

**Flotsam and Jetsom**  
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*“Flotsam is floating wreckage of a ship or its cargo. Jetsam is part of a ship, its equipment, or its cargo that is purpose-fully cast overboard or jettisoned to lighten the load in time of distress and that sinks or is washed ashore”*  
(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flotsam>). They are used together to indicate potentially valuable materials floating on the seas’ surface.

I use this title for periodic FishNets in which I address several issues that should be of value to anyone with an interest in oceans and fisheries in a somewhat abbreviated manner.

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**More astroturf “activism” in herring management**

Wikipedia – *“Astroturfing is the practice of masking the sponsors of a message (e.g. political, advertising, or public relations) to give the appearance of it coming from a disinterested, grassroots participant. Astroturfing is intended to give the statements the credibility of an independent entity by withholding information about the source's financial connection.”*

It was not quite a year ago that I wrote The Forage Fish Fakeout ([http://www.fishnet-usa.com/Flotsam\\_Jetsam\\_2012.pdf](http://www.fishnet-usa.com/Flotsam_Jetsam_2012.pdf)), in which I chronicled the most egregious examples of astroturf activism that I have come across in the world of fisheries. Undertaken by the Pew Charitable Trusts, or the organizations that the Pew Trusts has created and or funded, a succession of organizations ostensibly representing independent fishermen interested solely in the good of fish and fishing had mounted a multi-year campaign to drastically restrict or completely shut down fishing for menhaden, herring and other forage fish (smaller fish occurring in huge numbers that not too surprisingly are fed upon by other fish, sea birds, marine mammals and Homo sapiens).

A listing of the foundation-funded “research activities” that I compiled last year:

- 1998 - Conservation Law Foundation - \$30,000 – “To promote responsible herring management.”
- 2004 - National Coalition for Marine Conservation - \$558,000 – “To secure an amendment to the Interstate Menhaden Management Plan that would reduce or eliminate fishing of menhaden in the Chesapeake Bay, in order to protect the broader ecosystem of the Bay.”
- 2004 - Aquatic Farms Limited - \$142,000 – “To assess the amount of competition between catch of small forage fish for direct human consumption and for reduction into fishmeal and fish oil for use as aquaculture and agriculture feed.”
- 2004 - Research Foundation of the State University of New York, Stony Brook - \$750,000 – “To establish the Lenfest Forage Fish Task Force that will develop and recommend ecosystem-based standards for the sustainable management of forage fisheries.”
- 2004 – Research Foundation of the State University of New York, Stony Brook \$145,000 – “To advance ecosystem-based fishery management by evaluating the status of understudied fish and other marine species in several regions of the United States that are impacted by the commercial fishing industry.”
- 2005 - National Coalition for Marine Conservation - \$200,000 – “To ensure a new regulatory cap on the industrial harvest of Atlantic menhaden is implemented and enforced.”
- 2006 - National Coalition for Marine Conservation - \$100,000 – “To support efforts to initiate new regulatory actions that will preserve adequate populations of forage fish which support healthy populations of predators, including numerous species of marine mammals, seabirds and fish.”
- 2006 - Gulf Restoration Network - \$210,000 – “To support efforts to stop overfishing, secure conservation-based limits on unintended bycatch of marine life, and to conduct research and prepare a report on management reforms needed in the Gulf of Mexico menhaden fishery to reduce harvests to protect the forage needs of menhaden predators and reduce bycatch of sharks and marine mammals.”
- 2007 - Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermens Association - \$180,000 – “To provide general operating support policy reform campaigns for herring and groundfish.”
- 2007 - Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermens Association - \$596,000 – “To support a New England forage fish campaign to ban or severely restrict destructive trawling, reduce allowable herring catches.”
- 2008 – Research Foundation of the State University of New York, Stony Brook - \$3,000,000 – “To conduct scientific research regarding sustainable fisheries management and conservation of threatened and endangered fish.”
- 2008 - Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermens Association - \$722,000 – “To support activities to reform the Atlantic

herring fishery.”

- 2008 - Earthjustice - \$212,000 – “To reform New England’s Atlantic herring fishery.”
- 2008 - Marine Fish Conservation Network - \$125,000 – “For work intended to ensure the full implementation of the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act and to promote the sustainable management of forage fish species (\$100,000) and for general support (\$25,000)”
- 2009 - National Coalition for Marine Conservation - \$30,000 – “To develop guidance for conservation of forage fish through an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management.”

Note that of the over seven million dollars in “research” listed above none is devoted to contributing to the basic biology of forage fish, the fisheries or the fishermen they interact with. It’s apparently a foregone conclusion in some circles – not, of course, in the circles populated by the scientists and bureaucrats who are responsible for managing our fisheries – that catching forage fish is bad. This apparently is regardless of other factors like what’s really going on in our oceans, what conservation measures have already been adopted by the fishermen or how effective they have proven to be.

