

MOREHEAD CITY, NC¹

Community Profile²

PEOPLE AND PLACES

Regional orientation

Morehead City (34.72°N, 76.73°W) is the largest town in Carteret County, North Carolina. It is located on Bogue Sound across from the Bogue Banks (USGS 2008).



Map 1. Location of Morehead City, NC (US Census Bureau 2000)

Historical/Background

Morehead City is located in Carteret County which is known as North Carolina's "Crystal Coast." Founded by John Motley Morehead, Governor of North Carolina from 1841-1845, Morehead City was, according to the former governor, the "first instance of an entire new city on the Atlantic Coast being brought into market at once. Nestled at the confluence of the Newport River and Beaufort Inlet, Morehead City, formerly Shepard's Point Land Company, attracted the attention of the North Carolina Railroad and plans were made to extend the North Carolina Rail Road from Goldsboro to Morehead City. The first lots were sold in 1857 and the railroad launched its operations in 1858. Soon after, construction of Pier Number One, the predecessor of the Morehead City Port Terminal, was started at the mouth of the Newport River. Pier Number One shipped and received many types of commodities and supported the local fishing industry. Local fishermen would bring their catch to the wharf where ice was brought

¹ These community profiles have been created to serve as port descriptions in Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) for fisheries management actions. They also provide baseline information from which to begin research for Social Impact Assessments (SIAs). Further, they provide information relevant to general community impacts for National Standard 8 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) and information on minorities and low income populations for Executive Order (E.O.) 12898 on Environmental Justice.

² For purposes of citation please use the following template: "Community Profile of *Town, ST*. Prepared under the auspices of the National Marine Fisheries Service, Northeast Fisheries Science Center. For further information contact Lisa.L.Colburn@noaa.gov."

down from New England by sailing vessels to supply fish dealers who shipped out two to three carloads of fish per week. Although Civil War slowed growth of the local economy, Morehead City’s fishing industry continued to expand. By 1898, Morehead City had its own ice plant and was promoting itself as North Carolina’s leading seafood center and was setting its sights in becoming the nation’s leading seafood center. Around the turn of the century, the Core Banks whaling community displaced because of the discovery of petroleum, which marked the end of the whaling industry, settled the “Promised land” area of Morehead City (Town of Morehead City 2007). Morehead City is now famous for its [Big Rock Blue Marlin Tournament](#), attracting anglers from around the world, as well as for it’s fresh seafood and charter fishing opportunities. Presently, there is a large charter fishing fleet in the city, and the area has gained back its prominence as a major port terminal.

Demographics³

According to Census 2000 data, Morehead had a total population of 7,691, up 27.2% from the reported population of 6,046 in 1990 (US Census Bureau 1990). Of this 2000 total, 45.6% were males and 54.4% were females. The median age was 41.1 years and 76.8% of the population was 21 years or older while 24% was 62 or older.

The age structure for Morehead City (Figure 1) is similar to other North Carolina fishing villages. The highest age bracket is between 40-49 years, while the lowest percentage of the population is 80 years or older. This shows that there is not much of an out migration; individuals tend to live in the town their entire lives. There are also a large percentage of females present in the 70-79 and 80+ age brackets, which may indicate that Morehead is a retirement community.

