fishing and the maritime identity of the locals maintains a grip on the attitude and approach to present commercial activities. For example, unlike other

coastal areas in Virginia, back bays and channels on the Eastern Shore (including those around Chincoteague) are fished by gillnetters.<sup>8</sup> He complained that some gillnetters will place their nets in the channel, fish the nets all night long and leave nothing for the recreational fishermen. Another recreational fisherman noted that this practice is common during the croaker run in the summer, a time at which commercial fishermen are said to place gillnets across the Chincoteague Inlet. A separate informant had a litany of critiques against commercial fishermen: trawler by-catch is hurting the flounder population; potters are putting their gear on the wrecks and preventing recreational fishermen from using those grounds; gillnetters decimate the croakers that come into the inlet by placing their nets adjacent to recreational fishermen. Others noted that the VMRC has made mistakes that exacerbate the problems associated with commercial fishing. Closing weakfish harvest in the summer, for example, created a discard problem, according to one informant.

The negative attitude towards commercial fishermen on Chincoteague is tempered by positive experiences that some sport fishermen have had in dealing with commercial fishermen. One of the most critical recreational fishermen acknowledged that "most [commercial fishermen] will bend over backwards for you." One resident recreational fisherman explained that, despite the animosity between industries, the individuals who live together on the island try to get along. Chincoteague is a small island and so he does his best to be neighborly to the commercial fishermen. He noted that charter and commercial fishermen do communicate on the water through VHF radio channels, and some commercial fishermen will even provide fish to charter boats that have had a bad day. A separate sport fishing charter captain explained that it is frustrating for his clients to see a commercial boat taking 14" flounder when they have to meet a higher minimum length. At the same time, he expressed an understanding and sympathy for commercial fishermen who, he says, are saddled with very strict regulations.

#### Discussion: Community/fisheries dependency and engagement

Chincoteague is dependent on the resort economy. There are almost as many vacation homes (43.25%) on the island as fulltime residential homes. The resort economy is intimately tied to the sport fishing industry and the island's identity as a fishing community. Sport fishing has drawn tourists to the island for well over a hundred years and continues to serve as an important point of entry for both inshore and offshore recreational fishermen. Unlike other beach towns that feature a boardwalk and numerous attractions, Chincoteague Island and its waters are the attraction. Most interviewees were unequivocal in depicting Chincoteague as a fishing community - incorporating both recreational and commercial fishing

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<sup>8</sup> The Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) was lobbied by an Eastern Shore delegate and commercial fishermen who wanted an exemption from a regulation prohibiting gillnets from marked channels in coastal bays. They argued that coastal areas of the Eastern Shore do not exhibit the same problems associated with boat traffic and congestion that characterize other areas like Hampton Roads. They pointed out that restricting fishermen from these areas would eliminate historically important fishing grounds and upset the local fishing communities. The VMRC provided an exemption for the commercial fishermen on the seaside of the Eastern Shore, allowing them to continue fishing in marked coastal bays and channels.

sectors. Others described Chincoteague as a "tourism community" of which fishing is a significant part.

A representative from the Town of Chincoteague noted that boating in the area has grown considerably over the past few decades, which is why the town is spending resources on maintaining ramps and marinas. The town put in a new launch and parking area on the Assateague Channel called the 'East Side Boating Facility' and recently refurbished the ramp and bulkhead at the Town Dock. The town has also expressed its support for the recreational industry by devoting to it 300 feet of waterfront space associated with a proposed park on the Chincoteague Channel. Representatives of the county are also supportive of fishing as a central matter for the island. A representative from Accomack County expressed frustration over the ever-tightening bag and size limits that are threatening the recreational industry on the island. This representative is noted by others in the industry as a champion of sport fishermen, who has promoted the industry's interests. Government representatives and industry members alike expressed the sentiment that recreational fishing is an essential component of the island's identity and economy.

Despite the recognition of the importance of sport fishing on Chincoteague, the industry's growth is limited by the lack of available dock space and limited shore access. The shortage of slips and large marinas precludes hosting large tournaments or attracting more fishermen. Some industry representatives note that Curtis Merritt Harbor is in need of repair. While charter boat fishing has grown over the past decade, party boat operations have been unsuccessful in the area. In addition, there are only a few places where shore fishermen can fish, including one pay pier, a free public bulkhead on Chincoteague Channel, and a public walking pier on Assateague Channel. The National Park on Assateague offers plenty of space for surf casters, but they are restricted from areas closed to protect piping plover nesting. According to one fisherman, the piping plover area closures have grown larger each year. These limitations are just fine, however, according to those who feel the waterways around Chincoteague are already crowded enough.

