

UPDATE ON COMMUNICATION ENHANCEMENT EFFORTS

Situation: At the April 2003 meeting, Ms. Flaxen Conway, an Oregon Sea Grant extension agent, presented the findings of a study on communication in fisheries management to the Council. In response, the Council directed a small group of Council and National Marine Fisheries Service staff, in cooperation with Oregon Sea Grant staff, to develop a communications plan. The attached document represents an update on activities to date, presents draft terms of reference for the communications group, and provides some additional background on communications challenges and efforts. The communications group is expected to meet during the summer and present a draft communications plan in the fall of 2003.

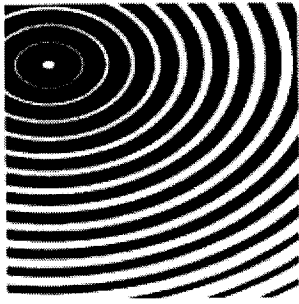
Council Action:

1. Information only.

Reference Materials:

1. "Investing in Trust: Update on the Council Communication Enhancement Process" (Attached).

PFMC
06/04/03



Investing in Trust: Update on The Council Communication Enhancement Process

Introduction

This “communication packet” follows up on the presentation on communications given by Flaxen Conway at the April 2003 Council meeting, at which the Council directed a small group of agency staff to develop a communication plan. This represents the first step in that process.

The packet includes two parts. First, it explains current problems in communication between fisheries management and constituent groups. Second, it describes the terms of reference under which a process for enhancing communication will take place. The goal of this effort is to create an action plan and strategy to create “best practices” for communication in fisheries management.

This effort uses a “concentric rings” analogy in its approach. Because of recent research on communication between fisheries managers and the commercial fishing community, and because the commercial fishing community is experiencing a crisis related to groundfish fisheries, we focus first on communication issues related to commercial fisheries and fisheries management. This is the core of the concentric ring. However, we recognize that there are other important constituent groups that also require effective communication. These include recreational fisheries, conservation groups, the general public, the media, and educators. As with expanding concentric rings, all of these groups will feel a ripple effect as communication infrastructure and methods improve. As resources become available, these groups will also take their turn at the center of the ring.

History

This effort was inspired by the publication *An Investment in Trust: Communication in the Commercial Fishing and Fisheries Management Communities*, which is based on a study of communications conducted by Jennifer Gilden and Flaxen Conway for Oregon Sea Grant (2002). *An Investment in Trust* describes current communication issues and challenges, and presents a series of recommendations for improving communication in fisheries management.

The current project is being spearheaded by a small group of partners representing Oregon Sea Grant, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council), and the National

Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). This group met on October 4 2002 via telephone to discuss the communication issues facing the Council and the possible strategies to address those issues. Since then, this group has met on November 22 2002, December 5 2002, January 9 2003, March 3 2003, and March 27 2003. On April 11, 2003, Flaxen Conway presented the findings of *An Investment in Trust* to the Council, resulting in the Council's direction to develop a communications plan, noted above.

Definitions

Throughout these documents we use the terms “fisheries management community” and “fishing community.” By “management” we mean the various fisheries management agencies (including, but not limited to National Marine Fisheries Service, the Pacific Fishery Management Council, state fish and wildlife departments, and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission), staff, scientists, Council members, Council advisory body members, and other policymakers. By “fishing community” we mean fishing families, fishing family businesses, fishermen and women, fishermen's wives groups, industry support groups, processors, and service/suppliers.



Problem Statement: Communication Related to Fisheries Management

Many people in the fisheries management and fishing communities feel that communication between the groups needs to be improved. However, improving communication will require effort from both the fishing and management communities. It is neither fair nor realistic to expect one community to single-handedly solve current communication problems.

As noted above, challenges to communication, and some potential solutions, were gathered and described in *An Investment in Trust*, which was based on interviews with members of the fishing and fisheries management communities. Chronic and acute crises in fisheries have exacerbated communication problems. Both managers and fishing community members are under stress, increasing their need for clear communication while decreasing their ability to communicate clearly.

The difference between formal and informal communication should be noted. Formal communication is the result of procedural mandates, and includes efforts such as environmental impact statements, *Federal Register* notices, public hearings, Council meetings and advisory body meetings. Informal communication includes efforts such as educational outreach materials, websites and newsletters (which do not have Federal mandates), informal meetings and workshops, and person-to-person communication. Both types of communication are suited to particular purposes, and both have pros and cons.

