

Flotsam and Jetsam

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According to Wikipedia “*Flotsam is floating wreckage of a ship or its cargo. Jetsam is part of a ship, its equipment, or its cargo that is purposefully cast overboard or jettisoned to lighten the load in time of distress and that sinks or is washed ashore.*” They are used together to indicate potentially valuable materials floating on the seas’ surface.

This seems an apt 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.

The forage fish fake out

In a column urging that menhaden management be overhauled on the Pew Environment Group website, Peter Baker wrote “*according to a report issued this year by a panel of 13 eminent ocean scientists, forage fish are twice as valuable left in the water as they are caught in a net.*” He is referring to the Lenfest Forage Fish Task Force. Forage fish include menhaden and herring.

The people at the Pew Trusts and more lately the Pew Environment Group don’t like menhaden or herring fishing. That’s not very startling news. In fact, the people at the Pew Trusts/ Pew Environment Group don’t appear to like any kind of fishing, because they’ve spent hundreds of millions of dollars – of course, that’s hundreds of millions of dollars earned by someone else – to curtail fishing in just about any way, shape or form that fishing happens.

The way they’re expressing their dislike of forage fishing has become par for their course of expressing dislike of just about every other fishery; what appears to be a loose confederation of independent researchers and stakeholders and grass roots organizations coalesce into some sort of committee or task force or whatever united behind the righteous cause, which invariably involves either stopping or significantly cutting back some form(s) of fishing, supposedly saving some critical part of some ocean ecosystem or other.

But in the case of saving the East coast ecosystem from the depredations of the supposedly ruinous menhaden purse seiners, how independent are these saviors and the people like Peter Baker who are flogging their “cause?”

Peter Baker is the Director of the Northeast Fisheries Program of the Pew Environment Group. Prior to that he worked for the Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen’s Association. Prior to that he was with the Sierra Club’s Environmental Public Education Campaign. Earthjustice, from which Oceana spun off, was spawned by the Sierra Club.

The Pew Trusts have given \$1.5 million to the Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen’s Association, at least \$60 million to Oceana and over \$23 million to Earthjustice.

I’ve written about the Herring Alliance on the FishTruth.net website at <http://www.fishtruth.net/Herring.htm>. The original member organizations have received well over \$100 million from Pew.

Consider the projects funded by the Pew Trusts (on the FishTruth website at [http://www.fishtruth.net/ENGO SPENDING.xls](http://www.fishtruth.net/ENGO_SPENDING.xls) or the Pew Trusts website at http://www.pewtrusts.org/program_investments.aspx) designed to curtail menhaden/herring harvesting listed below. Herring and menhaden are considered forage fish – fish that serve as food for other fish species – and, though all of the save the menhaden/herring rhetoric studiously ignores it, are also voracious predators of the early life stages of fish and shellfish species that feed on them as adults.

- 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 Fishermen’s Association - \$180,000 – *“To provide general operating support policy reform campaigns for herring and groundfish.”*
- 2007 - Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen’s 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 Fishermen’s 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.”*

That’s just under \$7 million Pew dollars going directly to “save” menhaden and herring.

Of the thirteen “*eminent ocean scientists*” on the Lenfest Forage Fish Task Force, nine can be directly tied to Pew funding via academic programs that have received well over \$30 million in grants from the Pew Trusts, and four are Pew Marine Conservation Fellows to boot (see <http://www.fishtruth.net/Pauly.htm> and <http://www.fishtruth.net/Pikitch.htm>).

The source of funding for the Lenfest Forage Fish Task Force, the Lenfest Ocean Program, is administered by the Pew Environment Group.

The Project Director of the Lenfest Forage Fish Task Force is Christine Santora She was previously employed for five years as a Senior Research Associate with the Pew Institute for Ocean Science.

So we have two ostensibly “grass roots” initiatives supposedly representing the views of a large group of constituents but which are in reality the handiwork of a handful of activist organizations in large part – to the extent of tens of millions of dollars – supported by the Pew “Charitable” Trusts. The Pew Trusts were founded with dollars from Sun Oil’s Pew family and are still largely under the control of the Pew family.

“Astroturf roots” seems a much more accurate descriptor (and I was pleasantly surprised to see that Wikipedia has an entry for “astroturfing,” which it describes as “*political, advertising or public relations campaigns that are designed to mask the sponsors of the message to give the appearance of 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.*”)

Unfortunately, at its regularly scheduled meeting last week the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission in what was an obvious bow to public pressure – pressure driven by mega-bucks foundations and the activist organizations they support – rather than sound science, voted for drastic cuts in the menhaden harvest.

The fishermen, the fish and the consuming public deserve much better.

And the Conservation Law Foundation is always there for the fishermen - just ask ‘em (Or better yet, ask a fisherman.)

