



The Mail Buoy



A publication of the Association for Professional Observers

P.O. Box 30167, Seattle, WA 98103

Liz: (541) 344-5503; Keith (928) 537-7523; Paul (907) 229-6882

E-mail: apo@apo-observers.org Website: <http://www.apo-observers.org>

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FROM THE APO:

******All contributions to this section are drafted by the one or more of the APO Board and represent viewpoints of the organization.***

Essential IFOC Work Group Surveys

5th INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES OBSERVER CONFERENCE



Victoria, British Columbia, Canada • May 15–18, 2007

As many of you may know, the early bird registration date for the 5th International Fisheries Observer Conference (IFOC) is nearly upon us. March 31st is not only the deadline to save some cash on your conference registration, but it is also the deadline for poster presentation submittal and for completing the questionnaires and surveys upon the IFOC [website](#)¹.

All questionnaires and surveys can be electronically completed directly on the IFOC website. The IFOC Steering Committee is asking observer program managers to respond to the conference's general [questionnaire](#)², aimed at gathering observer program statistics from all global programs. The [Training Work Group](#)³ is asking folks who are responsible for recruiting and training observers to respond to their survey, the [Safety Work Group](#)⁴ is asking those responsible for observer program safety to contribute to theirs, and the [Observer Professionalism Work Group](#)⁵ would be contented to receive responses from all levels and perspectives among worldwide observer programs.

If you do complete a survey by the March 31st deadline, you will be entered into a drawing for prizes donated from various international observer program entities. Whether attending the IFOC or not, these questionnaires and surveys are great ways to help us all to get to know each other's programs better and for folks to provide their input into some of the most pressing international observer program issues.

Please, do take the time to respond where you see fit, and help the IFOC Steering Committee and Working Groups facilitate heightened communications and working knowledge among worldwide observer programs. Your contributions to these efforts are greatly appreciated.

¹ www.fisheriesobserverconference.com

² <https://www.mairecorp.com/IFOC2007/Survey4.htm>

³ <https://www.mairecorp.com/IFOC2007/Survey3.htm>

⁴ <https://www.mairecorp.com/IFOC2007/Survey1.htm>

⁵ <https://www.mairecorp.com/IFOC2007/Survey2.htm>



Victoria IFOC Observer Housing Sponsorships

The APO has yet to receive very many applications for the observer housing that we will be providing for six observers at the forthcoming observer conference in Victoria this coming May, and our priority deadline is fast approaching. We've reserved an entire house at Ocean Island Suites⁶, only a 15 minute walk to the conference center in downtown Victoria- one suite will be designated for the APO board and the other two suites will be reserved for 3 observers per suite (6 total observers).

Although we don't have the means to provide funding for attending the conference itself, we hope that these housing sponsorships will alleviate a bit of the financial strain for the six sponsored observers who are either planning to fund themselves or will be funded by other sources. Priority consideration will be given to those observers who are not already funded by any other source, though we encourage all to apply. Following are our guidelines in order to be considered for a 2007 IFOC Observer Housing Scholarship:

- You must be an active observer (have observed anywhere in the world within 12 calendar months of the 2007 IFOC)
- Priority will be given to those observers who are registered to attend the 2007 IFOC by the March 31st "Early-bird" deadline.
- We hope to receive all Letters of Interest for sponsorships by the **March 31st** deadline, but will accept submissions until we fill all of the spots.

Please include the following 4 **paragraphs** in your Letter of Interest:

- A. Full name and a brief summary of your observing experience (~100 words).
- B. Additional experience pertinent to topics you wish to address (~100 words).
- C. State your intention for attending the IFOC- how do you plan to be active at the conference- please be thorough here (~250 words)
- D. By what means do you plan to attend the conference, and how certain are you that you will attend (~100 words)

Please send all submissions (Word or Adobe format are preferred, but e-mail text is fine), with at least two references, to the APO apo@apo-observers.org. Please address the letter to the "APO Staff" and write "2007 IFOC Housing Sponsorship" in the subject line so we don't mistakenly overlook your submission. Please contact us if you have any problems submitting. We hope to see you in Victoria!



⁶ <http://www.oisuites.com/suites.html>

Lynn Rassel- Featured Observer Artist for 2007 APO Products



Lynn Rassel, a North Pacific Fisheries Observer, has been kind enough to donate her artistic talent and is our featured observer artist for the 2007 APO product line.

We are proud to announce that we have recently updated the APO product line and have made it so that APO t-shirts, coffee mugs, stickers, mouse pads, and such can all be easily ordered on-line.

Proceeds from APO product sales will be used for future projects that the APO may work on to promote the professional livelihood of observers. Please show your support for the efforts of the Association of Professional Observers and check out the APO webstore, at: <http://www.cafepress.com/apoobservers>

OBSERVER BIOGRAPHY SERIES:

***** The “Observer Biography Series” is a quarterly profile of an observer who has done something normal or new (but noteworthy) in the course of their career. Do you know of an observer whom you would like to see profiled in our next issue? Contact the APO to nominate him or her for the “Observer Biography Series,” and help us profile them!**

William B. Most- An Observer’s Rise from the Ground

After graduating from college in the spring of 2005, William wanted to start edging into a career in fisheries policy and management and considered that some real ground-level experience would be a great place to start. William began working as a North Pacific observer in the summer of 2005, and stayed working there well into late last winter. There, he spent much of his time observing on a series of small pollock catcher vessels and cod longliners fishing out of the port of Dutch Harbor, Alaska.

