

OCEAN POLICY AND FISHERIES: A Discussion of Areas in Need of Change

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My name is David Goethel. I have been owner and operator of the day boat dragger "Ellen Diane" for the last twenty years. I am also a biologist having graduated cum laude from Boston University in 1975. I have worked in varying capacities on the waters of the Gulf of Maine for the last 35 years.

I would like to talk today on areas of ocean policy that need to be addressed from my point of view and experience. First, I would like to discuss items that don't, at this time, have a clearly defined national policy. Then I would like to discuss changes to current policy that would benefit our nation.

ITEMS IN NEED OF POLICY:

1. Address capacity issues in commercial and recreational fleets. We need a census of our fishing capacity and how much extra effort we have. Then we must create a policy to reduce excess capacity in an orderly manner instead of shifting it from fishery to fishery. If the government is serious about ending overfishing it must end overcapacity and not let it be supplanted by excess recreational effort.
2. Marine Protected Areas. The United States needs a coherent policy on Marine Protected Areas. As a biologist and a fisherman I can see the value of setting aside discreet areas of complex habitat with great biodiversity to act a biological reserves. I would support no extraction of natural resources from these areas. Because these areas will have a great impact on users of the resource, we must have a clearly defined policy with goals and objectives; we must define minimum areas to meet our objectives; we must decide what activities will be allowed on the ocean surface in a Marine Protected Area and we must educate the public clearly as to why this will benefit the nation.
3. National decision on Individual Fishing Quotas and Individual Transferable Quotas. The fishing industry needs to know whether or not IFQ's and ITQ's will be used as a tool of management and what the rules governing their use will be.
4. National policy on the timely availability of fisheries data. The United States should set a date after which time all data necessary for management will be available within 3 months of collection.
5. National policy on cooperative research. Cooperative research should be mandated in all fields of ocean study. I believe that men and women who spend their lives on the ocean can produce the most timely and cost effective research when teamed with our nations scientists.
6. Establish meaningful management regime for trans-boundary stocks. Work with other nations to make sure we have effective management of fish stocks that cross national borders. If existing committees and commissions cannot be reformed,

the United States should withdraw and petition the United Nations to address our grievances.

7. Educate American public on the effects of land-based activities on the oceans. Mandate Sea Grant or a similar agency to conduct educational campaigns explaining how many land based activities such as filling of the tidal wetlands, fertilizer, pesticide and biocide runoff, heavily chlorinated discharges, storm water runoff laden with oil, even the improper disposal of birth control pills are having serious and perhaps long term deleterious effects on our oceans. Where solutions to these problems do not yet exist, conduct research to identify solutions.

I will now address concerns with EXISTING POLICIES, which are contained principally in the Magnuson Act and the Sustainable Fisheries Act and what we might do to correct them.

1. Make sure overfishing definitions are standardized and workable. We need to have consistent biological thresholds so that management goals don't bounce all over the place. Some ground fish stocks in New England have as many as three overfishing definitions with some having more than one in the same amendment. This leads to inconsistent and sometimes ludicrous advice based on the law.
2. Better definitions of essential fish habitat. Current definitions consider essential fish habitat to be any place where any given fish swims. While this may be true for any given fish at any given time a more practical approach to me would be to define essential fish habitat as any area that, should it be destroyed, would cause a loss of 75 percent or more of the species in question. This way we would begin to usefully define essential fish habitat so that truly essential habitat can be preserved.
3. Have Congress rank the national standards. Every congressman I have talked to seems to have a clear intent as to what the national standards meant to them and how they ranked them in importance. This is almost always not the way that the National Marine Fisheries Service has interpreted them. Congress should either spell out their intent so there can be no ambiguity or appoint a blue ribbon panel to do it for them.
4. Clearly state what is known and not known relative to any given species. National standard 1 says, manage to the best available science. This is often pretty thin especially with habitat. I have no problem with professional judgment being substituted for hard facts but this should be clearly stated and trigger a timetable to answer the question with verifiable facts.
5. Address rebuilding schedules. Some of the rebuilding schedules for New England groundfish can only be met by virtually eliminating the commercial and recreational fisheries. Overfishing has gone on for hundreds of years; we don't need to be 100% rebuilt in 10 years. People in my generation (I am 48 years old) and older will never reap the benefit of rebuilding. We have however, paid the economic and social price for everybody's sins. Doubling or tripling the rebuilding schedules would allow a moderate amount of fishing to continue and spread the economic and social consequences over several generations while providing healthy fish stocks.

6. Change the Council Oath. Council members should represent the fish, not perceived constituencies of user groups. I also think on allocation issues (most of council business) the council should use consensus instead of voting. This would probably take more time but it would force all user groups to share the pain more evenly. Under the current system of voting, powerful voting blocks deflect the pain from themselves and place it on those who are not as well represented. Thus some areas of New England have contributed far more to rebuilding than others.
7. Create, within the Sustainable Fishery Act, the ability to test experimental management techniques. Under the current regime, if it can't be quantified you get no credit towards rebuilding. This is particularly troubling because many new ideas such as community based management or exploiting fish behavior for new management techniques (i.e. no night fishing for cod) can't be tried because we have no data. However we can't get data until we try them.
8. Create National Standard to consider ecosystem interactions. Management actions on one species will affect many others. If we are going to continue single species management, even though I personally am not in favor of it, we must at least recognize that this may impact the Maximum Sustainable Yield of other species. I seriously doubt all species can be at Maximum Sustainable Yield at the same time. Nature simply does not work this way.
9. Adequate Funding. If the United States is serious about having well managed oceans, the taxpayer must get serious about paying for it. Our agriculture system receives billions of dollars and feeds much of the world. Our oceans receive millions, which allows little more than an ocean policy of triage. Many of our solutions to management problems cannot be implemented because of woefully inadequate funding. This doesn't mean we need more bureaucrats. Rather, we need to fund programs such as capacity reduction that actually solve problems.
10. Require bureaucrats to spend one week per year observing the industry they oversee. A few members of various government agencies have actually come out with me or other fishermen to get some hands on experience, but always on their days off. Some of the agencies actually frown on their employees getting experience by saying it destroys their objectivity. In my opinion, many of our regulatory problems in ocean policy could be greatly lessened if our overseers had rudimentary knowledge of the problems faced when working in the ocean environment. You can read about it behind a desk until hell freezes over, but as my own children found out, nothing clarifies the mind like an ice-covered deck in the middle of January.

In conclusion I would like to thank you for the chance to offer my thoughts. As Jimmy Buffett stated in his song, *A Pirate Looks at 40*, "Mother, mother, ocean, all I've ever wanted was to sail upon your waters since I was three feet tall." It is with some irony then, that by the time this Commission issues its final report, our existing ocean policy may have destroyed this dream for me and many other small boat fishermen. I do not believe this was the intent of our government, and hope that some changes can be made to allow for our continued existence.