### **III. Vulnerability and Cumulative Impacts**

#### **A. Commercial Fishing**

##### Gentrification and Economic Development

Economic development and gentrification are two hallmarks of life on the island of Chincoteague. Each of the 15 gentrification indicators is present on Chincoteague. Tourism rapidly became the most important industry on the island following the establishment of the causeway to Assateague Island in 1962. In addition, waterfront

property values are rising, with residential homes valued at an average of \$105,600, according to the 2000 Census.

New hotels and large private residences have been growing in recent years, but the island has retained a relaxed pace and character that does not compare with the hustle and bustle of larger resort towns in the mid-Atlantic. This is reflected in the attitude of commercial fishermen and industry representatives who did not express any great anxiety over competition for waterfront space. Dockage on Chincoteague has always been rather limited. Curtis Merritt Harbor secures the place of commercial fishing in the area, and there are a number of private docks leased to commercial fishermen. A town official further emphasized that 175 feet of bulkhead will be reserved for commercial boats to lease once the town develops the waterfront park to the north of the draw bridge. According to this official, the mayor and the town council are dedicated to the preservation of the fishing industry's infrastructure on the island.

The current packing operations are zoned commercial and appear to be secure. However, the older of the two packing houses is for sale and may be in danger of being eliminated by development interests. Further, everyone seems to agree that gear storage space is needed considering that fishermen are not allowed to store their gear at Curtis Merritt Harbor. Fishermen have to store gear on their own property and haul it to and from their boats.

Although waterfront development is not considered particularly problematic for the fishing industry at this time, it has been threatening to aquaculture operations. One waterman complained about what he called the "high dollar people" coming down from the north, buying up all of the waterfront property and trying to dictate to the locals what they can and cannot do on the water. "They've already made theirs and they want to keep us from making ours." This conflict between local watermen and come-heres was manifested in a case brought by the Cedar View Beach Homeowners Association against the Virginia Marine Resources Commission over aquaculture leases. Homeowners complained about "very ugly and disruptive stuff" in front of their houses, referring to the PVC pipes used to mark the beds and the activities of watermen themselves (Lusk 2002:4). Conflicts such as this are becoming more common as both aquaculture and waterfront housing development expand.

The development of the aquaculture industry has been a mixed blessing for Chincoteague and the fishing industry. On the one hand, aquaculture competes with the harvest of wild shellfish. One informant involved in the harvest of wild clams explained that the low price of cultured clams is making it difficult for the few wild clam harvesters in the area to compete. On the other hand, aquaculture is revitalizing the seafood industry on Chincoteague, helping to reestablish the island's maritime heritage. Some feel that aquaculture has absorbed many of the watermen who were put out of business by strict regulations, while others say that it primarily employs out-of-work farmers. In either case, the aquaculture industry has grown substantially.

Employment opportunities associated with economic development are claiming those who might otherwise work on the water. According to fishermen working out of Chincoteague, the real threat to the future of the industry is to the lack of recruitment of people to it. They have witnessed a 20-30% decline in watermen in Accomack and Northampton counties over the past five years. One gillnetter in his mid-30s explained that he is the youngest in the area. Few are encouraging their children to follow in their footsteps and it is increasingly difficult to find reliable crew. Most of the local fishermen are part of an aging population of inshore gillnetters and watermen who feel that they are the last of a dying breed. They have become a part of an industry that increasingly relies on the activity of transient boats. According to the fishermen, the lack of recruitment is directly attributable to regulations that disrupt markets and reduce profitability (see below). Economic development in the area is claiming local watermen, who go to "bang nails," paint, or get involved in the tourist trade. One local fisherman claimed to know others who have left commercial fishing in order to run dive charters and recreational fishing charters. Some local fishermen also guide waterfowl hunts in the fall and winter.

The development of the area is also putting more people on the water in private boats. It has become more difficult for the commercial boats to find fishing grounds that are not overrun with recreational fishermen. This has resulted in more gear conflict between user groups.