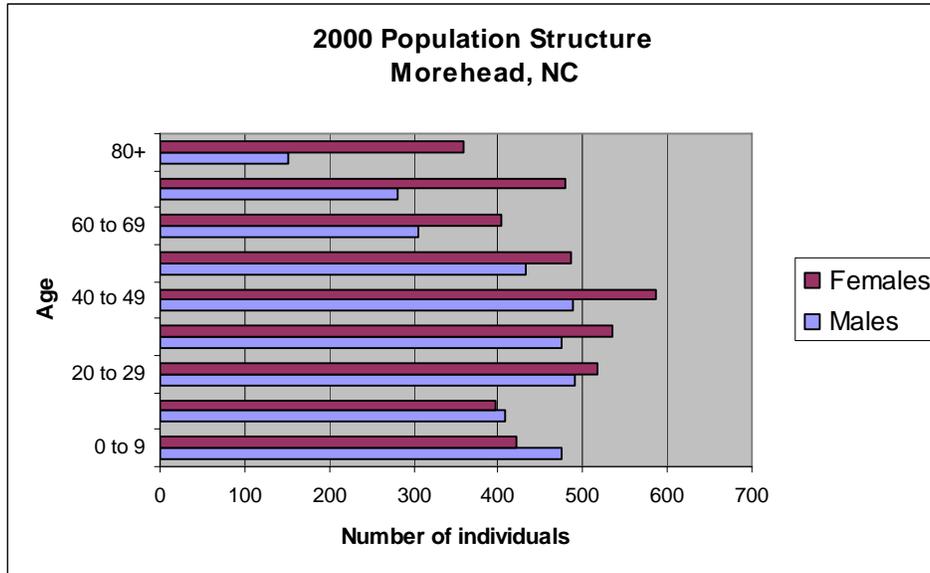


Figure 1. Morehead City’s population structure by sex in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

The majority of the population was white (83.1%), with 14.2% of residents black or African American, 0.8% Asian, 0.7% American Indian or Alaskan Native and 0.04% Pacific

³ While mid-term estimates are available for some larger communities, data from the 2000 Census are the only data universally available for the communities being profiled in the Northeast. Thus for cross-comparability we have used 2000 data even though these data may have changed significantly since 2000 for at least some communities.

Islander or Hawaiian (Figure 2). Only 2.3% of the population identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino (Figure 3). Residents linked their backgrounds to a number of different ancestries including: English (16.1%), German (10.1%), and Irish (9.8%). With regard to region of birth, 67.7% were born in North Carolina, 30.0% were born in a different state and 2.2% were born outside of the U.S. (including 1.8% who were not United States Citizens).

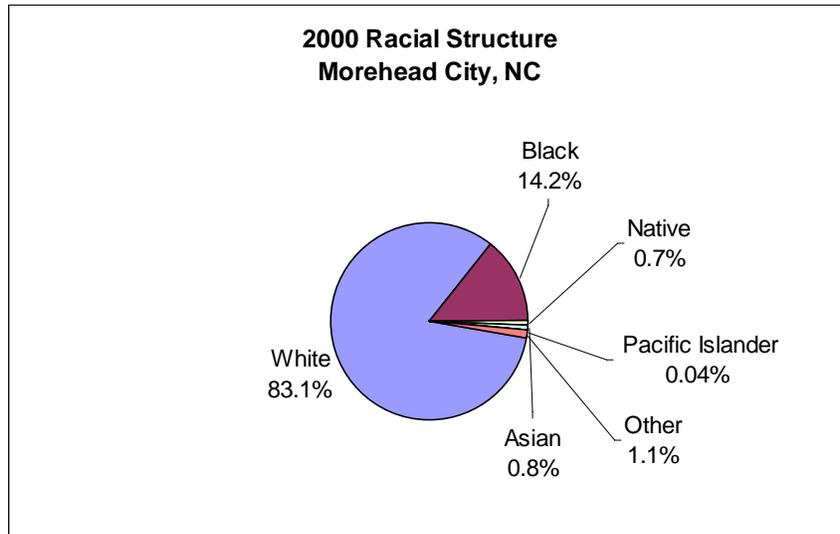


Figure 2. Racial Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

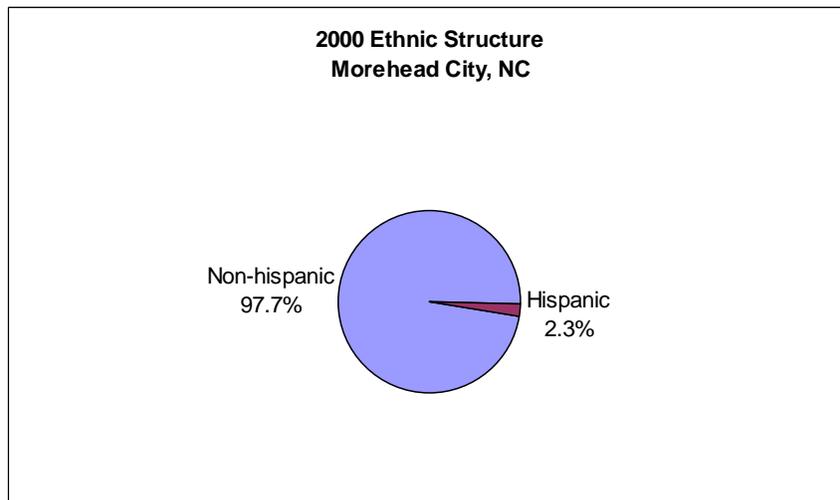


Figure 3. Ethnic Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

For 95.3% of the population, only English was spoken in the home, leaving 4.7% in homes where a language other than English was spoken, and including 1.7% of the population who spoke English less than “very well” according to the 2000 Census.

