

My view: The three-pronged assault on the family fishing fleet

My View

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The troika that is wrecking the family fishing fleet is composed of government bureaucrats, environmentalists and economists.

They are all governed by good intentions, but this is confirmation of the saying: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions."

Easiest to understand are bureaucrats.

Bureaucrats obey only power, the power of the law. And we would not want them to act otherwise. So, if we believe there is something wrong in what they do, we do not address them. We correct the law under which they operate.

Hence the call to amend the Magnuson-Stevens Act. You can see the specific requests to Congress at www.care2.com; search for Magnuson Act; sign your name, and add your reasons for signing, if you will. Many, from all over the world, are doing just that with poignant words.

The second team in the troika is composed of environmentalists. Again, one must not generalize too much, but this is their guiding light: They prefer fish over fishermen; they are more concerned with the fate of fish and nature in general than the fate of human beings and their families and their communities.

They cloak their bitter prescription pills under a sugary coat of science. Who can resist science, after all?

The only problem is that their science, in the case of the fisheries, is wholly antiquated and inadequate — even if their data were collected, analyzed and stored properly in accordance with all prescribed procedures.

Unfortunately, the science that is guiding bureaucrats and environmentalists in the fisheries is faulty on all three counts. For specifics, please see past proofs recorded at www.gloucestertimes.com/fishing.

Pay special attention to "Trawl-Gate" and "Data-Gate": These are unbelievable cases in which data were collected using the wrong fishing methodology; and then bureaucrats managed to mangle data handed to them by the fishermen, because as the National Marine Fisheries Service's Gloucester-based regional

administrator, Patricia Kurkul, with total impunity stated, "given the amount of data we receive and process each year, currently exceeding 1 million records, errors do occur. ..."

Most data on which bureaucrats and environmentalists operate are collected through surveys of fishing stocks. Surveys are generally suspect; surveys over a vast ocean in which conditions vary and vary abruptly, are doubly specious; in random samples of the universe, errors due to nonresponse may exist due to absence of fish at the moment. Finally, surveys run without a good prior understanding of the universe are not recommended at all.

This type of survey is not well-esteemed in serious scientific circles. To say the least, such surveys are upside down: They can never determine the universe. This is just like putting the cart in front of the horse.

For good measure, one can find, at the same source in the Gloucester Daily Times, detailed documentation about unconscionable enforcement procedures exercised in accordance with criminal procedures, rather than procedures guiding the application of civil laws. And why, you might ask? Because the pay scale is higher for criminal investigators!

This fact has been determined by an inquiry run, not by a natural enemy of NMFS, but by the Inspector General in NMFS' and NOAA's very own Department of Commerce.

Even if existing data were collected, analyzed, and stored with the most unobjectionable scientific methods, the conclusions would still not be reliable because these data are collected in accordance with a linear conception of science that is no longer accepted in serious scientific circles. Linear thinking has been replaced by organic, relational thinking guided by nonlinear mathematics.

Science now is ruled by the interactive understanding of reality. In the fisheries, as well as in all organic matters, from trees to such unsuspected animals as the lemmings, the prevailing view is guided by the predator/prey model.

If bureaucrats and environmentalists want to be taken seriously, they have to adapt their thinking to such modern views. No predator/prey model in the analysis of fisheries, no science. Back to the drawing board.

This is a fundamental request of the Petition to Amend the Magnuson-Stevens Act mentioned earlier. Members of Congress, please pay close attention to this request.

The third team in the troika that is wrecking the family fishing fleet is composed of economists. While environmentalists are guided by the wrong natural science, economists are misguided by an absence of vision.

Economics textbooks are concerned only with private and public goods. Hence the frenetic oscillations from the rule of the market to the rule of the government: privatization versus collectivization.

Economics, as is well known, is a science without history. It is supposed to be pure science, valid for ever and ever. → Well, history helps. At one time there were only common goods. Common goods are still in existence in the fisheries today. Please, members of Congress, do not let economists blind you to this reality. Common goods are vital goods that ought not to be exploited for profit.

Indeed, fisheries economists, almost alone in the profession, recognize that there is such a third category of goods, the common goods; yet, blinded by their respective ideologies, economists who believe in the primacy of the efficiency of the market want to privatize common goods — while the collectivists want to entrust common goods to the administration of the government. Thus we witness the daily saga of free marketers battling socialists who believe that common goods are government goods.

Caught between these two tsunamis of conflicting ideas, the family fishing fleet — and at this point feel free to add the family farm and the independent retailer as well — is wrecked.

For ages yet to come, common goods should be administered for the benefit of all members of the community. The community is responsible. The fishermen know: They are the true environmentalists. They might err at times, but, as distinguished from the large fishing corporations that never seem to learn, the family fishermen have proved capable of correcting their ways over and over again.

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