As he began searching for a job higher up among fisheries management, Will found that his time as an observer in Alaska was extremely valuable in helping him acquire his present position with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission ([ASMFC](http://www.asmfc.org/))⁷ in Washington, D.C. He said, “It (observing) gave me credibility, and showed my commitment to learning about issues related to fisheries policy, especially at the ground level.”

⁷ <http://www.asmfc.org/>

The ASMFC was formed in 1942 to cooperatively manage fisheries resources within the state waters along the U.S. east coast. Essentially, the fifteen U.S. states bordering the Atlantic Ocean realized that, since their fish didn't bother to stop at state lines, they would need to work together to manage the resource. The ASMFC's success with helping to rebuild striped bass stocks (a very popular fish for recreational fishing along the east coast) led to the passage of the [Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act](#)⁸ of 1993, which heightened the Commission's management authority, as well as federal funding to supplement state dues.

The Commission is made up of three representatives from each state: the head of that state's fisheries resource department, a member of the fishing community, and a state legislator. The Commission has Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) for [22 species](#), including economically valuable species like lobster, summer flounder, menhaden, striped bass, and spiny dogfish. Situated just a few blocks down the street from the White House, the ASMFC helps develop and carry out these FMPs, coordinate research, and communicate with stakeholders.

William finds that his role with ASMFC, as executive assistant to the executive director, is quite ideal for him. Will says: "although I'm still fairly low down in the organization, I do get a good sense of much of what we do... from how priorities for observer research are chosen, to our interactions with Congress to secure our funding. It is an exciting, fun place to work, and I feel like I'm absorbing a great deal very quickly."

In the last year, William has had the opportunity to witness how fisheries policy works from the bottom to the top: he's worked on the Bering Sea, collecting valuable fisheries management data, and he now gets to witness how regional management plans are put together utilizing data summaries and even how Congress charts out the broad direction of how our nation's marine resources are to be managed. Will said that he is very happy that he started his career in fisheries management as an observer. Having received a first hand look into the workings of fishing industries through observing, he feels that he has a broadened perspective in regards to fisheries policy and fisheries management developments.



⁸ <http://ipl.unm.edu/cwl/fedbook/acfcma.html>

INTERNATIONAL SPECTRUM:

[New International ICCAT Observer Program](#)

Teresa Turk; the US National Observer Program (NOP); Washington, D.C.

A new observer program is currently being developed by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) to monitor the transshipment of Atlantic tuna. The Commission is headquartered in Madrid, Spain. ICCAT is responsible for providing internationally coordinated research on and developing regulatory recommendations for the conservation of tuna and tuna-like species in the Atlantic Ocean and adjacent seas. Dr. William T. Hogarth, Director of the National Marine Fisheries Service, is currently serving as the Chairman of the Commission.

MRAG/Capfish has been selected to provide up to 15 observers to serve on board carrier vessels authorized to receive transshipments in the ICCAT Convention area from large-scale tuna longline vessels. MRAG/Capfish will also develop and conduct observer training, be responsible for all the travel arrangements and other logistics associated with observer deployment, and provide initial data review and editing.

ICCAT's regional observer program for transshipment vessels is set to begin operations in April 2007. Consistent with recent discussions and international developments, ICCAT is currently coordinating with the other four existing tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organizations with a view to expanding this new observer program to all tuna transshipment operations throughout the world. For more information, please contact MRAG at <http://www.mrag.co.uk>

NATIONAL NEWS:

[Vicki Cornish- Tales of a Wandering Whale Hugger](#)

Vicki Cornish; the Ocean Conservancy; Washington, D.C.

Ever have a chance to do something you really love, and then have to leave it? I did, and thought I would never get that sweet deal again. But then I got lucky and found something even better! Here is an update on what I have been up to since I last saw many of you in Australia, when I announced that I was leaving NOAA's [National Observer Program \(NOP\)](#)⁹ in D.C. for a new job in Florida.

⁹ <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st4/nop/index.html>

When I took the job as Marine Mammal Branch Chief for the [NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office](#),¹⁰ I expected to stay in Florida for a long, long time. I missed the ocean, and in Florida I could surround myself with water. Moving south was like coming home. As a Florida native, I loved the heat and humidity, the alligators and manatees, and mostly the dolphins. Here was my chance to reconnect. My job in St. Pete started right after the November 2004 observer conference. So much for fulfilling a lifelong dream to dive on the Great Barrier Reef... Instead, I cut short my visit to Australia and flew home to pack and say my goodbyes. By Thanksgiving, I had moved south, bought a little house with the Florida “must have”, a pool, and got to work saving the whales.



