

May 13, 1992

MEMORANDUM FOR: F/NE - Robert J. Pawlowski  
FROM: F/NEC - Allen E. Peterson  
SUBJECT: Regional Communication Plan

Following is brief information, from the Center's perspective, on the three topics in Bill Fox's April 28 memo on the subject.

**1. Assessment of Current Communication Efforts**

Constituent communications are generally satisfactory. Much of the current controversy in the marine fisheries realm is less due to ineffective communication than to unpopular messages. Anyway, the attached table lists the principal constituencies with whom we communicate and the nature and extent of the communications. In terms of "problems or shortcomings" with our recent constituent communications, several comments follow on our communications with commercial fisheries interests, commercial aquaculture interests, conservation & environmental/habitat interests, and Sea Grant.

With respect to commercial fisheries interests, we used to communicate somewhat more often and directly. For example, we used to publish articles monthly in Commercial Fisheries News, mail stock assessment information directly to fishermen, etc. Modified priorities (i.e., more emphasis on scientific publications than popular articles) and tighter budgets (i.e., trade paper publishing was on a "paid-copy" basis, and direct mailing will soon be on a "direct-charge" basis) have lessened such communications. Also, to strengthen our working relationship with the councils, especially the New England council, we now channel more of our newsworthy information directly to the councils, and thus indirectly to commercial fisheries interests.

With respect to commercial aquaculture interests, we have only recently (i.e., since the strategic plan was released) regained a mandate to become involved in this field. We have just appointed an aquaculture coordinator to deal with this area.

With respect to conservation and environmental/habitat interests, we rarely encounter "problems" with these organizations and individuals; in fact, they are often our strongest supporters. Probably for this reason, although not necessarily rightfully, we tend to take these groups for granted and consequently invest less effort in communicating with them. Also, we recently lost (due to transfer to another federal agency) our habitat coordinator -- the person on our staff most involved with communications with the environmental community -- and have had to eliminate the position due to budget concerns.

With respect to Sea Grant, we have found our interactions to be mostly a "one-way" street. We have consistently supplied Sea Grant's marine advisory agents with information and publications emanating from our research, but we see little use of our materials in their subsequent communications with our common constituents, and when we do see some use, we see little crediting of the information to us. Simply, there is little positive but much negative reinforcement for our efforts in this regard.

A more general problem, one which cannot be immediately solved and cannot be fully considered in this memo, is the relative (to other federal natural resource agencies such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, Soil Conservation Service, etc.) lack of professionally trained and experienced public communications/affairs personnel, let alone an integrated and coordinated public communications/affairs program, throughout the central office, regional offices, and fisheries science centers. Probably as a result of this lack of experienced personnel and formal programs, many communications problems are not addressed or are incorrectly addressed, and many communications opportunities are missed. Should you wish to follow up on this point, the Center has prepared two (1985 and 1990) excellent "white papers" on the issue.

## **2. Current Efforts to Improve Communications**

Two minor actions are planned which should improve our communications with one or more of our constituencies. First, we plan to expose our new aquaculture coordinator to salmon aquacultural practices in Maine to enhance his role in the finfish aquaculture field. Additionally, we plan to add salmon aquaculture to the agenda of the annual shellfish biology workshop, transforming it into an aquaculture workshop.

Second, we indicated in a September 20, 1990, memo to Bill Fox that we would soon be reducing the supervisory and administrative workload of our information services chief, as well as permitting

her to attend many management-level meetings, to enhance her role in public affairs. This should benefit communications primarily with news organizations and secondarily with all other constituencies.

### **3. Draft Communications Plan and Strategy**

We see short-term controversy mostly confined to our relations with commercial fisheries interests and focused on the credibility of our: (1) demersal finfish stock assessments; (2) marine mammal-fishery interaction analyses; and (3) vessel-specific fishing effort data.

To deal with the first item of potential controversy above, we have begun to increase our representation at council meetings and hearings where demersal finfish management will be discussed. We will also publicize (Research Highlights, News Releases, etc.) the broad-based participation (federal & state government, councils, academia, etc.) at stock assessment workshops, not just the information and advice emanating from those workshops. To deal with the second item above, we similarly plan to publicize the broad-based participation at marine mammal workshops (e.g., the recent harbor porpoise workshop). To deal with the third item above, we are tentatively planning an audit of our data on vessel-specific fishing effort by returning the appropriate data to each vessel captain for concurrence or correction.

Two suggestions came from our staff in the course of developing this memo, both of which will be considered in the context of our overall priorities. First, since the Region-Center marine recreational fisheries coordinator: (1) provides a single point of contact for the marine recreational fisheries community to obtain information, register complaints, etc.; (2) through a steering committee, alerts the community to potential or actual changes in management regulations, and enlists the support of the community for our research, management, and/or enforcement activities, etc.; and (3) through the mere existence of the position, provides some visible evidence of our support for marine recreational fisheries interests, it has been suggested that we consider creating an analogous position and steering committee for our relations with the commercial fisheries community where our communications are perceived to be less effective.