### Environment

Chincoteague does not have any major water quality issues, according to informants. The inlet and the channels are maintained by the Army Corps of Engineers. Fishermen are required to record freight slips each year, which are used to justify the expense of the dredging and maintenance. According to one fishermen, there are a few shore areas between the draw bridge and the harbor that are closed to clamming due to poorly managed sewage from the town, but there are no real environmental problems. In fact, one informant from the aquaculture industry proclaimed that Chincoteague has the cleanest waters in the world and is the only place in which the beds are not closed to harvest after heavy rains. There is a good flush of high quality water throughout the area. "Even the worst local areas that are said to be subject to pollution are no more polluted than the James River."

Watermen from Chincoteague and across the lower Eastern Shore have suffered from the severe decline in the population of the native oyster, *Crassostrea virginica*, due to oyster pathogens such as MSX and Dermo. They would like to see the establishment of the controversial *Crassostrea ariakensis*, or Asian Oyster. Trials using sterile, triploid individuals demonstrate that *C. ariakensis* is more resistant to these diseases and tolerant of a variety of environments, making it an attractive candidate for aquaculture. Some scientists and conservation organizations fear a reversion of sterile oysters to the fertile, diploid state, which may lead to the establishment of a reproducing colony of non-native oysters. Some watermen feel that a self-sustaining population of non-indigenous oysters would be an economic boon to the area. The town of Chincoteague has demonstrated its support for watermen by funding research on *C. ariakensis*.

## Fisheries Management

According to informants, commercial fishing interests on Chincoteague are most threatened by harsh regulations and the cumulative impact of state and federal fisheries management policies. The 20-30% decline in the number of watermen in the two Eastern Shore counties is attributed to unwise regulatory policies that have made fishing unprofitable by disrupting markets. Each of the various gear groups has its own bone to pick with fisheries management and regulation.

One of the primary concerns relates to the imposition of seasonal openings and closures that have no correlation with the movement of fish. According to one local gillnetter, "fishing out of Chincoteague is an intercept fishery - it depends on the weather and tides and seasonal changes. You can't depend on the calendar - you have to live it and do it, you can't be selective - the fish ride the eddies up and down the beaches and they overlap and vary." He explained that the mandated season for weakfish is problematic because the season is closed precisely when the fish are available for capture (Dec 16 - April 1). "This is the worst season for trout [weakfish] because the fish were gone by the time we could catch them."

Local fishermen have been ill served by a host of other regulations including the 200 fish/year quota on striped bass; the eight-month closure on weakfish; the total closure of spiny dogfish; and the 16-17 new blue crab regulations that have been handed down over the past five years.

The spiny dogfish fishery, for example, is said to have been very important to the local area. It accounted for as much as 12% of the total value landed in 1999. In 2001, it accounted for less than .1% of the total value landed. One gillnetter explained that he and others used to fish almost exclusively for dogfish, which allowed other fishermen to work in their own fisheries without competing as much. In 1998 the Northwest Atlantic US population of spiny dogfish *Squalus acanthias* 'overfished' was declared to be overfished by the National Marine Fisheries Service. A controversial fishery management plan took effect in 2001 that limited dogfish harvest to a by-catch fishery. The small quota that is currently granted for the capture of dogfish is quickly filled in the Northeast, preventing mid-Atlantic fishermen from pursuing dogfish when they are available.<sup>9</sup> These measures

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<sup>9</sup> A fishery management plan was approved in 1999 but was held up by a series of political struggles among different stakeholders over the status of the stock. The plan, which attempted to eliminate the directed dogfish fishery by reducing mortality from .3 to .03, was implemented during the 2001 fishing season. A small by-catch quota of three million pounds was to be allocated between two six-month seasons (58% in the first and 42% in the second) in order to allow fishermen from New England and Mid-Atlantic to harvest fish when they are seasonally available. However, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, which also governs migratory species that can be caught in different states, used different numbers to arrive at an eight million pound quota. This allowed fishermen to exceed the 3 million pound federal quota when capturing dogfish inside the three-mile limit of territorial state waters. It so happens that Massachusetts, and other New England States quickly capture the federal quota and the additional ASMFC allowance during the spring and summer months in New England states, leaving nothing for Mid-Atlantic fishermen during the winter. The 42% that should be left for mid-Atlantic fishermen to catch is all gone; because once three million pounds are caught the federal fishery closes. Besides the federal closure, the additional

resulted in the loss of this fishery among gillnetters in Chincoteague and other ports along the Mid-Atlantic. The spiny dogfish closure made it difficult to make a living in the winter. One of the local packing houses hired local fishermen who were put out of work as a result of the "horndog" closure to work on the dock during the winter. A gillnetter remarked, "That [closure] is why the bars are full in the winter."

