

# Joint Regional Statement Wilmington Harbor 403 Project

North Carolina Congressional Delegation

Governor, North Carolina

North Carolina General Assembly

US Army Corps of Engineers

North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality

North Carolina State Ports Authority

Brunswick County Legislative Delegation

As municipalities and stewards of taxpayer, cultural and environmental resources in the Lower Cape Fear region, we have come together to express our shared concerns regarding the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' recently released Draft Environmental Impact Statement ("DEIS"), dated September 12, 2025, for the proposal to deepen and widen the Cape Fear River channel from the ocean to the Wilmington Harbor (the "Wilmington Harbor Project").

While each of our communities may experience different localized impacts, we are united in calling upon the Corps, the Ports Authority (as Project Sponsor), and the State of North Carolina to ensure that prior to advancing the deepening project to the Final Environmental Impact phase, **an updated Economic Assessment be conducted reflecting 2025 volumes and ocean carrier profiles for the Port of Wilmington, focusing on container activity.**

Our concerns regarding the feasibility of this project must be addressed before additional studies attempt to identify an adaptive management plan and ongoing monitoring. We believe the impacts of this proposed project cannot adequately or successfully be mitigated given existing challenges in the Cape Fear River and surrounding communities.

The specific economic factors raising red flags include:

- The extremely slim margin of feasibility with a Benefit to Cost Ratio (BCR) of 1.3;
- The Office of Management and Budget BCR threshold of 2.5 to qualify for federal funding;
- Ocean Carrier Services highlighted in the Economic Assessment as justification for the deepening stopped calling Wilmington in May 2025;
- Ocean Carrier Alliances have realigned and are inaccurate in the Corps study; and
- The Operations & Maintenance dollars used in the annual cost equation seem low given the \$18 Million contract just awarded for maintenance dredging.

We are aware that the Corps will be required to update the BCR during the Pre-Construction Engineering and Design phase (when other costs excluded from this current cost estimate are included such as real estate acquisition, mitigation and ongoing monitoring) but the current state of play with escalating project costs and lower volumes at the NC Ports Authority, demand this should be updated now. It is minimal effort to do so and is the responsible path for the Corps of Engineers.

A 47-Foot Project is a last generation deepening project as surrounding Top 10 container ports are either deeper or have already achieved this proposed depth; and are currently seeking further deepening.

We must ask ourselves, Is North Carolina prepared to pay the entire cost of the project if federal dollars don't materialize?

Our citizens deserve the ability to evaluate this project on clear and accurate economic data. It is premature to attempt to address the tremendously negative environmental impacts of deepening to 47-Feet without confirmation the project has a positive benefit to cost ratio that merits federal funding.

Any future studies, **should they be warranted after a thorough, timely economic assessment**, must address a comprehensive, long-term, and fully funded Adaptive Management and Monitoring plan.

The DEIS not only lacks accurate economic data, it also fails to identify detrimental impacts to shorelines along the twenty-eight miles of the Cape Fear River, and proposes only two mitigation measures with the approximate cost of \$60 million, with no monitoring plan proposed beyond evaluating the effectiveness of these two limited actions.

By comparison, when the Savannah Harbor was deepened, that project cost approximately \$900 million, of which \$500 million was dedicated specifically to mitigation and ten years of post-construction monitoring. The Wilmington Harbor DEIS contains no comparable commitments.

We emphasize that the Lower Cape Fear functions as a single coastal system, and the strength of our shared regional economy depends on the health of our surrounding environment. What happens to the channel impacts every community.

We support responsible maritime infrastructure that strengthens our state's economy. But we cannot accept a project that lacks accurate economic data to determine feasibility and ignores the long-term financial commitment to provide environmental safeguards necessary to protect our shorelines, habitats, riverfronts, infrastructure, and citizens.

**Through this Joint Regional Statement, we affirm our unified commitment to stewardship, resilience, and the responsible management of the Lower Cape Fear and our taxpayer resources—today and for generations to come.**

Introduced at a Regular Meeting of the Town of Shallotte Board of Aldermen on February 3, 2026, and approved at a Regular Meeting of the Town of Shallotte Board of Aldermen on February 3, 2026.

Signed this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2026.

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Mayor

ATTEST:

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Town Clerk