

## **Remarks of Gilbert C. Radonski, representing the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) to the U. S. Commission on Ocean Policy (OC) meeting at Charleston, SC, January 16, 2002**

I would like to thank the OC for setting aside time at this important regional meeting and hearing to accept public comment. My brief remarks will address primarily fishery issues.

I am here representing the RFA. The RFA has more than 75,000 members, through our membership and club affiliate program. The RFA's mission statement: *To create a national grass roots, political action organization of one million (1,000,000) salt water anglers; safeguard the rights of those salt water anglers; protect jobs in the marine boat and tackle industries; and ensure the long-term sustainability of our nations salt water fisheries.*

The work of the OC is very important to the RFA and all 17 million recreational marine anglers. In 1997, nearly 17 million anglers made 68 million marine fishing trips to the Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific coasts. The estimated marine recreational finfish catch was 366 million fish, more than 50% released alive. They spent \$ 8,674,748,085, had an economic output of \$ 25,092,567,062, and created 287,707 jobs with wages and salaries amounting to \$6,659,787.684.

In 1975, I went to Washington, DC as Executive Secretary of the Sport Fishing Institute (SFI) and retired as President of SFI in 1994. At SFI, my first task was to work on then pending legislation, the Fishery Conservation and Management Act (FCMA). I learned quickly that the FCMA had its genesis in the Stratton Commission Report, as did the entire federal fisheries and oceanic bureaucratic infrastructure.

The OC, as it prosecutes its mission, serves in an oversight capacity of the application of the recommendations of the Stratton Commission report. There is no doubt that the findings and recommendations of the OC will have an extensive impact, bureaucratically and legislatively, on the way the fishery and ocean resources of the United States are managed for decades to come.

At this Charleston, SC meeting of the OC the most important panel, from a fisheries standpoint, was "Management of living Marine Resources" featuring Bill Hogarth (NMFS), Bob Mahood (South Atlantic Council) and Susan Shipman (ASMFC). Dr. Hogarth outlined the many problems at NMFS. He indicated that science was a perceived problem not a real problem indicating that sufficient information exists for most management decisions. He said that he wants an open and transparent operation at NMFS and what he wants to do is evaluate all of NMFS' mandates (citing differences between NMFS and ASMFC) and to look objectively at all management tools.

Bob Mahood talked about Council operations and said that if the measures that Bill Hogarth has taken to improve the council system do not work that the council system's future will be in doubt.

Susan Shipman talked glowingly about ASMFC and the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (ACFCMA). However, she did say there were problems in the application of the Act with respect to the Councils.

The panel's comments reflected the status of broad marine fisheries issues facing each agency. They did not broach the dissatisfaction of marine recreational anglers with the current infrastructure. Many of the problems they cited have their roots in the lack of adequate attention to the specific needs of recreational anglers.

An example is NMFS's Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Program that provides essential marine recreational fisheries information to government, scientists, and the public. The program conducts the annual Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) to provide a reliable database for estimating the impact of recreational fishing on marine resources. An adequate program, it is poorly understood or accepted by the constituency it serves. The MRFSS represents the top down management approach that NMFS takes toward recreational anglers. Another example is the small NMFS staff dedicated to representing recreational anglers within the NMFS. Although that issue is being addressed through reorganization by Dr. Hogarth, the recreational angling community is very leery.

Susan Shipman pointed out the problem of application of the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (ACFCMA). The problem between the ACFCMA and the Magnuson Act is that they employ different management philosophies. The ACFCMA uses adaptive management and the Magnuson prescriptive management. The two must share a philosophy to be effective and reduce conflict.

Dr. Hogarth's comment that the science is adequate for management is correct. However, a problem arises when government is required to use a conservative *risk averse* strategy (required under the Sustainable Fisheries Act) in making management decisions and the commercial fishing industry uses a very liberal *risk prone* strategy. Both parties use the same data but operate from opposite ends of confidence intervals. This strategy favors the commercial fishing industry in the public hearing process and in the courts. Sustainable fisheries cannot exist when risk prone strategies are employed.

In the Q & A session with the fisheries panel, I noted a tendency of the commissioners to lump together recreational fishing and leisure tourism and recreation. This remains a problem because none of the panels in the two-day meeting defined the infrastructure and policy needs of recreational anglers. The OC must ensure that it is informed of the political and economic importance of marine recreational anglers.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to address the OC. The recreational angling community will provide further input to the OC. The RFA will continue to make itself available to the Commission.