There are additional concerns among the offshore fishermen who land in both Chincoteague and New England ports. When fishing for monkfish, boats have had to travel further north to avoid monkfish area closures that restricted the use of gillnets over 8" mesh in order to protect sea turtles. This compelled fishermen to steam an additional 20 miles north of traditional fishing grounds and fish in bad weather. Those who fish for monkfish and groundfish also have to adapt to reduced days at sea. One fisherman explained that he is allowed a mere 62 days at sea: 22 from his multi-species permit and 40 for monkfish. This is not enough to make a living, and he needs more days to provide for his family. Days at sea reductions force him and others to fish in unsafe conditions because days must be used when the fish are known to be available, regardless of weather. More days at sea allow fishermen the flexibility to be choosy, and to weigh the risks. Fewer days at sea compel fishermen to stay out even if the weather is dangerous, in order to avoid the loss of a day at sea. Chincoteague fishermen say they lost additional days at sea in 2002 during a two week period spent waiting for the council to pass the monkfish regulations.

Quarterly quota systems are also the target of intense criticism among Chincoteague fishermen. Quarterly quotas on croaker, fluke, and black sea bass are blamed for creating a "derby" style fishing mentality that encourages fishermen to catch up all that they can when the quarter opens. This leads to an initial glut of fish, reducing prices paid to the fishermen, followed by a disrupted market that cannot be steadily supplied by local fishermen. Instead, markets look overseas for a steady supply of product. The owner of a now defunct fish packing house points to the fluke quotas as the primary reason for the collapse of the fish packing operation. One fisherman who runs a fluke dragger is worried that the cuts in quota will keep his boat out of operation. He must limit his trips each week in order to stay within the 75 box/week limit. Larger draggers cannot go out and turn a profit - they steam out four to five hours, work for an hour or two, and steam back. They need to work longer and catch more fish to make the trip profitable.

Finally, some expressed concerns over the politics of regulatory bodies such as the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). The ASMFC is said to be the area's greatest adversary because they are not beholden to the same National Standards of the Magnuson Act. Further, the New England states are thought to vote as a block, garnering more power than the divided mid-Atlantic States. As one fisherman put it, "They are using the mid-Atlantic as a nursery for fish." The weakfish (sea trout) fishery is an example: New England fishermen are favored by seasons that prevent mid-Atlantic fishermen from capturing fish when they are most abundant. "It's north against the south again." He opined that the regulations have nothing to do with science but with the

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quota for state waters can not be caught in Virginia because the dogfish are typically found outside three miles.

geographical votes. He also complained that in Massachusetts, the estimated 8% catch and release mortality figure for striped bass exceeds the entire east coast commercial catch because the commercial fishermen are held at 20% of their historical landings, while some states allow their recreational fishermen to catch 500% of their historical landings.

### Resilience and Representation

The cumulative effects of these regulations on recruitment of people to the industry are compounded by the licensing and permitting structure that reduces the resilience of the industry. There is a two-year waiting period for those who wish to obtain a Virginia commercial registration license. This delayed entry program can be avoided by the transfer of a license from a previous license holder, but according to one fisherman more people retire into fishing than retire out of fishing. "Most die with their boots on like cowboys." According to him, plenty of fishermen would like to sell out, but it is too difficult to get started in the industry - you have to buy out the boat, its permits, and license completely. Those who remain are aging. One fisherman 48 years of age said that there are only a half dozen or so in the area who are younger than he, and that there are quite a few in their 60s and 70s who are still fishing. Few are getting into fishing, but those with a savings and those who made their money at a land job can retire into fishing. One of the difficulties for new recruits and veterans alike is obtaining limited entry gear permits. For example, those who were put out of business in the winter as a result of the spiny dogfish closure could have engaged in blue crab dredging in the past, a winter fishery. This fishery, however, is under limited entry restrictions, preventing those without a history of involvement from participating.

Fishermen feel that there are no new opportunities within fisheries. For example, there are not a lot of job openings for crew because there are fewer operations. The town used to have large surf clam vessels, but they are all gone and the boats that remain have small crews. Most captains have just one mate or operate independently. The industry is not profitable enough to provide steady employment to deckhands. The lack of profitability coupled with the licensing structure has disrupted the cycle that would lead from crewman to captain/boat owner. As mentioned earlier, a few of the fishermen who were put out of business during the winter as a result of the spiny dogfish closure were absorbed temporarily by the industry in packing operations. This is, however, seasonal employment that has fortunately been made available as a result of large fluke landings in the first and fourth quarters that necessitated additional help at the dock.

