

WANCHESE, NC¹

Community Profile²

PEOPLE AND PLACES

Regional orientation

The village of Wanchese (35.8°N, 75.6°W) is located on Roanoke Island in North Carolina's Outer Banks (USGS 2008). It is 68 miles from Elizabeth City, NC and roughly 100 miles from the Norfolk/Virginia Beach/Hampton area in Virginia (MapQuest nd).



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

Historical/Background

Wanchese is located on Roanoke Island, famous for its role in American History as the site of the first attempt (ultimately a failed attempt) at European settlement in the New World. The settlement of 117 men, women, and children sent here by Queen Elizabeth I and Sir Walter Raleigh in the late 1500s disappeared without a trace, and became known as the Lost Colony, a mystery which has yet to be solved. Wanchese and Manteo are named for two Native Americans who were brought back to England from a 1584 expedition to the island (ICW-NET nd). Archeological exploration of Wanchese found large piles of shells, indicating that the area's early Native American residents were harvesting oysters and other shellfish, and probably fish, from the waters around Roanoke Island long before European settlers established a tradition of

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."

fishing here (Carolina Algonkian Project 2002). The English colonists who settled here were also very dependent upon harvesting marine species (Stoffle nd). Today Wanchese is advertised to tourists as a quaint fishing village where visitors can watch the fish come in to port and be shipped around the world (Outer Banks Visitors Bureau nd).

Demographics³

According to Census 2000 data⁴, Wanchese had a total population of 1,527, up 10.6% from the reported population of 1,380 in 1990 (US Census Bureau 1990). Of this 2000 total, 50.7% were male and 49.3% were female. The median age was 37.2 years and 73.0% of the population was 21 years or older while 15.0% was 62 or older.

Wanchese's age structure (see Figure 1) shows a dip in the number of 20-29 year olds, indicating that many people may leave town for college or in search of employment around this age, characteristic of many fishing towns.

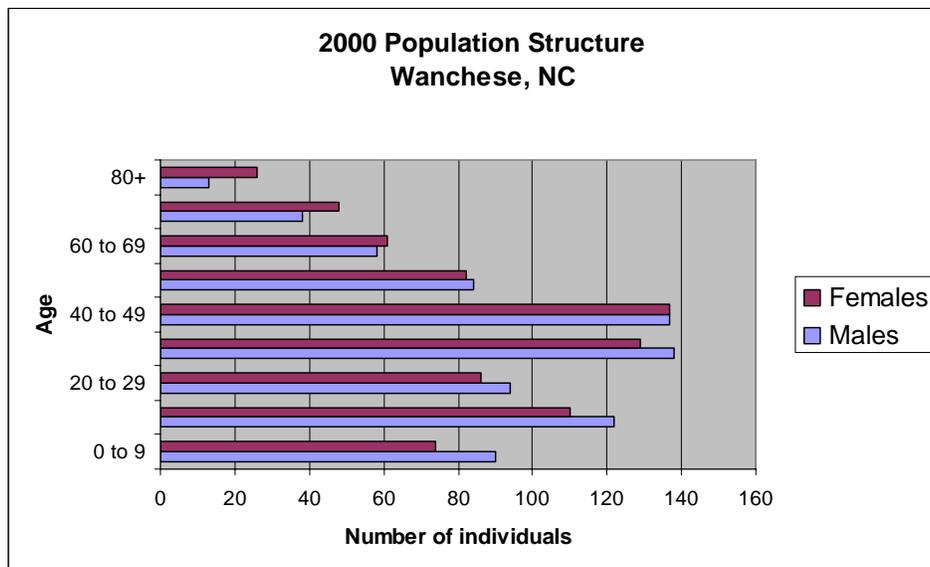


Figure 1. Wanchese's population structure by sex in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

The majority of the population was white (98.5%), with 0.3% of residents black or African American, 0.1% Asian, 0.6% Native American, and none Pacific Islander or Hawaiian (see Figure 2). Only 1.8% of the population identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino (see Figure 3). Residents linked their backgrounds to a number of different ancestries including: English (23.6%), Irish (14.8%), and German (11.8%). With regard to region of birth, 55.6% were born in North Carolina, 42.6% were born in a different state and 1.2% were born outside of the U.S. (including 1.2% who were not United States citizens).

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.

