

FIFTY TWO REASONS NOAA MUST CONDUCT FISHERIES STOCK ASSESSMENTS IN THE SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES ©

FEBRUARY 11, 2013

“Science will set us free,” has been a rallying cry for Southeastern Fisheries Association (SFA) and other commercial and recreational organizations from Texas through North Carolina for several decades. It continues to be a passionate rallying cry in 2013. Science is non-partisan. Fish are non-partisan. The private sector group of men and women who fight for equal protection under the law and more transparency in how our tax dollars are spent by NOAA are non-partisan.

(Week # 7 of 52 weeks) “If you can’t measure a fish stock, you can’t manage it.”

SFA believes NOAA’s lack of cooperative research with fishermen to gather data for stock assessments is a major reason for fishermen’s distrust of NOAA science. There is poor communication between NOAA scientists and fishermen. Without meaningful discussions and respect for the historical knowledge fishermen possess, there will be no progress concerning the stock assessment dilemma.

SFA is encouraged by the cooperative red snapper tagging program off the coast of Florida from Mayport to Cape Canaveral. East coast fishermen provide their vessels as the platform for tagging red snapper. All tagging and other scientific assessments are performed by biologists from Florida’s Fish & Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI). The tagging program on the east coast, where red snapper fishing has been banned for over two years, is a small part of the stock assessment process, but it is a start. The cooperative effort clearly demonstrates the industry’s willingness to work with state scientists searching for empirical data.

If NOAA does not have the time, money or interest for cooperative research, or even if they do, funds should be appropriated to the FWRI and state agencies in Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina who have a better knowledge of local fishermen and local fishing operations. The states are better suited to work with the recreational and commercial fishermen, in the opinion of many people associated with the fishing industry.

NOAA’s power, which comes from their ability to fund only the types of research they want done by whoever they select, will be a subject for a future SFA weekly statement on stock assessments. NOAA knows how to maximize their funding decisions. They are unsurpassed in keeping money out of the Gulf and South Atlantic region for stock assessment work as much as possible.

One of my advisers suggested the following. I think it deserves consideration by Congress:
“Let NOAAs fleet be tied up while state agencies supervise directed fishery sampling using cooperating recreational and commercial boats to catch fish from the sub-unit stocks spread throughout a species range. The sampling will better reflect the occurrence of fish which are being exploited than what NOAA has accomplished through independent fishery sampling. And, it will be cheaper, indicating how much savings can be realized by moving work down to the local level. It also will instill confidence that more localized governance is trusted. The state observers will be responsible for both collections, analysis, and reporting to the federal stock assessment scientists what the status of actually fished stocks is from year to year. NMFS scientists have been too remote from all the fisheries being managed via what the “mathamagicians” recommend to the Councils when fishing regulations are adopted.”

“If NOAA does not measure the red snapper stock, NOAA cannot manage it.”

Bob Jones, Executive Director
Southeasten Fisheries Association
Tallahassee, Florida 232303
www.sfaonline.org