Other watermen have undoubtedly been absorbed by the growing aquaculture industry. According to the owner of one aquaculture business, it is difficult to find reliable clam diggers because the work is very demanding. He intends to turn to the growing immigrant labor pool in the future in order to meet the needs of the expanding industry.

Fishermen on Chincoteague are primarily represented by the Eastern Shore Working Waterman's Association, but there are numerous watermen's associations covering the lower Eastern Shore region as a whole, as well as specific geographical places. Some of

the various groups include the Coastal Virginia Waterman's Association, Virginia Watermen's Association, Independent Watermen's Association, Eastern Shore Waterman's Association, Accomack Hand Harvester's Association, and Saxis Watermen's Association, to name a few. This diversity of associations is part of the problem that fishermen have in presenting a unified voice to management bodies, according to the president of one of these associations. He explained that the 13-14 different watermen's associations across the state have developed as a result of regional differences. Interest groups have splintered from larger watermen's associations on the basis of very particular concerns that are relevant to their geographical regions. Having so many interest groups and voices presents management with a dilemma. According to this informant, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) ultimately relies on its own numbers and research rather than attempt to cater to the competing interests of the many factions. He is working on getting a statewide association that will represent the diversity of interests through a single body.

One of the problems with proper representation is participation. To begin with, participation is partially determined by the issues at stake. If something pertains specifically to an individual, then that individual may get involved. As one fisherman put it, "They are the silent majority until something hurts them." Furthermore, it is difficult for fishermen to attend meetings when they have to work on the water to make a living. The schedules of fishermen and bureaucrats do not coincide. Underlying these factors, however, is the sense of frustration and powerlessness among fishermen who feel that the decisions are made regardless of their input and concerns. They tend to believe that the process is based on politics and that the outcomes are predetermined. One of the association representatives expressed his belief that the local fishermen could make a difference if they showed up in numbers with their families. But he recognizes that fishermen cannot be at two places at the same time: "If you leave the fish for even one day you lose their location and have to spend extra time to find them the next time".

## **B. Recreational Fishing**

### Gentrification and Economic Development

The economic development on the island of Chincoteague has had a positive effect on the sport fishing industry. As the tourism infrastructure has burgeoned, the various businesses involved in sport fishing such as marinas, bait and tackle shops, and charter boats have benefited. All aspects of the tourism industry are mutually constitutive, especially on Chincoteague where the majority of visitors come for a weekend or a week and contribute to lodging, food service, retail, and recreational fishing businesses alike. The family orientation of the island's tourism and development is one reason why the fleet of inshore charter boats can be sustained.

As noted above, the town has sought to include recreational fishing in its development plans, proposing, for example, to move the charter fleet from Curtis Merritt Harbor to the waterfront park to the north of the bridge in order to make it more visible and attractive to

the tourists. One charter captain said that the charters are opposed because it would result in longer travel time to the inlet and increased wear and tear on the boats due to the heavy current and commercial boat wakes in the area. Regardless of the outcome, the town is making an effort to provide more slip space for the boating community, which is a recognized need.

### Environment

According to informants, there are no major environmental concerns among recreational fishermen that have not already been covered under the discussion on the relationship with commercial fishermen. Clearly, sport fishermen in the area are concerned about the health of the fish stocks and the impact of commercial gear, especially on inshore species such as flounder and croaker. The inlets and channels are well-maintained by the Army Corps of Engineers, but there is a concern over siltation and shifting sand bars that disrupt navigation. Protected areas for piping plovers on Assateague were noted for their negative impact on surf fishing access, but this was not considered to be too problematic. Finally, some expressed concern that the aesthetics of the environment could be diminished as a result of overcrowding on the water. The boat traffic in the bays and channels has increased dramatically. Jet skis are a particular nuisance to fishermen.

### Fisheries Management

Participation in fisheries management varies among the sport fishermen on Chincoteague. Some say that they have no time to get involved while others contend that they are very active. According to one local informant, the full-time charter captains who live on the island are the most active participants in management. They go to the public hearings in Ocean City, MD and Virginia Beach, VA. Those who charter for the summer or on weekends are simply not that committed to the interests of the industry.