¹¹That first winter, I experienced my first entanglement of a right whale. Right whales migrate south each year to calve in the warm, shallow waters off Northern Florida and Georgia. Unfortunately, this one arrived dragging along remnants of his journey through some of the most gear-dense waters in the country. Within hours of being sighted, we launched a rescue effort in conjunction with a crew of highly trained whale specialists from

NOAA Fisheries, the [Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies](#)¹², and the states of Georgia and Florida. With only about 350 right whales left, this critically endangered species needs all the help it can get. On New Year’s Eve, Barb Zoodsma, our right whale specialist, relayed that after several unsuccessful attempts to cut the line wrapped across the whale’s back, the disentanglement team added some extra weight to the trailing gear and somehow that caused the line to part. The whale was left to continue its journey a bit less encumbered. This experience left me with a much greater appreciation of the patience and perseverance of folks that would drop everything to help a whale in distress.

Spring kept me busy with dolphin strandings and learning about sperm whales. During these first few months, I was commuting back and forth to D.C. on the weekends to see my husband Mike, and our two boys, Kyle and Chris. You see, Mike wasn’t as keen as I was to move to the Bible belt, and wanted to wait a bit before making any big decisions. Besides, he was happy growing his small construction business in D.C. and loved the big city. Despite his reluctance, when school was out, we packed up the kids and moved them down with me. Now it was his turn to make the commute, and it was clear he had little patience for airports and the disruption of constant traveling. It was rough going, but we figured we would stick it out for the school year and then reassess.

¹⁰ <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/>

¹¹ Photo of “Two Right Whales at the Water’s Surface:” NOAA

¹² <http://www.coastalstudies.org/>

In the summer of 2005, I launched a take reduction team with the goal of reducing bycatch of pilot whales¹³ in the Atlantic pelagic longline fishery. We worked closely with fishermen, scientists, environmental groups, and fishery managers to try and solve the problem of pilot whales “depredating”, or stealing the catch off longline gear, and getting hooked or entangled in the process. Fishermen told us the whales were actively seeking out swordfish and tuna for food, causing fishermen to lose their catch.



With fishermen motivated to fix the problem, 13 years of observer data to draw from, and one of the best spatial modelers on the NOAA Fisheries payroll, Lance Garrison, we came up with a plan that everyone thought might solve the problem. It relied on setting shorter segments of mainline in problem areas, coupled with better communications between fishermen regarding takes and more research to try and understand what was attracting whales to the gear. During this time, I spent many hours negotiating the elements of the plan with the fishery’s long-term leader, Nelson Beideman. He was a primary force in promoting the use of circle hooks by longline fishermen to reduce injuries to sea turtles, and was equally committed to finding solutions for reducing bycatch of marine mammals. In May 2006, just a week before the team’s plan was to be submitted, Nelson suffered a heart attack. His death was a shock to all of us, but I will always remember his hearty laugh and honest approach to keeping this struggling fishery alive.

During this time, we were getting lots of calls about dolphins being fed by boaters in Panama City Beach, FL. Feeding dolphins is illegal under the [Marine Mammal Protection Act](#)¹⁴, but the history of dolphin feeding in Panama City goes back to the mid-1980s. The local dolphin watching operators wanted assurance that their dolphin watching tours would be successful, and one way to attract dolphins to the boats was to feed them. Dolphins are highly trainable, and once fed will seek out the source of food again and again. Although one operator was busted for feeding dolphins in 1989, enforcement resources were slim, and feeding was again on the rise. We went out that summer and saw people not only feeding dolphins, but chasing them on jet skis for a chance to swim with them or see them up close. We launched a major campaign to inform boaters of the risks of feeding dolphins, and managed to get a bit more enforcement attention in the area. But retraining dolphins (and the people that feed them) will take years.

¹³ Photo of Pilot Whale: courtesy of Keith Davis

¹⁴ <http://ipl.unm.edu/cwl/fedbook/mmpa.html>

The next winter, we got a report of another entangled whale off Jacksonville – a calf that had not survived the encounter. It was found with multiple gillnet marks on its tail and peduncle. Gillnet fishing effort had been on the increase in the last two years, yet this effort had yet to be addressed under the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan. We immediately issued an emergency closure of the area to all gillnet fishing for the remainder of the calving season, and then met with fishermen and other stakeholders to craft a long term solution. Fishermen admitted they knew the whale had been entangled in gillnet gear, but no one would say who did it. We worked that next summer on proposed regulations to close the most critical calving area to gillnet fishing, and it is hoped that these measures, once fully implemented, will keep this area safe for right whales and their calves.

By this time I realized my days in Florida were numbered. I either had to go back north or risk losing Mike. He was not willing to move south, and we figured I could always get a job back at NOAA Headquarters. Well, I did, and am grateful that I had a few months there to learn about budgeting and planning, and to help secure funds for protected species programs. But I was restless and wanted to do conservation work again. So I sent my resume to the one organization I had always respected to do good work for the environment, the Ocean Conservancy. They had an opening for the Director of Marine Wildlife Conservation, and my background in fisheries bycatch and observer programs seemed ideally suited to the position.