⁴ These and all census data, unless otherwise referenced, can be found at U.S. Census: American Factfinder 2000 (<http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html>); census data used are for Wanchese CDP (cited July 2007)

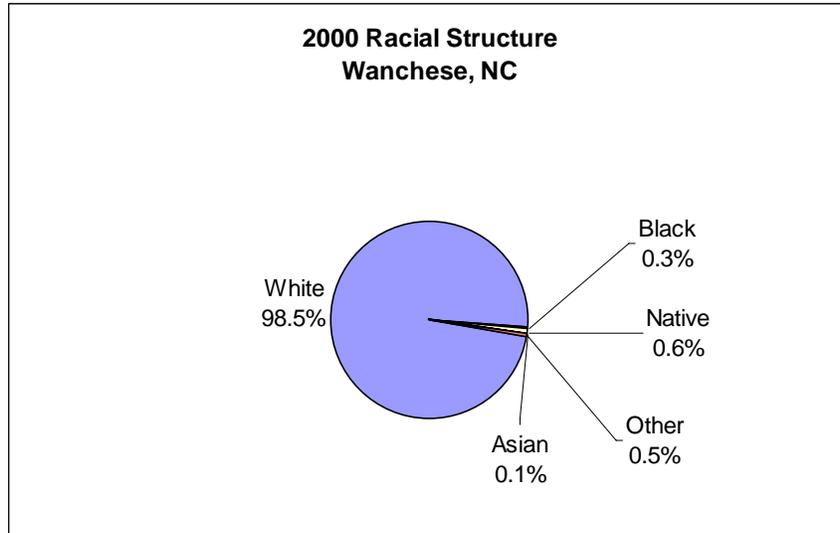


Figure 2. Racial Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

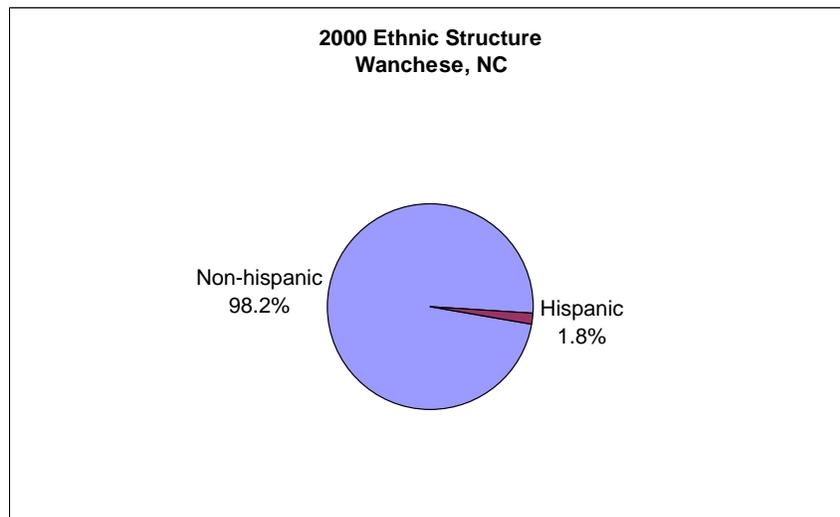


Figure 3. Ethnic Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

For 98.8% of the population, only English was spoken in the home, leaving 1.2% in homes where a language other than English was spoken, and including none of the population who spoke English less than “very well” according to the 2000 Census.

Of the population 25 years and over, 76.5% were high school graduates or higher and 16.2% had a bachelor’s degree or higher. Again of the population 25 years and over, 4.5% did not reach ninth grade, 19.0% attended some high school but did not graduate, 36.0% completed high school, 20.5% had some college with no degree, 3.8% received an associate’s degree, 11.6% earned a bachelor’s degree, and 4.5% received either a graduate or professional degree.

Although religion percentages are not available through the U.S. Census, according to the Association of Religion Data Archives in 2000, the religion with the highest number of congregations and adherents in Dare County was Methodist with 14 congregations and 4,686 adherents. Other prominent congregations were Catholic (4 with 2,097 adherents), Assembly of God (8 with 1,184 adherents), and Southern Baptist Convention (6 with 1,783 adherents). The total number of adherents to any religion was up 32.9% from 1990 (ARDA 2000).