Of the population 25 years and over, 80.1% were high school graduates or higher and 20.8% had a bachelor’s degree or higher. Again of the population 25 years and over, 8.1% did not reach ninth grade, 11.8% attended some high school but did not graduate, 26.2% completed high school, 26.3% had some college with no degree, 6.8% received an associate’s degree, 15.5% earned a bachelor’s degree, and 5.3% received a graduate or professional degree.

Although religion percentages are not available through the U.S. Census, according to the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) in 2000, the religion with the highest number of congregations and adherents in Carteret County was The United Methodist Church with 22 congregations and 6,057 adherents. Other prominent congregations in the county were the Southern Baptist Convention (20 with 7,079 adherents) and the Original Free Will Baptist (13 with 1,662 adherents). The total number of adherents to any religion was up 10.2% from 1990 (ARDA 2000).

Issues/Processes

Development pressures, population growth, property values, and water quality issues are all affecting Morehead City and its fishing industry. Although Morehead City still has a charter boat fleet on its waterfront and recreational fishing is booming, commercial fishing and ancillary businesses are disappearing. With the exception of Sanitary Fish Market Restaurant's fish market which caters to retail customers, there are no wholesale or retail fish markets of dealers in Morehead City's downtown waterfront area.⁴

Recently there has been a lot of worry over the decline of the commercial fishing industry in Carteret County. The North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission and a group of concerned maritime scholars plan to give the key State Legislative Panel resolutions and to act as soon as possible. Dr. Barbara Garrity Blake, a Marine Fisheries council member, stated: "We think it's time for our state's leaders to ask themselves if they want to have commercial fishermen and commercial fishing communities in our future or not." Dr. Garrity believes "the rapid and increasing pace of development such as mega houses, condos, fish houses and maritime related businesses resulted in a crisis along the coast." The coast is losing infrastructure of the commercial fishing industry such as dock space, working waterfronts and truck routes (Outer Banks Sentinel Staff 2006).

Another issue of interest to Morehead City relates to the changes of port facilities exports. The Port of Morehead City was once a major coal and wood chip export point. Today, the major freight is phosphates from Aurora, NC, rubber imported from Asia, and military goods exported to the Middle East.⁵

Some good news for the seafood industry is the "[Carteret Catch](#)", a marketing program designed to promote local seafood. In addition, NC legislators passed legislation that enables fish house owners to apply for Present Use Value taxation, like farmers, rather than taxes based on real estate values. The state also set aside \$20 million towards the enhancement of public access and working waterfront. Director Louis Daniel at the Division of Marine Fisheries is overseeing the program. In 1997, the state also passed the Fisheries Reform Act that mandated fisheries management plans for all important recreational and commercial species, establishing an extensive citizen advisory system. North Carolina is often referred to as having one of the best fisheries data collection programs along the east coast of the US.⁶

Shrimp fishermen along the North Carolina coast have suffered because of decreasing prices of shrimp, resulting from an increase of foreign farmed shrimp on the market. North

⁴ Community Review Comments, Randy Martin, City Manager, Town of Morehead City, 706 Arendell St., Morehead City, NC 28557, September 6, 2007

⁵ Community Review Comments, Lt. Cmdr Bruce Gay, Jr., 206 Yaupon Drive, Cape Cartaret, NC 28584, October 30, 2007

⁶ Community Review Comments, Barbara Garety Blake, Marine Fisheries Commission, 3441 Arendell Street - Morehead City, NC 28557, September 28, 2007

Carolina shrimp fishermen are working to promote their wild-caught shrimp to create a niche market and higher prices for their product (NCSG 2005). The North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries was discussing minimum size limits for the shrimp that could be taken by trawlers, noting that foreign imports have cornered the market on small shrimp (Smith 2005).