I have been with the Ocean Conservancy now for almost two months and absolutely love it! [The Ocean Conservancy](http://www.oceanconservancy.org)¹⁵ is a science-based advocacy group in Washington, D.C., working at the federal, state, and local level to bring about changes in attitudes, policies, and regulations to protect marine wildlife. Reducing bycatch of marine mammals and sea turtles in U.S. fisheries is a primary focus, but we also are working on innovative ways to reduce threats to marine wildlife from other human activities. We inspire, inform, and engage others to help realize the collective vision of wild, healthy oceans.

I look forward to catching up with old friends and making new ones in Victoria at the next International Fisheries Observer Conference, and am honored to be able to stay on the steering committee to help shape this important conference. Let me know what you have been up to, and if you have any ideas for how we can help raise awareness and build stronger public consciousness about ocean issues. Send me an email at vcornish@oceanconservancy.org. As Margaret Mead said so eloquently:

“A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

¹⁵ www.oceanconservancy.org

[U.S. National Observer Program \(NOP\) Update](#)

Samantha Brooke; the US National Observer Program (NOP); Washington D.C.



National Observer Program

Website Updates

The [NOP website](#)¹⁶ will be undergoing a makeover in the coming year- we hope to increase the site's accessibility and utility for industry members, observers, scientists, and the public. In the meantime, we are working on updates to a number of features; 2006 training and field manuals are now posted for the majority of observer programs, and the report for the Vessel Selection Bias workshop has been posted. A page discussing the role of observer data in management was also added. Keep checking back for changes! If you have suggestions on how the NOP website could be made more useful to you, please send them to: Samantha.Brooke@noaa.gov

IFOC Meet-and-Greet

The NOP team will be holding a meet-and-greet during this year's IFOC. Lisa, Teresa, Dennis and Samantha will be there to discuss the NOP and U.S. observer programs. We would like to hear from you, especially on how the NOP can better serve the observer community. This event will be held Tuesday, May 15th, in the Oak Bay Room at the Victoria Conference Center from 5:00 PM – 8:00 PM. The NOP team looks forward to seeing you there! If you are unable to attend the conference, but would like to send us your questions or comments, please send them to: Samantha.Brooke@noaa.gov

Observer Health and Safety Regulations

The comment period on the proposed changes to Observer Health and Safety regulations ended March 1, 2007. The proposed rule (published in the Federal Register on January 30, 2007) would clarify prohibited actions regarding observers, reinforce that an observer may not be deployed or stay aboard an unsafe vessel, clarify when a fishing vessel is inadequate for observer deployment and how an owner or operator can resolve discrepancies, improve communications between observer programs and fishing vessel owners and operators, and provide for an alternate safety equipment examination of certain small fishing vessels. The full text of the proposed rule is available online at: <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st4/nop/index.html>

USA REGIONAL UPDATES:

****We greatly depend on volunteered updates from your program. Please, submit stories and commentaries from any national or international observer program.*

The North Pacific/Alaska Region (USA):

Brian Petrie- Observer in Distress

Keith Davis; Observer/Mail Buoy Editor

On January 9th, 2007, Brian Petrie, an observer who has worked in the North Pacific since 2005, was hit, while crossing a city street in Chile, by a bus traveling at 60 km/hr. He broke 5 ribs, received a significant head blow that left a huge scar on the right side of his forehead, acquired blurred vision in his right eye, and now has chronic back pain, and headaches. Before he was able to make it to the hospital, he had lost 4 liters of blood, and the doctors removed his spleen in order to save his life. Brian was then kept in the intensive care ward of the hospital until the 20th of January and spent 2 days in a less critical ward before returning home to his residence in Chile. Brian then stayed in Chile over the following weeks before he could be well enough to return to his home in Ontario, Canada. He finally made it back home and is now beginning to slowly feel like he is recovering from some of his injuries.

Being that Brian is a contract observer and that he was in-between contracts, Brian was not financially protected when this horrible accident occurred. Luckily, his initial hospital expenses were paid for (by the bus company responsible for hitting him), but, since he was discharged from the hospital in Chile, he has tried to keep ahead of all of the x-ray, vaccination, clinic, lab, and legal fees that have mounted thereafter. Brian also has no protection for his lost time away from work, and since his immune system has been compromised from losing his spleen and that he has constant severe back pain, he can't see himself boarding a fishing vessel anytime soon. Brian says that he is sad to say that he will probably never be able to return to observing.

Many of Brian's friends and colleagues in the observer world were sad to hear of Brian's fate and have already sent him their sympathies (by way of cards, phone calls, and e-mails). Brian is incredibly thankful for all of their kind words, and humbly accepts any support that you may wish to send his way during this terrible time in his life. Brian can be reached at:

Brian Petrie

134 Sunrise Blvd.

Thunder Bay, Ontario

p7b 6z7, Canada

bpetrie78@yahoo.ca; (807) 345-0986

The Gulf of Mexico (USA):

Emergency Gulf Pelagic Longline Observer Positions

Chad Lefferson; IAP World Services; Galveston, Texas

IAP World Services is tasked with hiring over 30 Fisheries Observers for a new Pelagic Longline project in the Gulf of Mexico within the next few weeks.