Issues/Processes

For the last 43 years, the Army Corps of Engineers has been continuously dredging a channel at the entrance to Oregon Inlet, which connects the Roanoke Sound with the Atlantic Ocean. The Oregon Inlet receives heavy vessel traffic as it is the only navigable inlet between Cape Henry, Virginia and Hatteras Inlet, North Carolina, and it is commonly used by commercial fishing vessels from North Carolina and from other states (NCFA 2002). However, traveling the inlet can be dangerous; most vessels have to wait for high tide to pass, and a trawler was lost here in 1981. Some people argue that the Corps is fighting a losing battle against nature in dredging the Inlet. But without dredging, an important port would be lost (NCSG 2001) which could have a negative effect on many area businesses (Dare County nd). Some vessels from Wanchese now fish out of Hampton Roads, Virginia because of the danger involved with passing through the Inlet (Stoffle nd). The Corps received authorization in 1970 to construct two jetties alongside the inlet to stabilize the shifting sands and to dredge a channel through Roanoke Sound, making passage in and out of Wanchese safer for commercial fishing vessels as well as recreational boats, but as of 2002, this project had yet to be completed due to a variety of objections and proposed alternative plans (NCFA 2002). The construction of the jetties has been highly controversial, opposed by environmentalists and others who believe changing the dynamics of this poorly-understood estuary will have negative consequences (NCSG 2001). In April 2005, the Army Corps of Engineers announced it would discontinue its regular dredging of Oregon Inlet because of federal budget cuts (AP 2005).

The Wanchese Seafood Industrial Park has been controversial since it was built in 1979, and many fishermen opposed it. It was originally supposed to house a processing plant as well as a restaurant and cannery, but the facilities were never built. The park opened itself to marine related businesses, and has seen a boom in boatbuilding at the facility (NCSG 2001).

Crab fishermen along North Carolinas 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

The Dare County Parks and Recreation Department runs a fishing school for children during the summer months as well as a fishing tournament for children (Dare County Parks & Recreation nd). The [North Carolina Maritime Museum](#) on Roanoke Island in neighboring Manteo is dedicated to the region's maritime history and includes exhibits on early commercial shad fishing and an old shad fishing vessel. Until recently, Wanchese held a blessing of the fleet and seafood festival (Stoffle nd), but it seems these activities no longer exist here.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Current Economy

The Wanchese Seafood Industrial Park houses a number of businesses, many of which are related to fishing or other marine industries and are family-run operations. In 2001 Davis Boatworks was the largest employer in the park, employing 180 people (NCSG 2001), but was recently bought by a larger New Jersey company and moved to New Jersey. Another boatbuilder, Scully Boatbuilders, moved into the facility previously occupied by Davis Boatworks (NCWaterways.com 2003), and the former owner of Davis Boatworks has opened a [new boatbuilding](#). There is only one seafood dealer in the Seafood Industrial Park: O'Neals Sea

Harvest, a family-run business.⁵

There are three seafood businesses located outside the Seafood Industrial Park; Moon Tillet Fishing Company, Etheridge Seafood, and Wanchese Fish Company.⁶ The [Moon Tillet Fishing Company](#) in Wanchese, which is a processing, packing, and distribution facility located on the harbor, employs over 40 people in all areas of the operation.

According to the U.S. Census 2000⁷, 66.6% (799 individuals) of the total population 16 years of age and over were in the labor force (see Figure 4), of which 1.8% were unemployed, none were in the Armed Forces, and 64.8% were employed.

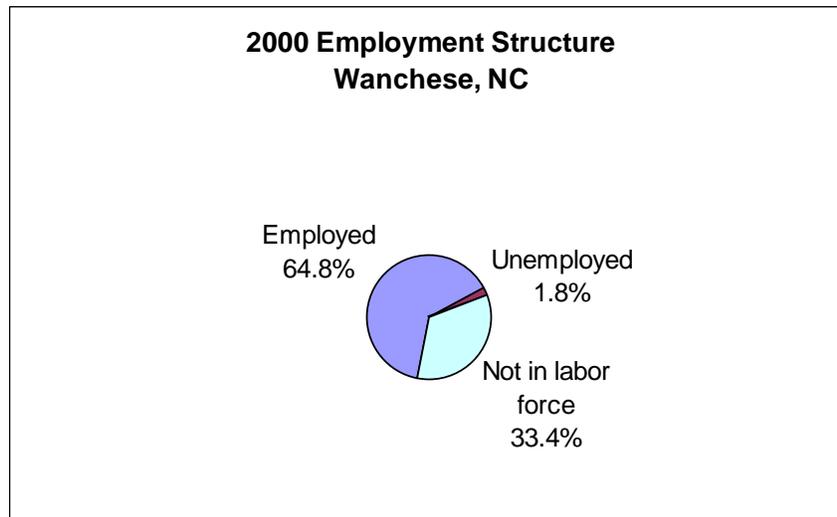


Figure 4. Employment Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

According to Census 2000 data, jobs in the census grouping which includes agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining accounted for 64 positions or 8.2% of all jobs. Self employed workers, a category where fishermen might be found, accounted for 128 positions or 16.5% of jobs. Education, health, and social services (22.0%), manufacturing (13.1%) and retail trade (11.7%) were the primary industries.

