

## **REVISIONISM AND REFORM**

### **An Op-Ed Response From U.S. Fishermen**

A recent national opinion piece jointly written by Lee Crockett of Pew Environment Group and Dr. Bill Hogarth of the Florida Institute of Oceanography is titled *Putting Fish Over Politics* - had news editors been aware of the history of fisheries management as it relates to these two former federal employees, we're sure that editors would've agreed a better title might've been *U.S. Revisionist History By Bureaucrats Turned Lobbyists*.

First and foremost, it should be disclosed that both Crockett and Hogarth worked extensively in the federal public sector before taking their current posts as advocates of the fish; Crockett having spent seven years working inside a Congressional fisheries committee and another four-and-a-half at the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), while Hogarth himself is the former head NMFS.

While it's common knowledge that the philanthropic endowments by Pew have given huge financial support to the Florida Institute of Oceanography over the years, what many media outlets probably aren't aware of is the vast difference of opinion that Hogarth and Crockett once held when the NMFS chief was asking Congress to stop a law from being manipulated by Crockett's group of anti-fishing, environmental lobbyists.

In an official 2007 memo NMFS director, Dr. Hogarth said of fishing regulations for a number of coastal species, "*Based on the language included in the most recent reauthorization, 2010 will be a train wreck.*" Call him prophet or genius, but Dr. Hogarth was absolutely correct; the rigid deadlines and statutory definitions included in the 2006 reauthorization of Magnuson have indeed greased the tracks to the point that the train barreled headlong into the heart of our coastal communities, leaving a wake of denied access and economic devastation for fishing communities including tackle shops, captains earning their livelihoods in the for-hire sector, commercial fishermen and many professionals in our marine communities who rely on sustainable coastal fisheries.

Fishermen of course tried warning legislators of this impending "train wreck" during the Magnuson reauthorization debate, bolstered by the scientific analysis of Dr. Hogarth himself. During this time, while Crockett's group was putting heavy influence on the Senate to pass an extremely restrictive new federal fisheries law to the exclusion of coastal fishermen, Dr. Hogarth was giving contrary testimony in the House which warned of severe socioeconomic impacts given the inflexible nature of some of the newly authored statutory definitions.

In direct questioning from House Natural Resource Committee members in 2006, Hogarth was asked specifically if he thought it made sense to include rigid deadlines for rebuilding fish stocks, or if instead there should be some flexibility for the Secretary of Commerce to adjust timeframes in certain instances. "*I think that there should be some flexibility, and I think we have utilized some flexibility,*" Hogarth responded, adding "*I think the key to this is do we rebuilt these stocks in a reasonable timeframe, and that is the key.*"

Asked again if he believed there should be some management flexibility added into the new Magnuson reauthorization, Hogarth said "*Yes, I think the Administration in its bill has talked about the rebuilding by the 10-year rebuilding timeframe we think is arbitrary, and there are better ways to deal with rebuilding.*" He then added, "*I think we need greater flexibility, I mean, so much for those stocks that can be rebuilt.*"

Pressed to elaborate further on the statutory deadlines included in the legislation, Dr. Hogarth told Congress, *"We think that 10-year is arbitrary. We think it should be based on the life history of the species, and we think we need that flexibility."*

House members continued to discuss various amendments to the Magnuson Stevens Act legislation in an effort to provide some of that limited management flexibility Hogarth favored, however, Pew Environment Group and its allies were ultimately successfully in fighting to keep the rigid and inflexible statutory language in place. In the end, whatever commonsense approach was being discussed, and indeed advocated by Hogarth and fisheries advocates in the House, was ultimately squashed when Pew and its political allies successfully worked over Senate leaders who steamrolled through a reauthorized version of the Magnuson Stevens Act by unanimous consent, summarily ignoring the debate taking place in the House Natural Resource Committee.

Today, we are experiencing a fisheries management "train wreck," just as Dr. Bill Hogarth once predicted would happen with passage of the Magnuson Stevens Act in Congress. Fishermen have been virtually denied access to economically vital coastal fish stocks like cod, haddock, summer flounder, black sea bass, red snapper, gag grouper and others, even though in most cases these same fisheries have been statistically deemed healthier than in generations of management.

To the exclusion of the fishermen, these former fisheries opponents from the public sector have since buried the hatchet and have found mutual comfort beneath the blanket of Pew Charitable Trusts funding and together have been painting a misleading portrait of joy and contentment within our coastal communities. Nothing could be further from the truth of course, and while these former NMFS staffers are touting to media outlets by trumpeting the fruits of their bureaucratic labor, a coalition of real fishermen, most without the luxury of public sector pension benefits, continues fighting for meaningful fisheries reform at the legislative branch of government.

These fishermen from both the recreational and commercial sector recognize that heavy sacrifice in the name of conservation has been made during the past 36 years of fisheries management, ever since the Magnuson Stevens Act was first established specifically to create a robust and sustainable U.S. coastal fishery, which has led to more robust fish stocks from coast to coast. Regrettably, it's those with the most to gain and lose, America's coastal communities and private sector constituents, who are the ones asking Congress not just to "build upon the work of those who came before," but to correct the inflexible provisions of Magnuson Stevens which has wreaked such damage to fishing families and their communities.

A plethora of lobbyists have manipulated Congress have helped manipulate the legislative system through the stealthy work of a few pensioned former bureaucrats who apparently don't understand that Congressional testimony doesn't actually disappear from public record. While Pew's Lee Crockett – and probably by default the Florida Institute of Oceanography's Bill Hogarth – don't want to see flexibility instilled into the federal fisheries law that they each had a hand in seeing dismantled, a coalition of recreational and commercial fishermen will be in Washington DC on March 21, together in a rally against this type of hypocrisy and revisionist history.

Respectfully signed,

Keep Fishermen Fishing

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