Qualifications: you must have at least an AS degree in Marine Biology or related field, offshore experience and a working knowledge of offshore large (pelagic) fish species. Candidates must be a natural U.S. Citizen or a non-U.S. Citizen with at least 5 years of continuous residency in the U.S.

Responsibilities: The successful candidates will be collecting catch, effort and environmental data for the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) aboard offshore commercial fishing vessels.

Training: will be held April 2, 2007 through April 13, 2007 at the Miami Lab in Miami, Florida.

Deployment: will be directly after training, out of two separate ports: Dulac, Louisiana and Panama City, Florida. Deployment from Dulac will be stationed out of a hotel located in Houma, Louisiana. Observers will work out of their respective port location for the duration of the study, ending sometime toward the end of June.

Salary: Competitive salary, travel, and per diem.

Closing Date: Please apply ASAP- positions will be filled quickly.

Contact:

Chad Lefferson
IAP World Services
Email: Chad.Lefferson@noaa.gov
Phone (228) 762-4591, x300
Fax (228) 769-9200

*****Please go to www.iapws-pts.com Southeast Fisheries Research Center for more specific information.**



Reef Fish in the Gulf of Mexico

Brooks Doughtie; Southeast Observer; Galveston, Texas

Who would not want to observe in warm, flat, calm waters, while studying exotic fish? So, when I was given the opportunity to observe in the Gulf of Mexico, I was pleased at the thought of the temperate weather and “lake” type seas. Having observed previously, in the northeast Atlantic Ocean, I was looking forward to warmer and calmer seas. I began working out of the Galveston NOAA Laboratory with the reef fish program, performing stock assessment sampling. Red snapper and grouper species are the reef fish that are normally commercially targeted.



¹⁷The reef fish program began during the summer of 2006. My duties consisted of performing biological sampling on the kept and discarded fish. The trips last from one to 14 days, and the crews on board range from one (only a captain) to possibly three or four. The boats fish using either longline or bandit reel gear. Most of the snapper boats are approximately forty feet in length, so the living quarters are very primitive. The bunks and the galley are all

in the wheelhouse and privacy is often lacking. Most of the captains and crew are hesitant at first when they have an “observer” on board because of the uncertainty of what it is we do. However, the observers in this program only collect biological data and the research is not used for enforcement purposes, so the crews are extremely helpful and appreciate when I am working hard. They respect most observers who are out on the boats. The main thing I tell other observers is to help the crew a little every time you can, cook a meal or clean some dishes. The best advice I have is to work hard and realize that you are part of the crew but at the same time always an outsider.

My first trip was out of Venice, Louisiana, a small fishing town south of New Orleans. Driving down there, I saw first hand the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. It was emotional because this fishing town was totally destroyed and even after a year the town has not recovered. Along with the usual jitters of the unknown, feeling the devastation and hearing the stories from the fisherman, it really hit home how



¹⁷ All Photos in “Reef Fish in the Gulf of Mexico:” Courtesy of Brooks Doughtie

destructive that hurricane was to the gulf region. The first couple of trips were an experience because I found out how many oil rigs there are in the gulf - over five thousand! The snapper live around the rigs and the fishermen have adapted unique styles to fish them. Boats tie up to the rigs and drift off the rig while dropping their reels to fish the snapper off the bottom. It is fun to watch the crews on the rigs come out and watch the fishing.



Going out on a longline trip, I realized that the gulf is much more than calm seas, as I witnessed 14-20 foot seas and high winds. Those are not really too unfavorable until you realize you are on a forty foot boat, and you have to lie at anchor as you bounce around at the mercy of the seas. Longliners in the gulf are used in deep water which highly affects the mortality rates of discarded fish. The gear is pulled up fast from the bottom,

causing the fish to come up with protruding eyes, stomach hanging out of the mouth, and enlarged swim bladders, due to the drastic pressure change. This truly has a negative impact on the fishery because most of the fish end up floating behind the boat and are incapable of diving down and safely swimming away. You can easily tell where a commercial boat has been by following the dead fish that float on the surface in a long trail behind the boat. Many fishermen are upset at how the different species of fish are not allowed to be kept, and instead must be thrown back when the captain and crew know the fish will not live!

The Gulf of Mexico has an abundance of exotic and amazing fish, and it is a truly awesome environment to work in. Along with the warm weather, there are summer water spouts that occur every few days and the sunsets are simply breathtaking. Seeing hammerhead sharks swim around the boat chasing after bait, or witnessing dolphins swimming along the bow of the boat, is what an observer can see on a regular basis.

The reason why I love my job is that I work on the water and I get to see something amazing every day. Being able to work on the water and perform a job that allows me to work on ocean conservation is what observing is all about. At the end of the day, I am truly enriched by the diverse species of fish that make up the Gulf, and I benefit from knowing that I am helping with the conservation of remarkable varieties of reef fish in the awe-inspiring Gulf of Mexico.



Defining Observers: “The Problem as I see it...”

