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

April 1, 2013
(Week # 14 of 52 weeks)

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

Southeastern Fisheries Association (SFA) asks if NOAA uses any parameters in their habitat suitability protocol off Florida to determine the salinity, chlorophyll, turbidity, temperature etc. as part of fisheries independent monitoring. SFA asks the question because it knows almost nothing about how NOAA conducts what little red snapper research they do in the South Atlantic Bight. Why can't the industry be privy to the research NOAA is conducting? What does the science center research program look like from a non-scientist management perspective? If the research plan is good why not share it with everyone? If it is not so good, then share that as well and invite constructive criticism or suggestions. If it is flawed or incomplete, scrap it and create a better one. This is an important part of stock assessment work.

When NOAA began their recent fisheries independent survey in the South Atlantic did it stratify the survey so that the sampling was random? We have been advised that if it was stratified by depth zones that is not as robust as being stratified by bottom type. If Chevron traps were used, SFA believes this type of trap catches more red grouper than red snapper. If that is true, the only way NOAA can accurately and adequately assess abundance and location of red snapper on the east coast of Florida, is with cameras deployed with the traps. Is any camera work being done or was it done when the research was occurring? This is an important part of stock assessment work.

We have little access to NOAA research protocols or how many scientists are assigned to different tasks. We are kept in the dark on how NOAA research is managed. We wonder if personnel are moved from research with a low priority to burning issues like South Atlantic red snapper ban that has been in place for over two years. How do the science centers operate as far as assignments are determined? Does anyone oversee the internal operations to determine if the centers are addressing current problems that impact so many lives like the red snapper ban?

Does NOAA conduct any continuing education programs for science center management teams to prevent personal likes or dislikes from being used in any regulatory decisions? Government is made up of human beings with strengths and weaknesses just like everyone else. If a fisherman crosses a scientist who is in charge of decision-making and later on a decision can go either way, the scientist might easily decide the fisherman can't use a specific net or fish in a specific area and therein lays the rule of law. SFA members have witnessed certain actions on the South Atlantic Council that leads them to the conclusion that personalities do play a part in decision making.

SFA has written before about the shabby treatment the late Dr. Frank Hester received from a NOAA scientist from the Beaufort, NC lab during a public meeting of the SouthEast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR 19) Assessment Workshop in St. Petersburg, Florida during October 2009. I won't recant the incident for it can be reviewed in a series of emails and other correspondence. I make the point proving what can happen to a fishing industry representative if a NOAA decision-maker doesn't like or respect that person when dealing with him or her.

NOAA Regional Administrators are like sheriffs. The council and staff are like deputies. It is not wise to make the sheriff or his deputies angry at you because the government sheriffs and government staffs can hurt you throughout their career.

Jes' saying.

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