

Sea Grant and NOAA Fisheries: Adversaries, Competitors, Partners?

Emory D. Anderson, PhD
NOAA Fisheries Liaison to NSGO (Retired)

First National Sea Grant
Fisheries Extension Meeting
Sea Turtle Inn, Jacksonville, FL
October 15-18, 2006

Some Perplexing Questions

- Why do fisheries extension staff working on the front lines, on the docks, and on the decks sometimes find themselves in interesting and uncomfortable situations with NOAA Fisheries folks and their policies?
- What are the differences in our missions, culture, and chain of command that might lead to this problem?
- Is Sea Grant's relationship with commercial and recreational fishermen different from that of NOAA Fisheries, and why?
- Why is there often frustration by both Sea Grant Fisheries Extension and NOAA Fisheries people when trying to work together?
- What hinders working together and what can be done about it?

NOAA Fisheries Background

- NMFS and its predecessor agencies around for 135 years
 - US Fish Commission – 1871
 - US Bureau of Fisheries in Dept. of Commerce & Labor – 1902
 - US Fish & Wildlife Service in Dept. of Interior – 1940
 - Bureau of Commercial Fisheries in USFWS – 1956
 - NMFS in NOAA & Dept. of Commerce – 1970
- Extension capability for several years in the early 1970s
 - Nine personnel in Washington and Regional offices
 - Responsible for “improving communications between NMFS and fishing industry and fostering understanding and practical use of knowledge and technical expertise relevant to the sustainable use of living marine resources”
 - Discontinued in about 1974
- NMFS “extension” mainly through port agents
- Things changed after FCMA
- Work more difficult and controversial in recent years

Sea Grant and NOAA Fisheries

- Sea Grant
 - University-based network
 - Partnership of academia, government, and industry
 - Federal core funds matched by state dollars
 - Engage nation's top universities and research institutions in scientific research, education, and extension projects designed to foster science-based decisions about the use and conservation of our ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes resources
- NMFS
 - Federal agency
 - Mandated by numerous laws and acts to conserve, protect, and manage living marine resources in US EEZ
 - Both science and regulatory functions

Sea Grant Background

- Established in 1966
- First grants awarded in 1968
- Originally in NSF
- Moved to NOAA in 1970
- First four universities achieved Sea Grant College status in 1971
- Now 30 Sea Grant programs and 2 projects

Mission Statements

- **Sea Grant** – To enhance the sustainable use and conservation of ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes resources to benefit the economy and the environment
- **NOAA Fisheries** – Stewardship of living marine resources through science-based conservation and management and the promotion of healthy ecosystems

Chronology of Past Cooperation

- Informal interactions since Sea Grant established
 - Mainly at investigator level in areas such as socioeconomics, aquaculture, fisheries oceanography, and fish biology
 - Annual NMFS - Sea Grant get-togethers (e.g., Southeast) to facilitate communication and discuss research priorities
- Collaboration in Southeast and Gulf on TEDs and BRDs
- 1997 – Organized 1998 EFH symposium together with NMFS and AFS
- FY 1998 and 1999 – Sea Grant expended \$1.6M in Sea Grant/NOAA Partnership Program
- Spring 1998 – MOU between OAR, NMFS, and Sea Grant
- October 1998 – NMFS/OAR Science retreat in La Jolla

Chronology of Past Cooperation

- December 1998 – NMFS Liaison to NSGO and Program Director for Fisheries
- FY 2000 – Began NMFS / Sea Grant Graduate Fellowship Program in Population Dynamics and Marine Resource Economics
- FY 2000 –Sea Grant Fisheries Theme Team established
- FY 2000 – First year of Sea Grant National Strategic Initiative on Fisheries Habitat
- Long Island Sound Lobster Research Initiative launched in 2000
- Jointly-sponsored fisheries symposia
 - Essential Fish Habitat – 1998
 - Managing Marine Recreational Fisheries in the 21st Century – 2000
 - Fisheries in a Changing Climate – 2001
 - Effects of Fishing on Benthic Habitats – 2002
 - Aquatic Protected Areas as Fisheries Management Tools – 2003
 - Cooperative Fisheries Research and Management – 2005
 - Natural Hazards and Fishing - Impacts, Analysis, Response, Mitigation – 2007

Chronology of Past Cooperation

- 2001-2002 – Steller sea lion research and outreach
- Sea Grant advisory committees
- Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship Program
- Fisheries research
- Aquaculture
- Sea Grant Fisheries Extension Enhancement Initiative
 - Major step forward
- November 2003 – SGA:NOAA Fisheries joint leadership meeting

Action items from Nov 2003 mtg.