Patrick Sullivan; Fisheries Observer; North Pacific and Pacific Islands

***** The following commentary was extracted, with permission, from a recent private observer discussion on the ObserverNet¹⁸ on-line forum.**

The problem as I see it is not in becoming something that we are not, but in achieving recognition for what we are.

The future of fisheries is heading toward being more rationalized among fleets, with a management shift toward ecological sustainability. What this means in part is a lower number of individuals employed. It also means observers must be available to collect timely and impartial data. We are an integral part of the new fisheries paradigm around the world. There is an increase in observer programs as countries attempt to rebuild and stabilize their fisheries. We are not going away any time soon.

What we need is standardization nationwide of: training levels and duties, program policy, software, species codes (based on AFS, FAO, etc.) accepted naming. With standardization will come greater understanding; with understanding comes recognition; with recognition comes greater benefits.

Each program has its own focus, techniques, species codes, training levels, computer system, gear, and method of payment, and method of assigning or acquiring vessels. For observers to be defined in broadly applicable legal terms there must be a tangible, cohesive and coherent definition nationally of an observer.

Further, we need a greater public awareness of our existence, without which we have no true power in our greater destiny. Out of sight; out of mind. Observers and observer programs need media coverage—local and national TV news, newspapers, magazines, books, university speaking engagements, etc. Nevertheless, always be mindful that while employed as an observer, you are representing your government, whether state or federal.

When I was interviewed for the news in Hawaii (Turtle Dehooking Training), NMFS sent out their media representative to give me a “watch your step” talk. While I was aboard a C/P in Alaska, I was filmed as part of a German documentary on world fisheries. I mention these incidents for a specific reason. Both crews that I spoke with had absolutely no idea what an observer is. In the first case I find it reasonable, yet the second case was a documentary on world fisheries where the crew was traveling around the world speaking with fisheries managers and fishermen. After all of their work, observers were essentially non-entities. They didn't know enough about the purpose or duties of an

¹⁸ www.observernet.org

observer to ask a single intelligent question for an interview. What it came down to was make something up and we'll do a few takes.

Finally, observers need legal representation in the larger arena. Without competent and capable legal representation, observers have no bargaining power or ability to solidify adequate benefit and compensation standards. Some programs pay better; some observer companies provide benefits. Compensation doesn't necessarily match workload, duties, or training.

I am 40 with a condo, a car, and a kid. I have to buy my own health insurance. Although my employer mildly offsets this cost, it is still significant. Also, I have no retirement plan as I did when I was a clerk at Fred Meyer's Grocery Store, where I also had a great health plan. The fight needs a specific coherent focus and purpose, court time, and legal specialists. Maritime Law is ancient and, we are "Johnny come lately."



[A Fisherman's Perspective: "A School of Red Herring"](#)

Terry Haines; Alaskan Fisherman; Kodiak, Alaska

******This piece is a re-print (with permission) of an article written by Terry Haines, "A School of Red Herring," originally printed on December 20th, 2006, on the [Alaska report website](#)¹⁹.***

In a recent opinion piece "MSA: 30 Years and Going Strong," Mr. Dave Benton applauds the reauthorized Magnuson Stevens Act for following the "Alaska Model" of fisheries management. In doing so he joins a frenzy of back-clapping politicians, lobbyists and envirowarriors- lighting each other's cigars, buffing each other's bald spots and sending out rafts of "We did it!" e-mails in the warm glow of their mutual victory.

Unfortunately, it is a magician's illusion. While one hand holds the audience's attention with a coral-reef card trick, the other hand is making a public resource disappear into a very few private hands.

Mr. Benton touts two aspects of the [Magnuson Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act](#) (MSFCMA)²⁰: the re-Americanization of the 200 mile Exclusive Economic Zone and improved "ocean stewardship," or the ability to better manage the stocks with the foreign trawlers pushed out of our waters. But while the "Alaska Model" may not kill the golden goose, it certainly steals all the eggs.

¹⁹ <http://www.alaskareport.com/terry-haines40014.htm>

²⁰ <http://www.observernet.org/obsforum/showthread.php?t=1531>

Benton offers the "Americanized" pollock fishery as an example of how the MSFCMA worked well. He fails to mention that the [American Fisheries Act](#)²¹, which privatized and monopolized the fishery, was a square off between Norwegian funded factory trawlers and Japanese owned shore plants. Senator Stevens' Aide Trevor McCabe refereed the match and when it was over the entire fishery was owned by a few big, mostly foreign companies - lock, stock and fish barrel. They own the boats, the fish and the market, forever. Alaska's pollock fishery was a free range cow that the whole world was chasing around with a three legged stool and a milk bucket. Our response was to fence the pasture and give away the cow. Knowing that Bossy is healthy is small consolation to the guy who can't have milk any more.

Benton goes on to praise the "genius of MSFCMA, not regulating the fishery through distant bureaucrats, but putting local fishermen with real-life expertise at the table." Unfortunately, there are no "real life" fishermen on the North Pacific Council. In five years of attending meetings I have seen only two working fishermen on the Council, and they did not serve at the same time. The Council is dominated by lobbyists: executive directors and vice-presidents of special interest groups like the [At Sea Processors Association](#)²² and the [Pacific Seafood Processors Association](#)²³.