Crab fishermen along North Carolina's eastern coast have also seen an increase in competition from the global market, with an influx of imported crab meat from around the world. Many local Crab processors are unable to compete and are losing profit (NCSG 2002).

Cultural attributes

Every October, Morehead City hosts the [North Carolina Seafood Festival](#) on the waterfront which celebrates the tradition that surrounds fishing in the area; the festival includes fishing and surfing contests. There is a Blessing of the Fleet the last day of the festival to honor Carteret County's commercial fishermen. Morehead City is also involved with the American Music Festival, Chocolate Festival, and a boat and tackle show as well as the annual Carteret County Curb Market which sells local seafood. There are several fishing competitions based in Morehead City, such as the Calcutta Wahoo Challenge, Lady Angler Tournament, and the Big Rock Blue Marlin fishing tournament that are held throughout the year (Town of Morehead City 2007).

INFRASTRUCTURE

Current Economy

Carteret County has one of the largest marine related business sectors in North Carolina, including over 25 boat builders and manufacturers, about 70 marinas, all with a payroll of over 1,600 people (State of North Carolina 2007). The North Carolina State Port Terminal provides for much of the economy in Morehead City; it is located 5 miles down the shipping lane. Employment in Morehead City is centered on marine-related industries, commercial and governmental service areas. The military population has also risen in the area and they are provided employment in surrounding counties such as Cherry Point Air Station and Camp Lejeune Marine Base and local facilities such as Bogue Field and Fort Macon Coast Guard Station.

Many Universities and State Agencies whose work involves coastal issues are also found in Morehead City. Other major businesses located in the area are the RBC Centura Bank, and the Cooperative Bank and the Wachovia Bank. The Walmart Super Center also brings in a lot of business (Town of Morehead City 2007). In addition, other businesses such as Lowes Home Improvement, Belk's clothing, Best Buy, chain restaurants, hotels, and construction of new hospital facilities has provided jobs to local residents.⁷

According to the U.S. Census 2000⁸, 60.2% (3,788 individuals) of the total population 16 years of age and over were in the labor force (Figure 4), of which 4.6% were unemployed, 1.7% were in the Armed Forces, and 54.0% were employed.

⁷ Community Review Comments, Lt. Cmdr Bruce Gay, Jr., 206 Yaupon Drive, Cape Cartaret, NC 28584, October 30, 2007

⁸ Again, Census data from 2000 are used because they are universally available and offer cross-comparability among communities. Some statistics, particularly median home price, are likely to have changed significantly since 2000.



Figure 4. Employment Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

According to Census 2000 data, jobs in the census grouping which includes agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining accounted for 37 positions or 1.1% of all jobs. Self employed workers, a category where fishermen might be found, accounted for 297 positions or 8.8% of jobs. Educational, health and social services (20.2%), arts, recreation, entertainment and food services (14%), retail trade (12.2%), and construction (11.6%) were the primary industries.

Median household income in Morehead City was \$28,737 (up 43.4% from \$20,041 in 1990 [US Census Bureau 1990]) and per capita income was \$19,138. For full-time year round workers, males made approximately 5% more per year than females.

The average family in Morehead City consisted of 2.73 persons. With respect to poverty, 12.1% of families (down from 14.1% in 1990 [US Census Bureau 1990]) and 14.6% of individuals earned below the U.S. Census poverty threshold. This threshold is \$8,794 for individuals and ranges from \$11,239 through \$35,060 for families, depending on number of persons (2-9) (US Census Bureau 2000b). In 2000, 43.7% of all families (of any size) earned less than \$35,000 per year.

In 2000, Morehead City had a total of 4,308 housing units, of which 83.7% were occupied and 58.6% were detached one unit homes. Less than ten percent (8.2%) of these homes were built before 1940. Mobile homes accounted for 6.8% of the total housing units; 79.3% of detached units have between 2 and 9 rooms. In 2000, the median cost for a home in this area was \$106,400. Of vacant housing units, 8.0% were used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. Of occupied units, 44.5% were renter occupied.