- Improve NMFS representation on Sea Grant advisory committees
- More Sea Grant representation on NMFS groups, committees, panels
- Annual report to document Sea Grant - NMFS collaboration
- NMFS should seek help from Sea Grant network to prepare NEPA-required materials for regulatory documents

Action items from Nov 2003 mtg.

- NMFS Office of Protected Resources to establish lines of communication with Sea Grant extension network for outreach purposes
- Increase flexibility in issuance of permits for cooperative research using TAC research set-asides
- Convene regional planning meetings between NMFS and Sea Grant within next six months
Establish regional coordinating and planning committees for Sea Grant fisheries extension activities
- NSGO to provide NMFS with list of fisheries extension projects from Sea Grant FY03 FEE national competition deemed worthy of funding

Action items from Nov 2003 mtg.

- NSGO offers up to \$1M in FY04 to fund high priority research projects contingent on NMFS providing same amount as NSGO on projects with NMFS – university partnership
- Sea Grant and NMFS to work more effectively at improving communications
- Sea Grant Directors to be invited to biennial meetings between NMFS senior leadership and state agency directors
- Meetings between NMFS senior leadership and Sea Grant Association to be held biennially
- Continue NMFS Liaison position in NSGO

Adversaries?

- No
- Occasional hard feelings and misunderstandings
- Most problems have been people vs people problems

Competitors?

- Yes, at times
- Perceived competition for fisheries research funds
- Sea Grant fisheries research isn't focused and doesn't always address problems of concern to NMFS

Partners?

- Definitely yes
- Each has clear role, but Sea Grant has valuable skills and expertise that would benefit NMFS
- Cooperative research (e.g., Northeast) has demonstrated benefits of partnerships

Observations

- Sea Grant much better situated and equipped to do outreach than NOAA Fisheries
- No *bona fide* extension capability in NOAA Fisheries
- Because of NMFS regulatory mandate, both science and management staff are targets for criticism from unhappy constituents
- NMFS staff generally viewed as bearers of bad news associated with new regulations or with explaining results of latest stock assessment, which are often suspect in minds of some fishermen
- Sea Grant extension personnel, as university employees, are considered honest, neutral, and, most of all, not "Feds", and able to talk to fishermen about regulations without being seen as advocates or enforcers

Comments on Questions

- Why do fisheries extension staff working on the front lines, on the docks, and on the decks sometimes find themselves in interesting and uncomfortable situations with NOAA Fisheries folks and their policies?
 - NOAA Fisheries has a regulatory mandate
 - Regulatory process cumbersome and slow
 - Sometimes easy to fault NMFS and side with fishermen
- What are the differences in our missions, culture, and chain of command that might lead to this problem?
 - Compatible missions, but one is regulatory and one is not
 - NMFS is Federal; Sea Grant is hybrid

Comments on Questions

- Is Sea Grant's relationship with commercial and recreational fishermen different from that of NOAA Fisheries, and why?
 - Yes
 - University staff not "Feds", not regulatory, hence more trusted by fishermen
- Why is there often frustration by both Sea Grant Fisheries Extension and NOAA Fisheries people when trying to work together?
 - Different work and responsibilities
- What hinders working together and what can be done about it?
 - Inadequate communication
 - Personal attitudes

Food for Thought

- Each side must recognize and respect the role of the other
- Sea Grant employees must strictly maintain their “honest broker” image with fishermen
- Ways and means must be explored, at all levels, for Sea Grant and NOAA Fisheries to improve working relations and to assist each other
- More frequent meetings, at the regional and national levels, would help identify priority areas where Sea Grant extension activities could be beneficial to NOAA Fisheries
- Concerted effort and commitment by leadership on both sides are essential to make this happen

Bottom Line

The secret to a better working relationship between Sea Grant and NOAA Fisheries is improved communications and respect for the role of the other