Representation has not been from the grassroots, but from the penthouse roofs. There is a simple litmus test. Who, among the members of Council, the Advisory Panel and the participating public, is being paid to be there, and who pays from his own pocket? I have met a number of fishermen and citizens who pay thousands of dollars a year to attend meetings and try to have a voice in the process, with little or no hope of personal gain. This is a far cry from being put up at the Hilton with an expense account by a multinational corporation that expects to own the resource at the end of the day.

In praise of MSFCMA's ecosystem safeguards, Benton writes; "Bycatch is closely monitored and has been substantially reduced. Extensive swaths of the ocean floor have been closed to fishing to protect essential habitat." First, bycatch has been reduced largely by calling it something else. The saleable fish now caught accidentally with the target species are being renamed "Secondary Species". Both saleable and non-saleable bycatch will become ratable commodities. Boats that over-catch these species can buy blocks from boats that don't to avoid being shut down. So the amount of these secondary species harvested will ever be reduced. Why should it be? It's money in the bank. Good policy would reward techniques that specifically target fish, not the opposite.

Also, to say that bycatch is "closely monitored" is an inside joke. The amount of observer coverage on groundfish boats is pathetic. And it is common knowledge that boats with observers aboard fish quite differently than those without. Repeated requests for a period of 100% observer coverage to provide an accurate set of numbers has been called too expensive, even though a tax on the "secondary species" trawl fishery for black cod alone could easily pay for it. Trawl black cod has been classified as saleable bycatch even

²¹ http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/sustainablefisheries/afa/afa_sf.htm

²² <http://www.atsea.org/>

²³ <http://www.pspafish.net/>

though it is caught with a different kind of net on different grounds as the target species. Another inside joke...

And pointing to "extensive swaths" of closed grounds is a bit disingenuous. Not letting a trawler tear his net to ribbons on a patch of coral as sharp as broken glass is like not letting someone punch himself in the face. Nursery grounds for crab and cod in the flats where a bottom trawl rolls easily remain open. And they probably will, with the bycatch trade system in place.

This brings up one of the biggest ironies of the proposed rationalized groundfishery. The so-called Sector Split, which locks in gear types. To compete with each other in the "race for fish," trawlers and their nets have grown bigger, badder and less discriminate. Rationalization means the race is over. Why are we locking in the race cars? Kodiak's Bill Alwert has often observed that in a rationalized world, all of the cod in the Gulf of Alaska could easily be caught with pots, with: higher quality, more community equity, and virtually zero bycatch.

Now here's the really crazy part. Whether our state and federal fish policy serves the country or the company may very well come down to a definition of its ultimate goal. That's right. They're still not sure what it is they're trying to do. The Constitution of the State of Alaska directs its public servants to manage a public resource for "the maximum benefit of its people". However, our own Fish and Game Commissioner, McKie Campbell has been leading an effort to define "maximum benefit" as "optimum yield." That made me scratch my head.

But then I began to read the McDowell Group's excellent report titled "[State of Alaska Seafood Economic Strategies- Draft Report](#)"²⁴. Highly recommended- It is objective, plainspoken, and pertinent. I can't say enough good things about the McDowell Group's professionalism and their product. It was prepared to help the state form good fisheries policy, and I sure hope they use it. The report clearly calls for the state to gather socioeconomic data before proceeding. This is something many fisherman and community groups, notably the Jigger's Association, have been asking about for years.

Raw economic data basically tells you about the size of the pie. Socioeconomic data tells you how the pie is sliced and who gets a piece. "Optimum Yield" means we want a big pie. "Maximum benefit" means our sons and daughters might actually get to taste it.

If fishermen understand one thing - it is that no job is ever really over. Eternal effort is the only thing that keeps the gear sharp and the boat afloat. Likewise, work on the Magnuson Stevens Act is not over. It is entering its next phase. It is just a blob of molten metal right now. What kind of sword it becomes will depend on who hammers on it as it cools. Regional Fisheries Associations, in particular, are important to watch as they develop. They could be used to steal the pie, or to slice it. Terry Haines can be contacted at: yohaines@alaska.com; <http://www.4alaskafishers.com/>; (907) 486-4759.

²⁴ <http://www.mcdowellgroup.net/pages/akseafoodeconomicstrategies.html>

An Observer Poem: “A Fisherman’s Toast”

Jon Youngman; Observer; the North Pacific, USA

May your beard grow long
And your cup be full.
May the seas wash gently,
Upon your hull.

May your lines be heavy
With plump fish aplenty.
And, the cook be with skill
And a smile in the galley.

That your days pass by with ease
While your lady does wait,
While the forces of nature
Determine your fate.

