

30 January 2025

North Carolina General Assembly
16 West Jones Street
Raleigh, NC 27601

Dear esteemed members of the N.C. General Assembly,

We the undersigned write to show support for the creation of a permanent, long-term and sustainable abandoned and derelict vessel program in North Carolina, as proposed by the North Carolina Coastal Federation (Federation), North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (Commission), and North Carolina Division of Coastal Management (DCM).

Between 2018 and 2020, Hurricanes Florence, Dorian, and Isaias left an unprecedented number of Abandoned and Derelict Vessels (ADV) along the North Carolina coast. After a chaotic beginning in the days following Hurricane Florence, with emergency storm funding and legislation, a very effective and innovative partnership between the Federation, Commission, DCM, and local governments was established.

To date, this partnership has removed almost 400 ADVs and over 3.5 million pounds of marine debris. These efforts were supported by multiple appropriations totaling \$3.8 million from the N.C. General Assembly and an additional \$8 million in leveraged federal grant funds. The continuing/ongoing magnitude and impact of this work highlights the need and opportunity for the 2025 General Assembly to formalize this public-private framework to address chronic and disaster-related ADV removal needs.

As representatives of coastal counties, municipalities and law enforcement agencies who deal with the day-to-day chaos and hazards associated with these derelict vessels, we have come to realize just how important it is for N.C. to have a formal state program to house these removal efforts.

Working with the Federation, Commission, and DCM has enabled us to better serve and protect our communities. While a few select counties and municipalities have means to address ADVs, the majority do not. Most of us lack the resources, funding and experience to effectively and properly remove and dispose of these vessels. Removing these vessels means a great deal to our residents, and has reinstated public access and removed navigation hazards and contaminants across countless miles of state waters.

We have relied heavily upon the partnership from day one; without them, the vast majority of ADVs would still be sitting in state waters. They have made funding available, lent administrative support, mobilized, contracted and supervised removal companies, ensured all regulations were followed during removal and disposal, advocated for legislation, and provided education to our local government staff, elected officials, and residents.

The program they have proposed builds on past and current ADV removal efforts to create a state-level program that has the permanent authority and resources to reduce, prevent and

remove ADVs and associated marine debris in emergency and non-emergency situations along N.C.'s coast, is implemented by an effective public and non-governmental partnership that includes local governments, and holds owners accountable for avoidable vessel and debris impacts. N.C.'s lack of a permanent state-level ADV program affects its ability to secure the full extent of emergency federal funds, and this has resulted in inefficiencies and delays in addressing disaster-related ADVs which increases costs for taxpayers.

By formalizing this existing public-private partnership framework into a state program, it will enhance vessel removals, leveraging efficiency and cost-effectiveness; support local government removal and prevention initiatives; and facilitate a more timely recovery effort after the next major storm strikes our coast and in non-emergency situations.

We are genuinely appreciative of the efforts of the Federation, Commission, and DCM and strongly support the formation of a state program to address abandoned and derelict vessels in North Carolina coastal waters.

Sincerely,