Because the fisheries management establishment has refused to take the word of the Pew clique that these fisheries need to be shut down, in the intervening years the pressure to do that has been characteristically relentless – and characteristically expensive. In the latest example of Pew formed/funded organizations jumping on the “get the forage fishermen” bandwagon, Earthjustice just announced a lawsuit in which it is representing several small recreational fishing groups, claiming that by the Council's declining to move ahead with Amendment 15 to the Mackerel, Squid and Butterfish Fishery Management Plan, NMFS is not providing adequate measures to "protect\*" blueback herring and alewife and American and Hickory shad." This is in spite of the fact that both the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and NMFS fully explained their reasons for proceeding as they have been and extending assurances that the management provisions now in place would adequately protect both river herring and shad (for more on this see *Is this any way to manage a fishery?* at [http://www.fishnet-usa.com/Any\\_way\\_to\\_manage.pdf](http://www.fishnet-usa.com/Any_way_to_manage.pdf)).

Of course this isn’t good enough for the Pew people. Who needs solid science if you have that sense of righteous indignation that generally accompanies cashing those huge checks? Should it surprise anyone to learn that Earthjustice has received over \$20 million from Pew?

I guess if you have a few billions of dollars in the bank you kind of believe that things should be run your way, even if you had nothing to do with – or maybe because you had nothing to do with - earning any of those dollars yourself.

(For a surprisingly rational discussion of the forage fish issue on the west coast, see Glen Martin’s blog on the Huffington Post website titled *Of Little Fish, Cute Mammals, and the Law of Unintended Consequences* at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/glen-martin/pacific-herring-shortage\\_b\\_1987810.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/glen-martin/pacific-herring-shortage_b_1987810.html).)

\*Neither of which are considered endangered or threatened.

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**And on the subject of who’s doing and who’s not doing real research to better determine the status of our managed stocks –**

The Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) and the University of Southern Mississippi, operating under a five year National Science Foundation grant and with industry partners currently including Garden State Seafood Association, the National Fisheries Institute Clam Committee, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, Atlantic Capes Fisheries, Inc., LaMonica Fine Foods, Lunds Fisheries Inc., the National Fisheries Institute Scientific Monitoring Committee, Surfside Seafood Products, and L.D. Amory and Company of Hampton, started the Science Center for Marine Fisheries, or SCeMFiS in March of this year.

Eric Powell, the Center’s Director, says that it is “*unique in being the only federal-industry partnership that permits the fishing industry to retain a leadership role in designing the science program. This assures that sustainable fisheries will remain a focus of project design and that the science products will directly address the issues faced by the fishing industry.*”

Roger Mann, who is the Director at VIMS, said that research at SCeMFiS “*will use peer-reviewed science to help improve sampling methods for fisheries surveys, enhance population-dynamics models, develop new approaches to reducing discard, reveal geographic and biological variations in stock structure and dynamics, among many other benefits.*”

Compare the design and operation (and source of funding) of SCeMFiS to the above listed “research” initiatives that it’s hard to think were designed, bought and paid for with a particular goal in mind – the overly restrictive control then the closure of a fishery based on no new science and in spite of the fact that the existing management process has given every assurance that the fishery is being managed properly and sustainably. How would you rather our fisheries – or any of our natural resource dependent industries – be managed?

For more on the SCeMFiS see the VIMS March 27 press release at <http://www.vims.edu/newsandevents/topstories/scemfis.php>.

**Sustainability certification** – A couple of months back the General Services Administration and the National Parks Service were rightfully taken to task by Members of Congress for demanding that a seafood served in NPS facilities be la-belled as sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), an international third party seafood certification business with headquarters in London. Considering the initial and ongoing costs of MSC certification, this would have been an impossible requirement for most domestic seafood suppliers, in spite of the fact that any seafood from a permitted federal fishery in the US is *de facto* sustainable.

In a letter to Alaskan Senator Lisa Murkowski GSA Assistant Commissioner Darren Blue wrote “GSA believes that that American managed fisheries do not require third-party certification to demonstrate responsible and sustainable practices.... As soon as GSA became aware of your concerns, we worked with HHS (Department of Health and Human Services) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to revise the Guidelines. The new Guidelines continue to reflect the best of Federal fisheries management policy and practices, but they omit any reference to third-party certification systems.” This might be a loss for the MSC – and for its ENGO/Foundation supporters – but it’s unquestionably a gain for knowledgeable seafood consumers and the domestic seafood industry.

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**Sleeping with the enemy?** – Many of us in the domestic fish and seafood business were taken by surprise by an announcement that Diversified Communications, the corporate owner of National Fisherman magazine, Pacific Marine Expo and the Seafood Source website, had partnered with Pew SeaWeb to produce a series of annual seafood sustainability “summits.”