Median household income in Wanchese was \$39,250 (up 51.1% from \$25,977 in 1990 [US Census Bureau 1990]) and per capita income was \$17,492. For full-time year round workers, males made approximately 34.1% more per year than females.

The average family in Wanchese in 2000 consisted of 2.96 persons. With respect to poverty, 5.1% of families (down from 6.5% in 1990 [US Census Bureau 1990]) and 8.1% of individuals earned below the official U.S. Census poverty threshold. This threshold is \$8794 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, 46.5% of all families (of any size) earned less than \$35,000 per year.

In 2000, Wanchese had a total of 690 housing units, of which 89.0% were occupied and 67.4% were detached one unit homes. Less than ten percent (8.0%) of these homes were built

⁵ Community Review Comments, Beth Burns, Fisheries Biologist, North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries, Wanchese Office, PO Box 539, Wanchese, NC 27981, October 3, 2007

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⁷ 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.

before 1940. Mobile homes, vans, and boats accounted for 31.5% of the total housing units; 98.6% of detached units had between 2 and 9 rooms. In 2000, the median cost for a home in this area was \$104,900. Of vacant housing units, 7.1% were used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use, while of occupied units 24.3% were renter occupied.

Government

Wanchese is still an unincorporated village within Dare County (NCSG 2001). The county is governed by a seven-member board of commissioners. They are elected in county-wide elections to serve four-year staggered terms. There is also a County Manager who is the chief administrative officer for the government. The county seat is in Manteo, six miles from Wanchese, also on Roanoke Island (Dare County nd).

Fishery involvement in the government

One of the twenty one voting members of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) is from Wanchese. The Council is responsible for planning and decision making to carry out provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 (MAFMC nd). In addition, the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Division of Marine Fisheries has an active field office on Harbor Road in Wanchese, within the NC Seafood Industrial Park (NCDENR).

Institutional

Fishing associations

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. Several members of the Board of Directors are from Wanchese (NCFA nd).

Fishing assistance centers

Information on fishing assistance centers in Wanchese is unavailable through secondary data collection.

Other fishing related organizations

Information on other fishing related organizations in Wanchese is unavailable through secondary data collection.

Physical

Wanchese is located along Route 345, off Interstate Highway 64 which runs through Manteo and Rt. 345 provides the only land access to the village. Wanchese is 6 miles from the Dare County Regional Airport in Manteo, 192 miles from the Raleigh-Durham International Airport, and 100 miles from the Norfolk International Airport in Virginia (MapQuest nd).

Wanchese is home to the Wanchese Seafood Industrial Park, “the only Federal, State and County-financed project devoted entirely to the seafood processing and fishing industries” (Outer Banks Visitors Bureau nd), built to enhance fishing and marine-related industries in the area and to increase the area’s economic growth (NCDoC nd). The facility houses a number of businesses involved with building, repairing, and outfitting commercial fishing and sport fishing

vessels, as well as one company that sells seafood packaging (NCDoC nd).

The [Broad Creek Fishing Center](#), located within the NC Wanchese Seafood Industrial Park, is a full service marina for the sportfishing industry, with fishing gear and bait, and also houses a number of charter vessels. Many charter vessels are also docked at the [Thicket Lump Marina](#), which also has a bait and tackle shop. There is one public boat ramp in Wanchese operated by Dare County (Dare County nd).

INVOLVEMENT IN NORTHEAST FISHERIES⁸

Commercial

Wanchese appears to have a diversified fishing industry, based on a large number of species landed. Fishing operations here readily switch gear to target different species depending on availability and market demand. Gear and vessel types used include longlining, scallop dredges, gillnetting, otter trawling, and crab pots (Stoffle nd). The most valuable species grouping landed in Wanchese on average from 1997-2006, with an average value of \$7.7 million, is the “other” species grouping, which includes blue crab and Atlantic croaker, both important species in Wanchese. However, croaker is a federally managed obtained primarily from the ocean, where blue crabs are state managed and harvested from the interior waters of the state.⁹ The value of “other” landings in 2006 far exceeded the ten-year average value at close to \$10 million (see Table 1). Landings in the summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass grouping were also significant, and also exceeded the ten-year average, as did bluefish landings.