Second, the likelihood that all participants in many fisheries will soon have to be permitted/licensed on an annual basis means that we will likely have up-to-date mailing addresses for each such participant in order to send applications, permits/licenses, notices of regulation changes, etc., giving us one of the two

essentials (the other being funds for printing and postage) for instituting a comprehensive direct mailing capability. Next, since beginning on October 1 we will have to pay for mailing each piece of mail, and since each piece of mail will be "metered," we will often have extra room in each mailing (i.e., until the weight of the piece trips the next higher postage level) for additional written communication. In other words, we could begin direct mailing -- in a piggyback mode -- of information on recent stock assessments, marine mammal - fishery interaction analyses, etc., for no more than the cost of xeroxing the information. The above information and observations should be adequate for you to begin preparing a regionwide response to Bill Fox on the subject.

Attachment (1)

Synopsis of Constituent Communication  
by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center

---

Constituency	Nature and Extent of Communication
New England & Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils	Center has a designated liaison to the councils. Semi-annual stock assessment workshops permit council technical staff to review Center stock assessment activities. Center-Region budget discussions are occasionally attended by council leadership. The councils as a whole as well as many council members individually receive a copy of each issue of the Center's irregular Technical Memorandum (including the annual Status-of-the-Stocks Report and the annual Indexed Bibliography of Center Publications, Reports, and Abstracts), monthly Research Highlights, annual End-of-Year Report, irregular News Releases, variable (i.e., 2-4 times per year) Fishermen's Report, and semi-annual Shark Tagger Newsletter.
State fisheries agencies in the Northeast region	Center attempts to be represented at major meetings of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and its committees (e.g., Northern Shrimp Technical Committee). Semi-annual stock assessment workshops permit state marine fishery scientists to review Center stock assessment activities. The agencies as a whole as well as many agency members individually receive the same items as council members.
Commercial fisheries interests	Center attempts to be represented at major meetings of commercial fisheries interests (e.g., Maine Fishermen's Forum). Considerable communication occurs one-on-one between the Center's port/sea samplers and commercial fishermen. Infrequently, Center writes articles for trade papers (e.g., Commercial Fisheries News) and prepares exhibits for trade shows (e.g., Fish Expo). Many commercial fisheries organizations and individuals receive copies of each issue of the Status-of-the-Stocks Report, Research Highlights, End-of-Year Report, Fishermen's Report, and Shark Tagger Newsletter.

Commercial  
aquaculture  
interests

Center has recently appointed an aquaculture coordinator. An annual shellfish biology workshop and annual juvenile oyster disease workshop are held for the Northeast's commercial shellfish aquaculture interests. Many commercial aquaculture organizations and individuals receive copies of each issue of the Research Highlights and End-of-Year Report.

Recreational  
fisheries  
interests

Region-Center combined have a designated liaison (coordinator) to the marine recreational fisheries community in the Northeast region. The coordinator oversees the Northeast Marine Recreational Fisheries Steering Committee (less than 20 members) which is a select body of leaders in the regional marine recreational fisheries community. The coordinator also maintains a mailing list of key members (about 50) of that community. Regular meetings are held with the steering committee to share information of concern to each other. Regular mailings to addressees on the mailing list include summaries of pertinent council activities, copies of pertinent Technical Memorandum, etc. Many marine recreational fisheries organizations and individuals receive a copy of each issue of the Technical Memorandum (including the annual Status-of-the-Stocks Report), Research Highlights, End-of-Year Report, and Shark Tagger Newsletter.

Conservation and  
environmental/  
habitat interests

Deputy Center Director has functionally filled void created by elimination of habitat coordinator position, and has significantly raised visibility of habitat communications through representation on environmental/habitat organizations such as the Gulf of Maine Council on the Maine Environment. Center maintains a 250-name mailing list of environmental science & health reporters, and infrequently mails "briefing kits" to each reporter on all of the Center's research findings associated with a single topic (e.g., seafood nutritional composition). Many conservation and environmental/habitat organizations and individuals receive a copy

of each issue of the Status-of-the-Stocks Report, Research Highlights, and End-of-Year Report.

General public

Center maintains a public aquarium in Woods Hole which hosts about 200,000 visitors from the general public each year. Current exhibits in the aquarium focus on seafood as health food, and on the problem of marine litter/debris. Occasional public demonstrations of seafood handling and preparation -- particularly of underutilized species -- are held in the aquarium. Over 250 general (i.e., targeted at the general public) news organizations and individuals in the Northeast receive copies of each issue of the Center's Status-of-the-Stocks Report, Research Highlights, End-of-Year Report, and News Releases. Occasional open houses are held by each Center laboratory.

K-12 students

Center operates a marine science educational program for about 7,000 K-12 students through its aquarium. The program involves day-trips of whole classes during which the regular teacher and an aquarium staff member collaborate to teach basic principles of marine science; high school students are introduced to the principles of fishery resource management. Smaller, informal educational efforts are conducted by all Center laboratories.

News organizations

Center maintains a mailing list of over 500 general and special news organizations and individuals in the Northeast. Addressees receive copies of each issue of the Status-of-the-Stocks Report, Research Highlights, End-of-Year Report, and News Releases. Occasionally, news items are placed with specific news organizations or individuals. Rarely, news conferences are held when an item of breaking news occurs.

Sea Grant

Center produces an annual Research Directory of its research programs, projects, personnel, etc., which is distributed to all Sea Grant programs in the Northeast. In addition, all Sea Grant programs in the Northeast, as well as most marine advisory

personnel, receive copies of each issue of the Status-of-the-Stocks Report, the Indexed Bibliography of Center Publications, Reports, and Abstracts, the Research Highlights, the End-of-Year Report, and News Releases.