Factors within both the fisheries management community and the fishing community that exacerbate, or are symptoms of, communication problems include the following. (It should be noted that these are generalizations; not all members of either community share these traits.)

- Complex nature of information that must be communicated
- Tendency of the media to simplify and polarize issues
- Distrust and lack of respect for other communities
- Lack of clarity about agency roles regarding informal communication
- Varying levels of awareness about the importance of communication
- Varying levels of personal motivation to communicate
- Fluctuating levels of outreach effort
- Cultural and personal differences that muddle communication

Factors within just the fishing community that exacerbate, or are symptoms of, communication problems include the following:

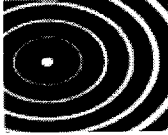
- Confusion about what federal and state agencies do
- Perception that managers and scientists are not accessible, and/or are not interested in listening
- Beliefs that management wants to or shut down the fishing industry
- Need to feel that concerns have been heard, even when management decisions don't fulfill hopes or expectations
- Competition and lack of cohesion, making it difficult to disseminate information or speak with a unified voice
- Economic and social stress, reducing people's capacity or willingness to communicate
- Involvement in management limited to a small, core group of people, while most are disengaged

Factors within the fisheries management community that exacerbate, or are symptoms of, communication problems include the following:

- Overwork and lack of funding, leading to a reactive rather than proactive system
- Low prioritization of informal (person-to-person) communication
- Federal mandates limit the available options, resulting in the impression that managers are not listening or reacting to fishing community concerns
- Formal Federal communication are not highly successful in reaching average fishing community members
- *Federal Register* notification requirements reduce flexibility in communicating

While improved communication will not solve all fisheries-related problems, it can lead to a clearer and better understood management process, more effective involvement in management, and increased trust – thereby improving relationships among all communities and improving decisions made by fisheries managers. It should be noted

that while this effort focuses on communication with the commercial fishing industry, improved communication will also benefit relations with other important constituent groups (mentioned above) as well.



Terms of Reference for Council Communication Enhancement Process

Composition (Who is involved)

As of May 2003, those involved in this process are: Jennifer Gilden, and Renee Dorval (PFMC), Marija Vojkovich (CDFG), Steve Copps, Janet Sears, and Steve Freese (NMFS-NW), and Ginny Goblirsch and Flaxen Conway (Oregon Sea Grant Extension).

As outlined in the goals stated below, this is an open process. Improving communication and creating trust will require the involvement of many people, including Council and advisory body members, agency staff, representatives of stakeholder groups, and members of the public. Involvement will need to take place at many levels, from providing suggestions for improving communications to actively creating and implementing the action plan.

Principal Responsibility

The principal responsibility of this group is to carry out the terms of reference for this process, the purpose of which is to help the Council family understand the communication enhancement process, and to ultimately enhance communication.

Goals of the process

The goal of enhancing communication through this effort is for all people involved in the Council process to:

- clearly understand how the fisheries management process works
- understand how to effectively involve themselves in the process
- be able to express their views clearly, and in a timely way, within the process
- feel that their views have been heard and respected

We recognize that it will take considerable time for these goals to be realized.

Objectives

The objectives for reaching these goals are to:

- Use the recommendations set out in *An Investment in Trust* as a springboard for improving communication efforts
- Develop a flexible, organic communications action plan that describes specific ways to improve communication
- Involve advisory body members in developing the action plan
 - Propose choosing lead person from each advisory body to be the liaison between the communications group and the advisory committee
 - For each Council meeting, develop place holder on each advisory committee agenda to have regular updates regarding communication
- Address communication on the following levels:
 - actions that can be undertaken on an individual level (by Council staff, Council members, advisory body members, and NMFS staff)
 - actions that can be undertaken by the Council (and NMFS) as a whole
 - actions that can be undertaken by advisory bodies
- Conduct the work in a transparent and inclusive manner
- Update the Council consistently on the progress of these efforts

References

Gilden, Jennifer D., and Flaxen D.L. Conway. 2002. *An Investment in Trust: Communication in the Commercial Fishing and Fisheries Management Communities*. Corvallis, Oregon: Oregon Sea Grant publication ORESU-G-01-004.