



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

March 4, 2013

(Week # 10 of 52 weeks)

"If NOAA does not measure a fish stock, NOAA cannot manage it."

At the request of a coalition of seafood industry fishermen, processors, allied businesses and seafood restaurants dependent on local seafood, eight United States Senators submitted a letter on February 28, 2013 to Mr. Gene L. Dodaro, Comptroller General of the United States, concerning the importance of science in honestly managing the fishery resources in the southeast. The Senators agree on the importance of conducting "robust, peer-reviewed stock assessments on fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic" The Senators who signed the letter are: **Marco Rubio** (FL), **Roger Wicker** (MS), **Thad Cochran** (MS), **Richard Shelby** (AL), **Jeff Sessions** (AL), **Mary L. Landrieu** (LA), **David Vitter** (LA) and **Kay R. Hagen** (NC). This is the first time, since the passage of the MSA in 1976, that a bipartisan group of U.S. Senators has addressed stock assessments by submitting a request to the Comptroller General for a full review. Their concern for accurate, contemporaneous, peer-reviewed science, on which to base regulations regulating the lives of all who fish in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic, is very real and greatly appreciated by many of us who believe politics can get in the way of fisheries science.

In a March 1, 2013 article published in Saving Seafood, the Environmental Defense Fund's (EDF) Pam Baker wrote, "Gulf of Mexico states and their anglers are increasingly frustrated with short seasons for prized red snapper in federal waters. They have every right to be angry. The management of the recreational share of the fishery is utterly failing. This year's projected federal season of a few weeks at best, together with large over-harvests each year, are obvious signs. The system stinks and punishes everyone including those who enjoy fishing on their own and fishermen and families who use for-hire guides to access the Gulf." <http://www.savingseafood.org/opinion/edfs>

Southeastern Fisheries Association echoes and totally supports the EDF statement verbatim and would add to Pam Baker's statement, "and prevents new entrants into the red snapper fishery in regions where red snapper currently are abundant and continues the political ban on red snapper fishing in the South Atlantic." She is right on the mark when she says, "**The system stinks and punishes everyone...**"

The commercial and recreational fishing industry hopes the Comptroller General will spend enough time to peel through the layers of fisheries management bureaucracy. NOAA seems to be in business of keeping "outsiders, i.e. stakeholders" from knowing exactly how the fisheries models are created. We need to know what data is actually entered into the models for analysis. We need to know who makes the final decision on what data is allowed to be considered by the computer modeler.

If all the scientific processes used to create quotas and allowable catch are not available to the public, there will always be mistrust of the scientific information NOAA sends to the councils.

The fishing industry, commercial and recreational, is chagrined it cannot review all aspects of NOAA's scientific process and offer comments before final decisions are made. There needs to be stakeholder participation from the science done at the lab until the final vote by the council. Many decisions are subjective and might be of a personal nature. If the Comptroller General can't pull the curtain back from the "Great and powerful Oz", nobody will ever know if the information being used by the councils is the best available or just the best that NOAA allows to be considered.

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