In a blog post on the Conservation Law Foundation website, CLF lawyer Peter Shelley did a masterful job of trying to ally himself and the CLF with the New England groundfish fishermen, blaming the ongoing debacle in that fishery on the federal fisheries managers. Towards the end he even touchingly wrote “*this Thanksgiving, I want to give an overdue thanks to the region’s remaining fishermen who brave the elements and bring my family fish and seafood products to eat.*”

Being unaware of anything that the CLF has done that any fishermen who I know would be grateful to that organization for – as far as I know the role has mostly centered on either bringing or supporting court actions to further restrict fishing – I left as a comment “*Mr. Shelley - Re ‘can anyone point to even partial successes in the groundfish fishery in New England?’ there are approximately a million metric tons – that’s 2.2 billion pounds – of three species of catchable and marketable fish ‘available’ of our Northeast (see **Fishing isn’t a four letter word** at http://www.fishnet-usa.com/Fishing_not_four_letter_word.pdf). These three species – Acadian redfish, spiny dogfish and haddock – could sustainably support the entire out-of-work groundfish industry, and then some. What has the Conservation Law Foundation (or the mega-foundations that support it), with all of your eloquently phrased gratitude for those fishermen, done to help them to harvest any of those fish?”*

Of course spiny dogfish aren’t a part of the New England groundfish complex, though they do infest the east coast waters from North Carolina to Canada and through their predation are in large part responsible for the declines in groundfish stocks.

But regardless of which species are considered members of the New England groundfish complex and which aren’t, I would think that shifting some of the fishing effort that Mr. Shelley and his colleagues have been so diligently trying to eliminate in the groundfish fishery to these copious amounts of dogfish would, had it been done, certainly have been deemed at the minimum a “partial success” in the groundfish fishery.

Not, however, in Mr. Shelley’s estimation. In replying to my comment he wrote “*dogfish are not even managed as part of the groundfish fishery in New England (the focus of the blog); everyone supports a significant*

increased harvest of dogfish but doing so right now would drop the prices because of the oligopoly created by the dogfish MSC certification.” He continues in a similar vein with redfish and haddock – a listing of the reasons why these three fisheries haven’t expanded in spite of the certain knowledge that they could support a whole bunch of under- or unemployed fishermen.

Acadian redfish and haddock are part of the groundfish complex.

He also refers to me as a “paid fisheries gadfly,” which isn’t all that bad considering that Socrates seems to be considered the first gadfly. This was for being paid as a consultant for my questionable advice. According to Mr. Shelley most of my direct experience was with raising fish in pens, and he suggests that I’m out of touch with the New England fisheries. I’ve probably missed a few of his other displays of grace and wit aimed in my direction, but I’m sure you get the drift.

However, what he doesn’t address is my question, so I’ll repeat it again; *what has the Conservation Law Foundation (or the mega-foundations that support it), with all of your eloquently phrased gratitude for those fishermen, done to help them to harvest any of those fish?*

Neither commenting on my background, my abilities, my place of residence nor my connections to New England fisheries is anything approaching a semi-adequate answer to that question. I can’t help but wonder if perhaps the answer would have been absolutely nothing and Mr. Shelley wasn’t up to that level of candor – particularly after he expressed such a heartfelt, though in his estimation overdue, Thanksgiving thanks to New England’s “remaining fishermen.”

But then hope springs eternal

The first time I wrote about the huge supplies of unharvested and unsold but harvestable and sellable fish in the waters off our coast was back in August of 2009 in **Chronic Underfishing - The Real New England Groundfish Crisis** (http://www.fishnet-usa.com/chronic_underfishing.htm). This was after I had organized a workshop that was well attended by researchers, managers and fishermen – both recreational and commercial – addressing the plague of spiny dogfish which was negatively impacting most of the important fisheries from Cape Hatteras to the Gulf of Maine and beyond (visit the website at <http://www.fishnet-usa.com/dogforum1.htm>).

In spite of my and other writings on the wall in pretty large letters and, as demonstrated in the above, in spite of all of the good intentions of the ENGOS that their minions are so willing to tell us they have for fishermen and fishing (with particular reference to Mr. Shelley’s Thanksgiving thanks), nothing had been done for over three years. In Chronic Underfishing I do take a stab at estimating what the cost to our coastal economies was but I’ll leave it to the folks at NOAA/NMFS to notify us via yet another mysteriously delayed status report how many fishermen and folks in dependent businesses lost their jobs and how much human misery was inflicted on our fishing communities.

However, it appears as if changes are near at hand, and for the first time in quite a while these pending changes are the positive kind. John Bullard, who was recently appointed the Regional Administrator for NMFS for the Northeast Region, has announced that management measures will be put in place that will allow the harvest of significantly greater numbers of spiny dogfish and Acadian redfish. For more information, see Richard Gaines **NOAA eyes easing redfish, dogfish rules** in the December 7 Gloucester Daily Times at <http://www.gloucestertimes.com/fishing/x2120612513/NOAA-eyes-easing-redfish-dogfish-rules>.

