

A good fisheries crisis is harder to find, but....

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(The FishNet USA home page is at <http://www.fishnet-usa.com/>)

People with a mission to save the earth want the earth to seem worse than it is so their mission will look more important. P.J. O'Rourke, All the trouble in the world, 1994

Crises just keep getting harder to find - Do you think folks in the so-called marine conservation community look fondly back to their "good old days?" Those would be the days when - in their collective and jaundiced estimation - overfishing was running rampant, the oceans were on the brink of a fishing-induced collapse and they could delude themselves, the foundations that support them so lavishly and an unknowing and gullible public into believing that they were the white hat guys here to save fishermen from their greedy selves.

Alas for them, those days are over.

Every year sees more domestic fisheries added to the sustainable list. (It's another issue, but because of arbitrary management restrictions, every year also sees another 5 percent or so added to the total amount of seafood we import into the U.S. It's now at a staggering 80 plus percent, but hey, that's only lost jobs and money for fishermen and fishing dependent businesses.)

So what's a dedicated and devoted ocean savior to do? Having oceans - at least the U.S. EEZ parts of the oceans - filled with fish and having the number of bothersome fishermen, fishing boats and the waterfront businesses that keep them fishing whittled down dramatically, perhaps a consideration would be to move on, finding new nature to save and new businesses to destroy.

But that doesn't seem to be happening. Instead, those folks in the foundation funded greenish-tinged white hats are still setting their sights on domestic fishermen, but they're doing it for increasingly picayune reasons.

Take the issue - or perhaps I should use *cause célèbre*, because that's what it's been turned into - of bycatch, and of the Endangered Species Act/Marine Mammal Protection Act implications of bycatch. In a report recently released by the National Marine Fisheries Service (U.S. National Bycatch Report http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/by_catch/BREP2011/2011_National_Bycatch_Report.pdf), as of 2005 the overall rate of bycatch in domestic commercial fisheries - defined as the ratio between the total bycatch divided by the total catch) was 0.17. Note that this was in 2005. In the intervening six years many more bycatch reduction strategies and mechanisms have been developed and implemented, but the initial estimate that only one-sixth of the total catch of the entire domestic fleet is not used - and this includes regulatory discards that would be saleable but the management measures in place make it illegal for fishermen to land them - puts the bycatch "crisis" in the proper, real-world perspective; a crisis only in the eyes of the ocean eco-alarmists.

"Bureaucracy defends the status quo long past the time when the quo has lost its status" Laurence J. Peter - Canadian author who formulated the Peter Principle

But why are the people in the ENGOs grasping at such seeming straws as bycatch rather than moving on? Why are they focused so fixedly on inflicting ever more destruction on fishing people, fishing businesses and fishing communities? The current ENGO push for listing as endangered Atlantic sturgeon, thorny skates and American eels, the ongoing efforts to list bluefin tuna, the past - and pathetic - attempts to list spiny dogfish (spend some time browsing the Plague Of Dogfish website at <http://www.fishnet-usa.com/dogforum1.htm>) and barndoor skates and the seemingly endless - and outrageously expensive to the taxpayers and to the fishing industry -

string of lawsuits aimed at the sea scallop fishery to "save sea turtles" whose populations are increasing dramatically anyway seem to be little more than attempts to use federal legislation and apparently unlimited access to legal talent to continue the anti-fishing onslaught.

"Voracious almost beyond belief, the dogfish entirely deserves its bad reputation. Not only does it harry and drive off mackerel, herring, and even fish as large as cod and haddock, but it destroys vast numbers of them. Again and again fishermen have described packs of dogs dashing among schools of mackerel, and even attacking them within the seines, biting through the net, and releasing such of the catch as escapes them. At one time or another they prey on practically all species of Gulf of Maine fish smaller than themselves, and squid are also a regular article of diet whenever they are found." (Fishes of the Gulf of Maine, Bigelow, H.B. and W.C. Schroeder, 1953) *A plague of spiny dogfish (Squalus acanthias) is interfering with fisheries in coastal states from Maine to North Carolina. Unprecedented numbers of these voracious predators are clogging nets, stealing bait and ruining the catch in fishery after fishery, needlessly penalizing the affected fishermen and coastal fishing communities. In addition to this direct interference with other fisheries, dogfish are eating vast quantities of much more valuable species, negating the effects of drastic management-mandated fishing effort reductions in those fisheries. Fishermen are sacrificing to conserve extremely important recreational and commercial species and their efforts are doing little more than providing more food for an ever-increasing population of dogfish.* (from the website A Plague of Dogfish linked above).