If you haven’t been associated with fisheries issues for very long, or if you have been trying to ignore what’s being done to domestic seafood producers – those are the people who are on the wrong side of those “we are importing over 90% of our domestically consumed seafood” numbers – SeaWeb was one of the first organizations to “declare war” on US fishermen.

In a column for Commercial Fisheries News in April of 2001 I wrote:

*One of the more active efforts to influence public opinion on fisheries is spearheaded by SeaWeb. On its web site, SeaWeb describes itself as a "project designed to raise awareness of the world ocean and the life within it." Its primary funder is the Pew Charitable Trusts. Early in its existence, SeaWeb commissioned a public opinion survey to determine which ocean issues would best "engage the public interest."*

*The introduction to the results of the survey, which was conducted for SeaWeb by the Mellman Group, stated "Americans believe the ocean's problems stem from many sources, but oil companies are seen as a prime culprit: In fact, 81% of Americans believe that oil spills are a very serious problem. This is followed by chemical runoff from large corporate farms (75% very serious), improperly treated water from towns near the coast (69%), contaminated seafood (65%), and trash, oil, and chemical runoff from streets (65%)." Overfishing evidently wasn't considered "a very serious problem" and was lumped in with "the loss of critical species" to make the cut as a "meaningful indicator" of trouble.*

*But in an article on the poll in SeaWeb's November 1996 monthly update, the only specific threat to the oceans mentioned was overfishing. Along with three paragraphs of vague generalities was this statement: "71% (of respondents) agree that overfishing is threatening the health and stability of the marine environment." Nothing about oil spills, runoff, contaminated seafood, or any of the other "problems" identified in the survey, only overfishing. Is this engaging or is it redirecting the public interest?"*

*There seemed to be much more redirecting than engaging (remember that back then the 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster in Prince William Sound, AK was still fresh in peoples' minds) .*

Continuing in the same column:

In January 1998, SeaWeb announced the "Give Swordfish A Break" campaign, centered on a domestic consumer boycott of swordfish. In a 1998 article in the St. Petersburg Times (FL), titled "En Garde for Swordfish," reporter Bill Duryea detailed the SeaWeb strategy behind the "Give Swordfish A Break" campaign. *"The first thing (Sea-Web Executive Director) Vikki Spruill did when she went looking for a fish to save did not have to do with fish at all,"* Duryea wrote.

Having decided that the most effective way to "engage the public interest" in ocean problems was through the food on their plate, Spruill, Duryea wrote, *"needed a certain kind of fish. A poster fish, if you will. Shrimp and salmon rank at the top of the most popular seafoods, but half of the shrimp and salmon sold in the United States are farm-raised, tempering their status as overfished. Besides, shrimp lack a certain weightiness. 'We wanted something majestic,' said Spruill. Number 3 on the popularity list, according to Spruill, was swordfish, whose firm-fleshed steaks had become a mainstay of fashionable restaurants across the country."*

It wasn’t about the swordfish. In fact, according to Mr. Duryea it wasn’t about any fish at all. It was nothing more than a hook (sorry!) to capture the public’s interest. Regardless of that, the US swordfish fishermen – who had been engaged in an ongoing and successful

program to rebuild swordfish which predated Pew SeaWeb's discovery of swordfish for years - paid dearly for this national "don't eat swordfish" campaign which was underwritten with Pew dollars.

A quick examination of its website showed that SeaWeb has branched out quite a bit since its "formative years," but those years have left their impressions on some of us with long memories (or reasonably organized archives). Diversified Communications will be putting together an advisory board for these joint sustainability summits. Who is appointed to this advisory board, and the connections of those appointees to the independent domestic seafood industry (i.e. not married to the jaundiced Pew view of domestic fisheries by virtue of direct or indirect funding) should have a tremendous impact on how this DivCom/Pew SeaWeb venture is viewed by the fishing industry.

We'll be watching.

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**Fishosophy** - Last month I announced the formation of the Fishosophy blog on the American Institute of Fisheries Research Biologists website (<http://www.aifrb.org>). Two entries have been added which have a bearing on the "flotsam" and "jetsom" here. The first is *Faith Based Fisheries* by Ray Hilborn. Written in 2006 but unfortunately as relevant today as it was back then, it is in essence a discussion of the lack of solid science behind much of the fisheries research and reporting on fisheries issues.

This is followed by Brian Rothschild's keynote address at Pacific Marine Expo last month. Brian, who is the President of the recently formed Center for Sustainable Fisheries, writes about reforming the Magnuson Act, a well-intentioned piece of legislation when passed into law in 1976 which has been largely distorted into a weapon used against the domestic commercial fishing industry.