Government

Morehead City is run by a council/manager form of government. There are five Councilmen plus a mayor. The Council members are elected on staggered four-year terms and the Mayor is elected every two years. The city manager is a full-time position, appointed by the Council (Town of Morehead City 2007).⁹

⁹ Community Review Comments, Randy Martin, City Manager, Town of Morehead City, 706 Arendell St., Morehead City, NC 28557, September 6, 2007

Fishery involvement in the government

Information on fishery involvement in the government in Morehead City is unavailable through secondary data collection. Major issues currently (October 2007) being addresses by the local government include: planning for future housing developments, pollution effects on shellfish areas, increased traffic, high property values, and water access.¹⁰

Institutional

Fishing associations

[The Carteret County Sport fishing Association](#) is dedicated to protecting the interests of sport fishermen in Carteret County and to educating the public about the wildlife of Carteret County. The association gives two scholarships annually to Carteret County residents enrolled in a marine studies program at Carteret County Community College. There is also an active [NC Watermen's Association](#) as well as a [Winter Bluefin Association](#) in the area.

[The North Carolina Fisheries Association](#) has been supporting fishing families since 1952, with the goal “to celebrate and preserve commercial fishing families, heritage, and seafood” in North Carolina. This is achieved through lobbying federal, state, and local legislators and through public awareness projects.

Fishing assistance centers

The Trade Adjustment Assistance for Farmers (TAA) program has provided business education to shrimpers in the state to assist them in recent changes in the market of shrimp, and also provided some training to shrimpers to exit the business if they chose (NCSG 2005)

Other fishing related organizations

There is a significant amount of marine scientific research taking place in Morehead City and the surrounding area. [The North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries](#) is located in Morehead City. Other research centers include the [Duke Marine Lab](#), the [University of North Carolina](#), [North Carolina State University](#), and the [Center for Marine Science and Technology](#).

Physical

The town of Morehead is situated on a Peninsula which is bordered on the south by an Bogue Sound, east and north by the Newport River. The Atlantic Ocean lies both south and east of Morehead City. US 70 bisects the City. The nearest international airport is the Raleigh/Durham Airport (RDU), which is an approximate three hour drive west of the Crystal Coast (Insiders.com 2007). The closest big city with a population of 50,000 or more is Jacksonville, NC which is 45.6 miles away. Raleigh, North Carolina with a population of over 200,000 is 150.7 miles away. The towns of Newport, Beaufort and Atlantic Beach are Morehead City's immediate neighbors (Insiders.com 2007).

There are numerous marinas listed for Morehead City. [Portside Marina](#) offers a wide range of services including a ferry to nearby Sugarloaf Island. The marina also offers charter fishing, dry boat storage, fuel dock, and can accommodate up to 125 foot vessels. They also offer bait and tackle for visitors. [The Morehead City Yacht Basin](#) is located north of the Morehead City causeway bridge and State Port. The facility accommodates 88 vessels from 30 feet to 200 feet in length. The Yacht Basin also boasts as being the original home of the Big Rock Blue Marlin Tournament.

¹⁰ Community Review Comments, Lt. Cmdr Bruce Gay, Jr., 206 Yaupon Drive, Cape Cartaret, NC 28584, October 30, 2007

INVOLVEMENT IN NORTHEAST FISHERIES¹¹

Commercial

The species with the highest value landings over the ten-year average from 1997-2006 were “Other” and summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass (Table 1). The level of fishing landed port values generally declined over the ten year time period. Both the number of vessels home ported in Morehead City and the level of fishing home port value did not show any clear trend. However, the number of vessels whose owner’s city was Morehead City generally decreased as did the level of fishing landed port value (Table 2). In 2003, the landings value for Morehead City sharply declined, indicating that most fishermen are now landing their catch elsewhere.

Landings by Species

Table 1. Dollar value by Federally Managed Groups of landings in Morehead City

	Average from 1997-2006	2006 only
Other ¹²	592,114	60,934
Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass	33,255	0
Scallop	4,281	0
Dogfish	2,178	0
Tilefish	1,556	0
Bluefish	1,198	0
Squid, Mackerel, Butterfish	328	0
Monkfish	285	0
Largemesh Groundfish ¹³	5	0
Smallmesh Groundfish ¹⁴	3	0