Another update on the extinction of the Barn Door Skates – In the late 1990's the foundation-funded doomsayers manufactured a media tempest by predicting the imminent extinction of the barndoor skate. A number of these anti-fishing activist groups lobbied to have the species listed as endangered, something that would have negatively impacted many of the trawl/dredge fisheries operating in the skate's range. Recognized as one of the most egregious examples of overblown environmental alarmism that had been manufactured to date as an assault on commercial fishing, the fishing industry came together with the managers to prove conclusively that the "plight" of the barndoor skate was non-existent. (Google "barndoor skate extinct" for an idea of how the anti-fishing claque piled on to this non-issue). Far from these long-lived skates being "endangered," the Northeast Fisheries Science Center reported in the 2007 Spring Bottom Trawl Survey **"history was made at Oceanographer Canyon, station 204, when over 3200 pounds of barndoor skates and 1500 pounds of winter skates came over the stern and ended up sliding all over the back deck. This is the first time in survey history that so many barndoor skates were landed"** (http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/esb/rsr/sbts/sbts_2007/large_file.pdf). Unfortunately, while these activist groups and foundation-funded researchers are adept at spreading their erroneous information far and wide, they are characteristically inept at getting the right information out when they are shown to be misinformed. (from Fisheries Management – It's time for a new paradigm, 07/18/2007, http://www.fishnet-usa.com/new_paradigm.html).

Yet in spite of these expensive exercises in futility, the same circle of ENGOs are persisting in their attempts to further cripple fishermen via raising the spectre of one supposed extinction "crisis" after another.

I'm pretty sure that I'm not the only one who's wondered why. How can anyone attempt to inflict such economic devastation on so many hard working people time after time?

I was sent a link to the webpage titled "Our Team" on the Pew Environment Group website. Each of the over 200 Pew "team" members is listed individually. Many of them have titles that seem to be somewhat more grandiose than necessary (how'd you like to have, **Deputy Director, Lands, U.S. and Canadian Oceans and Ocean Science** or **Officer, Offshore Energy Reform Campaign, Global Conversation Initiative** on your business card and the door to your office?). Having dealt with bureaucracies fairly extensively, I've observed that lots of employees with impressive seeming titles are often an indication of rampant bureaucratization. And it goes without saying that any "successful" bureaucracy is one that has reached critical mass. It won't be diminished regardless of the status of its original mission, just keeps chugging along.

This whetted my appetite. While I have researched and written quite a bit about fishermen-focused ENGOs and the foundations that support them, I've never gotten very much involved in their inner workings. I decided to correct that obvious lapse, so I set out to find what I could about the ENGOs that had done such a thorough job of "saving our fish" that U.S. fishermen, with the most productive EEZ in the world, are now permitted to supply less than a fifth of the seafood we consume in the U.S.

As I've observed before, having the ability to examine the most remote nooks and crannies on the internet facilitates effective research in a truly dramatic fashion. After a few minutes with Google, I discovered a website that makes available the IRS Form 990 (Return of Organization Exempt From Income Tax) filings for not-for-profit organizations, including those that have made life miserable for fishermen for most of a generation.

One of the things that these forms reveal is the total assets of the organizations. For some of the ENGOs and foundations that fishermen have become far too familiar with, net assets were reported as follows:

Organization	Net Assets	
David and Lucille Packard Foundation	\$5,524,740,637.00	
Pew Charitable Trusts	\$5,513,279,092.00	(from Annual Report)
Pew Charitable Trusts	\$379,662,254.00	(from Form 990)
Natural Resources Defense Council	\$232,304,192.00	
Environmental Defense	\$161,775,725.00	
Ecotrust	\$22,401,000.00	
Oceana	\$22,102,232.00	
Ocean Conservancy	\$15,828,705.00	
Conservation Law Foundation	\$13,676,279.00	

(The Pew Environment Group didn't file its own Form 990. Rather, it was included in The Pew Charitable Trusts filing.)

This sure makes these ENGOs' willingness to pursue, for example, a seemingly interminable string of suits in federal courts easier to understand. If you've got tens of millions of dollars in the bank and a stable of lawyers in house or on retainer, and if the foundations that have funded you to this point have billions of dollars available, why not? The alternative would be something akin to downsizing, something that's probably not all that acceptable to either bureaucrats or bureaucracies.

Another Form 990 reporting requirement is the compensation from the particular organization to "*Officers, Directors, Trustees, Key Employees, and Highest Compensated Employees.*" Again, for employees, etc. of some select and familiar ENGOs and foundations, total compensation from the organization (not necessarily the total compensation that person received from all sources) in the most recent year for which a Form 990 was available was as follows:

Position	Organization	Total Compensation from Organization
Chief Investment Officer	David and Lucille Packard Foundation	\$1,196,037.00
President & CEO	The Pew Charitable Trusts	\$1,071,525.00
President/CEO	David and Lucille Packard Foundation	\$696,687.00
President	Natural Resources Defense Council	\$432,742.00
President	Environmental Defense	\$423,359.00
Managing Director	Pew Environment Group	\$400,487.00
Executive Director	Environmental Defense	\$347,963.00
VP West Coast, VP Land, Water and Wildlife	Environmental Defense	\$304,626.00
Executive Director	Natural Resources Defense Council	\$277,846.00
Development Director	Natural Resources Defense Council	\$265,001.00
President and CEO	Ocean Conservancy	\$261,111.00
Finance Director	Natural Resources Defense Council	\$259,460.00
Chief Executive Officer	Oceana	\$247,164.00
VP Marketing and Communications	Environmental Defense	\$242,947.00
Executive Vice President	Oceana	\$237,589.00