Jane Lubchenco – soon to be gone but not soon forgotten head of NOAA

“The adoption of this new management system and the lower catch limits happened early in my tenure as Administrator. Indeed, sustaining the groundfish fishery and the economic health of the industry has been of paramount importance to me since my first day in office. I understand how important it is to the region’s economy and culture. I also know that implementing tough measures to end overfishing and to rebuild stocks is not easy for fishermen and fishing communities. For those reasons, I have devoted significant energy to take action in three key areas that I will talk about today: 1) our work with fishermen and the New England Fishery Management Council to help get this fishery on a pathway to sustainability and long-term profitability; 2) our top-to-bottom overhaul of NOAA operations in the region, including an independent management review and follow-up actions we have already taken; and 3) advancing concrete proposals that build on your ideas — and those of other partners in New England — to address residual problems faced by fishermen in the region and to build on the progress made. Our goals are clear: to be a partner in the success of fishermen, to sustain fishing jobs, to create a profitable and healthy future for fishing communities, and to maintain marine fisheries. We appreciate your support in getting there” (from Jane Lubchenco’s testimony to the U.S. Senate’s Committee On Commerce, Science, & Transportation in Boston on 11/03/2011).

Last week Ms. Lubchenco announced that she would soon be leaving her position as the head of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. She announced her departure in a self-serving missive supposedly directed to her employees that said, among other things, *“we’ve tackled some big challenges together. Through an emphasis on transparency, integrity, innovation, team work and communication, we have made significant progress on multiple fronts.”*

Then, in the first of a listing of what she considers her top 20 triumphs at the NOAA helm, she included: *“ending over-fishing, rebuilding depleted stocks, and returning fishing to profitability.”*

She neglected to mention that she also left the New England groundfish fishery, our oldest and historically one of our most valuable fisheries, in far worse shape than it was in when she took over at NOAA. Looking back, one of her first “official” appearances as NOAA head was at a meeting of the New England Fisheries Management Council in April of 2009. In a press release prior to her appearance there she said *“we worked hard to find ways to provide quick and meaningful help to the fishing industry through increased cooperative research and assistance in setting up the infrastructure for the new management system based on sectors and catch shares, NOAA is committed to working with fishing communities to find long-term solutions that create sustainable and profitable fisheries.”* In fact, after three plus years of her *“quick and meaningful help”* she is leaving the fishery in such poor shape that Congress is providing \$100 million in disaster relief to those in the fishery and those who are dependent on it to survive Ms. Lubchenco’s efforts to “save” it. I doubt that anyone would argue that at this point the fishery is anything but a shambles after almost four years of her efforts to fix it.

(For an in-depth examination of how bad conditions in the groundfish fishery have become, see the letter that Jackie Odell, Executive Director of the Northeast Seafood Coalition, sent to “Rip Cunningham, Chairman of the New England Fishery Management Council, on December 17. It’s at <http://tinyurl.com/byknlj4>. The Northeast Seafood Coalition represents more groundfish fishermen in New England than any other group.)

She also neglected to mention that the Mid-Atlantic/New England sea scallop fishery, the fishery which has been the most valuable in the U.S. in recent years, is facing major reductions in landings over the next several years. Sea scallop landings have been playing a major role in propping up most commercial fishing ports from Maine to North Carolina for at least a decade. I’ll refer you here to my June 25, 2012 FishNet *After 35 years of NOAA/NMFS fisheries management...* at [http://www.fishnet-usa.com/After 35 years of NOAA.pdf](http://www.fishnet-usa.com/After_35_years_of_NOAA.pdf). Pay special attention to New England landings minus sea scallops and lobster, Mid-Atlantic landings minus sea scallops, and

South Atlantic landings. While the higher than average sea scallop and lobster landings have been masking it, commercial fish and shellfish landings on the East coast have been plummeting for the last decade.

Missing also was any mention of the fact that, under her regime “*in 2011, about 91 percent of seafood consumed in the U.S. was imported, up five percent from 2010*” (NOAA Press Release *U.S. seafood landings reach 14-year high in 2011* dated 09/11/2012).

While I wouldn't consider disputing Ms. Lubchenco's contention that “*through an emphasis on transparency, integrity, innovation, team work and communication, we have made significant progress on multiple fronts,*” the “*we*” she is referring to certainly doesn't include most fishermen on the East coast (if it includes any at all), and the “*significant progress*” doesn't have anything to do with anything other than forcing more fishermen and more fishing boats off the water and more fishing businesses into bankruptcy. That is unquestionably progress from the perspective of the anti-fishing activists but it shouldn't be for someone who is in charge of the federal agency that manages our marine fisheries.