

## Murrells Inlet, SC: Second large fish kill in a week investigated by SC officials

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Murrells Inlet, SC — S.C. Department of Natural Resources officials say oxygen level likely was a factor in the deaths of hundreds of that were found in North Inlet late Thursday — the second time in a week that officials found a large fish kill.

Dean Cain, a marine biologist with S.C. Department of Natural Resources, said “upwards of a million fish” died in Winyah Bay around Muddy Bay sometime late Wednesday or early Thursday and is likely related to a low dissolved oxygen event. He said most of the fish were Menhaden, but there were also some Red Drum. On Friday Cain was investigating the second report, in North Inlet, which he said is about eight and a half miles away from the Winyah Bay event.

Seven Seas Seafood Market, in Murrells Inlet, posted pictures on Facebook late Thursday evening saying a boat captain went to North Inlet Thursday morning and found “a huge kill of Spot Tail and Menhaden.”

Cain said hypoxia (the absence of oxygen in the water) is the likely culprit in both fish kills, but said it doesn't mean the events are related.

In January 2013, thousands of Menhaden washed ashore in Debordieu and Pawleys Island. Officials suspected low oxygen levels in the waters just offshore.

Phil Maier, with DNR, said it will take a couple days to confirm low oxygen levels is responsible, but said all conditions point in that direction.

“An early morning low tide, warm temperatures, and real stable conditions point toward a low

dissolved oxygen kill,” he said. “June through August is typically when we see these kinds of events.”

Water samples at both sites are being collected, as are measurements of the temperature, salinity and dissolved oxygen.

Cain said the water samples will be tested to determine if there is any correlation with a phytoplankton or algae bloom which also can cause low oxygen levels.

Neither Winyah Bay nor North Inlet is closed as a result of the incidents and Cain said there is no reason to avoid either location. Cain said low dissolved oxygen does not impact water quality as it relates to humans.