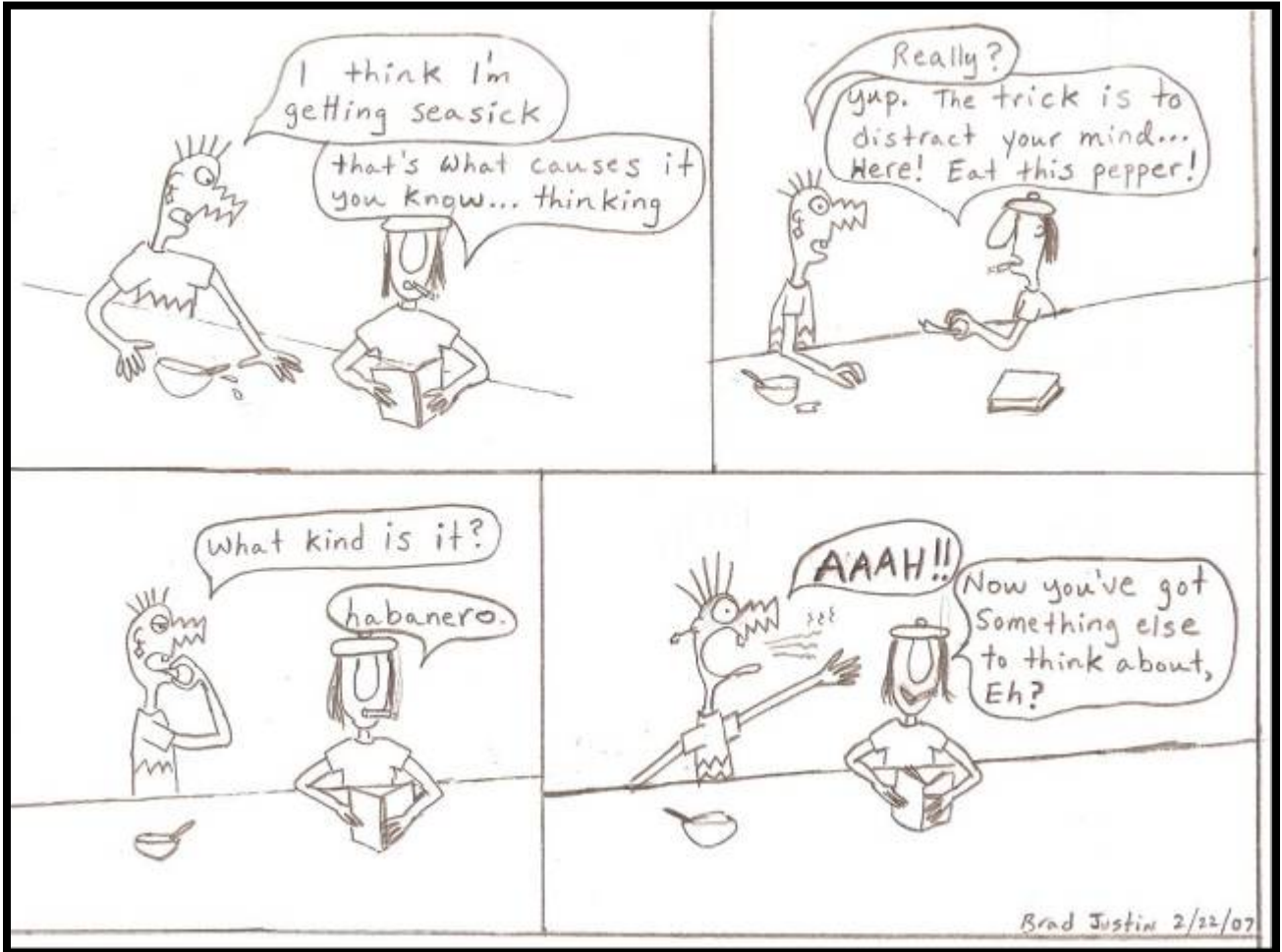
If it so passes while on the
Weather deck you sit,
That the sea-duck harasses
And anoints you with s--t.

May the sea-spray wash quickly
That crap from your shoulder.
And, your undies stay dry,
So you don't get much colder.



High Sea Funnies - Chapter #1: "The Cure for Seasickness"

Brad Justin; Observer/APO Board; the North Pacific, USA



IMPORTANT CONTACTS AND WEBSITES:

APO General E-mail	apo@apo-observers.org
APO website	www.apo-observers.org
ObserverNet Forums	www.observernet.org
Keith Davis (Mail Buoy Editor)	lblegend@yahoo.com (928) 537-7523
Paul Wilkins (Associate Mail Buoy Editor)	pbwilkins@mac.com (907) 229-6882
Liz Mitchell (APO Board)	emitch@efn.org (541) 344-5503
David Wagenheim (APO Board/ObserverNet.org)	davewagenheim@hotmail.com
Mark Wormington (APO Board)	siberio@hotmail.com
Brad Justin (APO Board)	bjustin@cheerful.com
Kim Dietrich (APO Treasurer)	kdiet@myuw.net
NP Observer Advisory Committee	(907) 257-2770
Tracey Mayhew (SIU Union Representative)	tmayhew@seafarers.org
National Observer Program	www.st.nmfs.gov/st4/nop
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***** Submissions for the Summer Mail Buoy are due by the middle of June 2007.**