¹¹ In reviewing the commercial landings data several factors need to be kept in mind. 1) While both federal and state landings are included, some states provide more detailed data to NMFS than others. For example, shellfish may not be included or data may be reported only by county and not by port. 2) Some communities did not have individual port codes until more recently. Before individual port codes were assigned, landings from those ports were coded at the county level or as an aggregate of two geographically close small ports. Where landings were coded at the county level they cannot be sorted to individual ports for those earlier years, e.g., prior to 2000. 3) Where aggregated codes were used, those aggregate codes may still exist and be in use alongside the new individual codes. Here the landings which are still assigned to the aggregate port code cannot be sorted into the individual ports, so port level data are only those which used the individual port code. 4) Even when individual port codes exist, especially for small ports, landings may be coded at the county level. Here again it is impossible to disaggregate these to a port level, making the port level landings incomplete. 5) In all these cases, the per port data in this profile may under report the total level of landings to the port, though all landings are accounted for in the overall NMFS database.

¹² “Other” species includes any species not accounted for in a federally managed group

¹³ Largemesh groundfish: cod, winter flounder, yellowtail flounder, American plaice, sand-dab flounder, haddock, white hake, redfish, and pollock

¹⁴ Smallmesh multi-Species: red hake, ocean pout, mixed hake, black whiting, silver hake (whiting)

Vessels by Year¹⁵

Table 2. All columns represent vessel permits or landings value combined between 1997-2006

Year	# Vessels (home ported)	# Vessels (owner's city)	Level of fishing home port (\$)	Level of fishing landed port (\$)
1997	10	5	164,408	1,870,436
1998	2	0	CONFIDENTIAL	1,685,451
1999	2	0	CONFIDENTIAL	1,212,808
2000	9	4	43,576	923,277
2001	4	3	59,667	401,723
2002	3	2	84,827	75,298
2003	4	3	192,606	16,128
2004	4	3	223,634	80,773
2005	2	1	CONFIDENTIAL	25,215
2006	2	1	CONFIDENTIAL	60,934

Vessels home ported = No. of permitted vessels with location as homeport

Vessels (owner's city) = No. of permitted vessels with location as owner residence¹⁶

Level of fishing home port (\$) = Landed value of fisheries associated with home ported vessels

Level of fishing landed port (\$) = Landed value of fisheries landed in location

Confidential = Value information is confidential in ports with fewer than three vessels

Recreational

[Recreational fishing](#) is very popular in North Carolina. In Morehead City there are dozens of charter boats devoted to saltwater fishing, deep sea fishing, sport fishing and much more. They are available to anyone that wants to spend a day on a large boat learning and experiencing the art of fishing. The most widely targeted sport fishing species include: tuna, dolphin fish, wahoo, blue marlin, sailfish, and sharks. Inshore fishing and bottom fishing targets King and Spanish mackerel, red snappers, groupers, and triggerfish.

Some recreational fishing clubs also provide scholarships to students interested in marine studies. They also provide significant funding toward the construction of artificial reefs offshore to support recreational fisheries habitat.¹⁷

Subsistence

Information on subsistence fishing in Morehead City is either unavailable through secondary data collection or the practice does not exist.

FUTURE

[The port of Morehead City](#) is one of the most rapid growing ports on the eastern sea

¹⁵ Numbers of vessels by owner's city and homeport are as reported by the permit holder on permit application forms. These may not correspond to the port where a vessel lands or even spends the majority of its time when docked.

¹⁶ The Owner-City from the permit files is technically the address at which the owner receives mail concerning their permitted vessels, which could reflect the actual location of residence, the mailing address as distinct from residence, owner business location, or the address at which a subsidiary receives mail about the permits.

¹⁷ Community Review Comments, Lt. Cmdr Bruce Gay, Jr., 206 Yaupon Drive, Cape Cartaret, NC 28584, October 30, 2007

board. Across from the port (and Newport River) is Radio Island. The Port Authority is offering 150 acres which is suitable for port industrial development.

The amount of international trade is expected to double by the year 2020, and the Port Authority is beginning to recruit retail distributors to the state.

Community members are also feeling the effect of increasing cost of living. The upward spike in housing costs for both Morehead City and Beaufort has made it difficult for many local fishermen, nurses, school teachers, etc. to afford housing in the area.¹⁸

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¹⁸ Community Review comments, Capt. Dale Britt, F/V Sensation, 2012 Shepard Street, Morehead City Waterfront, Morehead City, NC 28557, October 22, 2007