The level of landings in Wanchese increased in most years, from a low of \$6 million in 1997 to a high of \$15.8 million in 2004. The value of fishing for home-ported vessels increased steadily between 1997 and 2005, declining in 2006, with 2005 home port values more than four times the 1997 values. The number of vessels, while showing considerable variability, seems to have also increased, with a maximum of 54 in 2005 (see Table 2).

The [Moon Tillett Fishing Company](#) in Wanchese is one of the largest fishing and seafood trading operations in the Outer Banks. The company includes retail and wholesale sales and distribution, including importing and exporting fish, and processing both fresh and frozen seafood. O’Neal’s Sea Harvest, Inc. is a wholesale and retail distributor of fresh and frozen seafood (Outer Banks Visitors Bureau nd). They specialize in crabs and make crab pots as well (NCSG 2001). Other commercial dealers include Etheridge Seafood and Wanchese Fish Company which handle large volumes of fish.¹⁰

⁸ 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.

⁹ Community Review Comments, Beth Burns, Fisheries Biologist, North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries, Wanchese Office, PO Box 539, Wanchese, NC 27981, October 3, 2007

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Landings by Species

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

	Average from 1997-2006	2006 only
Other¹¹	7,679,033	9,620,101
Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass	1,718,482	2,846,008
Bluefish	581,481	631,231
Monkfish	349,827	155,222
Scallop	338,145	136,774
Squid, Mackerel, Butterfish	155,286	162,475
Dogfish	66,619	396
Tilefish	10,291	38
Lobster	2,090	0
Skate	1,073	74
Largemesh Groundfish¹²	883	501
Smallmesh Groundfish¹³	56	0

Note: Herring are also landed, but data cannot be reported due to confidentiality.

Vessels by Year¹⁴

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	30	22	3,199,133	6,328,469
1998	29	17	3,866,523	8,906,794
1999	40	25	3,861,804	9,748,684
2000	47	32	5,316,849	13,907,486
2001	51	30	7,939,403	10,904,337
2002	46	28	7,772,627	9,307,889
2003	49	29	9,535,872	10,083,266
2004	47	31	11,950,292	15,780,765
2005	54	28	13,358,295	10,523,773
2006	52	33	11,314,873	13,552,820

(Note: # Vessels home ported = No. of permitted vessels with location as homeport

Vessels (owner's city) = No. of permitted vessels with location as owner residence¹⁵

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)

¹¹ "Other" species includes any species not accounted for in a federally managed group

¹² Largemesh groundfish: cod, winter flounder, yellowtail flounder, American plaice, sand-dab flounder, haddock, white hake, redfish, and pollock

¹³ Smallmesh multi-species : red hake, ocean pout, mixed hake, black whiting, silver hake (whiting)

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 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.

Recreational

The Outer Banks area is known as “the billfish capital of the world” (Outer Banks Visitors Bureau nd), and recreational fishing is a billion dollar industry in North Carolina (Stoffle nd). The neighboring town of Manteo, also on Roanoke Island, has a marina that hosts a number of billfishing and other sportfishing tournaments throughout the year (Pirate’s Cove nd). There are also a number of marinas that have charter fishing vessels in Wanchese ([A-Salt Weapon Charters](#), [Broad Creek Fishing Center](#), [Thicket Lump Marina](#)). Some of the younger fishermen have switched from commercial fishing to charter fishing, which is a more profitable industry. Clamming used to be done commercially in the southern part of the state but is no longer done as a commercial activity. Instead it is generally done by families looking to take home clams to eat (Stoffle nd).

Subsistence

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

FUTURE

As it becomes increasingly difficult to make a living from fishing in Wanchese, much of the village’s industry has shifted to boatbuilding, which has proved to be a profitable industry for many. However, many of the seafood packing and distribution houses in Wanchese are still in operation after several decades (NCSG 2001). The boatbuilding industry rarely employs past fishermen, instead relying on carpenters from home-building trades, and Mexican workers. The seafood packaging and distribution houses also hire predominately Mexican employees.¹⁶

Dare County has recently worked with residents to propose a zoning plan for Wanchese, which currently lacks zoning of any kind, to protect the character of the town by designating commercial, residential, and mixed-use districts for the town, including a marine commercial district (Virginian Pilot 2005).

In 2002 Will Etheridge III, owner of Etheridge Seafood, one of the oldest businesses in Wanchese, believed the fishing industry will be put out of business by environmentalists and recreational fishermen, and because the public was not aware of the commercial fishing industry. He claimed that he would not encourage his children or grandchildren to go into the seafood business (NCSG 2001). Some commercial fishermen see the industry as inevitably declining, and see charter fishing in the recreational fishing industry as a fallback way to make a living (Stoffle nd).

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