EVP/COO	Ocean Conservancy	\$217,911.00
Communications Director	Natural Resources Defense Council	\$213,737.00
Executive Director of Oceana in Europe	Oceana	\$205,868.00
Senior Vice President for North America, Chief Scientist	Oceana	\$203,272.00
VP Legal Affairs	Ocean Conservancy	\$180,426.00
President	Ecotrust	\$178,527.00
VP Resource Development	Ocean Conservancy	\$172,381.00
VP Communications	Ocean Conservancy	\$172,161.00
Jim Ayers Oceana Regional Director in North Pacific	Oceana	\$170,114.00
Shark Conservation Program Director	Ocean Conservancy	\$152,754.00
Managing Director	Ecotrust	\$151,050.00
VP State Advocacy Center Director	Conservation Law Foundation	\$141,141.00

And this chart represents only the proverbial tip of the iceberg. Remember that the Pew Environment Group, for example, lists in the neighborhood of 200 "teammates," and well over a third of them are in the Pew oceans campaign. It's apparent that while the gold might be gone from them thar hills, there's still plenty available in the oceans, though it's not going to fishermen - at least U.S. fishermen - any longer.

With this level of "commitment" to solving ocean problems, is it any wonder that the involved ENGOs are more than willing to pump up any of those problems that come along or come to mind to the greatest extent that they can? And with what seems to be virtually unlimited access to geese that are far more capable of laying golden eggs than the average barnyard fowl, is it any wonder that the programs that these people inflict on the rest of us seem so completely out of touch with the working world? They want those geese to keep on laying, they know that saving "oceans in crisis," regardless of how real the crises actually were, has worked admirably up until now, so why should they stop?

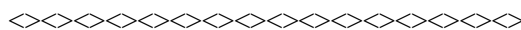
And with salaries (and perks) ranging up into seven figures, is it any wonder that these people exhibit such a lack of empathy for people with real jobs - you know, the kind of jobs that depend on actually producing something tangible to justify a paycheck? (And no, putting people out of work isn't producing something tangible.)

Anyone who has built a successful career - that is, successful as far as the size of their paycheck and their ability to climb the (ENGO) corporate ladder is concerned - by spending money earned by someone else isn't likely to have much of an idea of what it would be like to be out of work or, it appears, to be particularly concerned when their actions have that consequence on others. If they think about it at all, these "marine conservationists" must be convinced that if the welfare of fishermen or fishing communities were that important, those uber-rich foundations wouldn't be giving them all those bucks to save all of the fish that they can regardless of the human consequences. And their self-serving argument that it will be good for the fishermen - and the fishing communities - at some point in the future conveniently ignores the fact that the profusion of ex-fishermen and bankrupt fishing dependent businesses make abundantly clear; that the path out of fishing is almost always one way.

But those grants keep rolling in.

Rightly or wrongly, environmentalists used to be stereotyped either as little old ladies wearing tennis sneakers while clutching a Peterson's Field Guide to the Birds of North America, as superannuated versions of Pee Wee Harris complete with thick glasses and knee pants, or as bearded, bedraggled, beplaided rugged individualists. What they all had in common was a dedication to the environment, a realization that grass roots movements were the only acceptable way to get things done, and a severe aversion to corporate life and all its trimmings. They've come a long way, haven't they?

(For those of you who are interested in delving into the IRS Form 990s of your favorite ENGOs, they are available on the Guidestar website (<http://www2.guidestar.org/>).



Words of wisdom on a Pew/Seaweb website?

Going back to its very beginning, I haven't been much of a fan of Seaweb, another product of The Pew Charitable Trusts' \$billions. However, shark researcher Shelley Clarke's "Ocean Voices" article, ***Examining Scientific Integrity In the Global Shark Fin Trade***, on the Seaweb website should be taken to heart by anyone who spends any time reading - and being influenced by - second, third or later-hand reports on ocean-related research. I'd draw particular attention to the second and last bulleted sentences in the final part of her article, which I've highlighted below:

What can we do to become better science consumers? My advice is to apply the following tests to the science on your daily menu:

- *Is the name and affiliation of the original research team mentioned? If not, the opportunity to verify the information is more limited, thereby opening the door for misrepresentation.*
- ***Was the research team independent? If not, the study may have been conducted to support a particular conclusion.***
- *Did the researchers invest time in gathering new data from a reliable source themselves? If not, there may be a greater chance that they have misinterpreted signals in the data.*
- *Does the article mention whether the study was published in a peer-reviewed journal? If not, there may not have been sufficient independent checking of the results.*
- ***Does the article present any shortcomings or weaknesses in the study? If not, it may be a press release from a proponent organization rather than an objective summary of the findings.***

Choose carefully, and bon appétit!

The URL is <http://www.seaweb.org/getinvolved/oceanvoices/ShellyClarke.php>.