The flounder size minimum of 17.5" was cited as the most damaging regulation for the sport fishing industry of Chincoteague. One marina owner said that he witnessed the decline of charter boats resulting from the 17.5 inch minimum. In 2001 they had four charter boats running fulltime in the summer. This number plummeted to one in 2002. "You could see the charters dropping off." Admittedly, business was slow in 2002 as a result of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, poor spring weather, and the overall sluggish state of the economy in addition to the increased minimum size of summer flounder.

The fight that local fishermen waged for a smaller minimum size on flounder is instructive about the local area and its recreational industry. According to one representative, they were willing to accept a short closure as long as they were granted a smaller minimum size limit. They attempted to unify with the recreational fleet in Wachapreague, VA - another coastal fishing town to the south. It is understood that people go to Wachapreague to fish, while people go to Chincoteague for the overall tourist experience. Even so, Chincoteague fishermen thought that Wachapreague would be better able to weather a short closure on flounder in the summer because of the ability

of the Wachapreague fleet to fall back on offshore tuna fishing. They all agreed to a closure in order to get a 15.5" minimum. Their mutual opponent in the matter was the Chesapeake Bay charter industry, which wanted a larger size minimum and no closure. They contended that their businesses would suffer as a result of a closure, but according to Chincoteague charter captains, the bayside businesses have the luxury of targeting a diversity of fish unlike inshore coastal charters. The VMRC took the option proposed by the coastal fishermen, but later learned that management was relying on faulty data. So, the minimum was increased to 17.5" from 15.5" in June 2002, and no closure was enforced. In response to the increased minimum size, campers at Tom's Cove have told a local charter captain that they will sell their campsite if the size minimum is raised again. He believes that most of the negative reaction is mere talk, but he has witnessed less traffic on the water among private boats and charters. He thinks that reduced traffic on the water is a sign of the transfer of effort among long distance clients and boaters who are staying in areas closer to home instead of traveling longer distances to Chincoteague where it is more difficult to land keepers.

There were additional concerns among some Chincoteague sport fishermen over the sea bass regulations that have increased the minimum size to 11.5 inches. Once the size minimum went over 10 inches, the inshore charters were cut out of the fishery. Others point out that Chincoteague is not a hub of wreck fishing activity and so the sea bass regulations have less impact on the area. Offshore shark fishing is said to be declining as a result of the two coastal/one pelagic limit that is turning off the customer base.

Aside from these concerns, charter captains are particularly upset over the data collection methods of the National Marine Fisheries Service and its Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey. The phone survey is especially vexing because, as one captain explained, he doesn't know anyone on the Eastern Shore who has ever received a call.

### Resilience and Representation

The Chincoteague Island Charterboat Association is the primary representative of the local sport fishing industry. The leadership of this association is intimately engaged in the fisheries management process, and actively promotes the interests of sport fishermen on Chincoteague. The Town of Chincoteague has also sent representatives to VMRC meetings on behalf of the local sport fishing industry, voicing concerns and fighting regulations deemed to be harmful to the island. The town representatives contested the Virginia saltwater license requirement, for example. The County Supervisors are also said to be a powerful ally of recreational fishing interests on Chincoteague because they can make the claim that they represent tens of thousands of Accomack County citizens. Interestingly, the town and the county have demonstrated a commitment to both recreational and commercial interests on Chincoteague, walking a razor's edge of opinion. Representatives from both the county and the town expressed the belief that both industries are not only vital to the economic and social well-being of the island, but also compatible.

Despite the support that the industry receives, some feel that local recreational fishermen are not active enough. They believe that, were the numbers mobilized, they would accomplish much more than they have up until the present. As one charter boat captain said, "you can't fight fleets," referring to the perceived clout that the local commercial fleet has with the regulatory agencies. There was, at one time, a Chincoteague Island Anglers Association. It is now defunct, but some local anglers have joined regional and national sport fishing interest groups such as the Coastal Conservation Association, Recreational Fishing Alliance, the Virginia Charterboat Association, and the National Association of Charterboat Owners.

The sport fishing industry on Chincoteague has prospered over the past decade and, with the exception of the loss of a few party boat operations, has demonstrated growth. Both the inshore and offshore charter boat fleet has grown, but its potential is limited by the lack of slip space and waterfront infrastructure. Overall, the industry's place on the island is secured through its attachment to the growing tourist trade. Fishing, especially family-oriented fishing is an integral dimension of the tourist economy on Chincoteague, operating in a symbiotic fashion with the other island businesses that cater to visitors. Industry representatives expressed the hope that area businesses will gain a greater awareness of the importance of sport fishing to their operations, and more actively advertise and promote fishing among their patrons.

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