

<b><i>NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE POLICY DIRECTIVE 39-103</i></b> December 2, 2016	
<b><i>External Communications and Affairs</i></b>	
<b><i>NOAA FISHERIES SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY</i></b>	
<b>NOTICE:</b> This publication is available at: <a href="http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/directives/">http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/directives/</a> .	
<b>OPR:</b> OC – K. Naughten <b>Type of Issuance:</b> Revision	<b>Certified by:</b> OC – K. Naughten
<b><i>SUMMARY OF REVISIONS: Added clarification on services and roles and responsibilities, and updated with a new serial number.</i></b>	

## **NOAA Fisheries Social Media Policy**

### **Objective**

The *NOAA Fisheries Social Media Policy* is intended to complement the Department of Commerce (DOC) policy and provide additional policy guidance for NOAA Fisheries staff on the approval and use of social media and Web 2.0 platforms. The *NOAA Fisheries Social Media Policy* also provides specifics on the management and use of those platforms by Fisheries staff to maintain consistency in how we use these tools.

### **Introduction**

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter provide powerful communications tools for engaging our target audiences and amplifying our messaging. While social media can serve as additional channels for NOAA Fisheries content, all content for social media (including images) must be posted on and accessible from an official government website prior to posting on a social media site. Some, but not all, social media platforms have DOC approved terms of service for use by sub-agencies and, by extension, NOAA Fisheries. Only social media platforms that have reviewed terms of service can be used by NOAA Fisheries offices.

In addition, NOAA Fisheries and DOC require approval of all public facing mobile applications using the same process as social media applications.

Offices and programs must obtain approval by NOAA Fisheries, NOAA, and DOC to use any online third-party services. Currently, DOC's policy on the [Approval and Use of Social Media and Web 2.0](#) provides specific guidance for operating units and DOC employees on the use of social media, and NOAA provides additional guidance in its [Social Media Handbook](#). All NOAA Fisheries social media accounts must adhere to the DOC policy.

### **Establishing Social Media Accounts**

The process for establishing a new social media account begins with an operating plan (see Appendix

A for specific procedures), prepared by a regional communications lead before being reviewed and approved by the NOAA Fisheries Communications Office, NOAA Fisheries Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO), NOAA, and DOC.

### **DOC-Approved Social Media Platforms**

At this time, NOAA Fisheries accepts the following DOC-approved social media platforms and technology for use by regional offices and science centers:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Flickr
- Public facing mobile applications (apps)
- Blogs (see guidance about blogs)

The NOAA Fisheries Communications Office is open to discussing and approving additional platforms approved by DOC, provided these new accounts meet a specific need and there is value in investing in the new platform. For more information on the DOC social media approved services, visit this [page](#).

### **Important Note on Official Agency-Run Social Media Accounts**

All Fisheries social media platforms are for official agency use—not personal use. When an employee posts content to a Fisheries social media channel, that employee is acting in an official capacity on behalf of the agency (see [DOC policy](#) for more details). NOAA employees using social media in an official capacity must do so only on approved accounts and may only use official email or other contact information for the creation and management of those accounts. In addition to helping NOAA and DOC track how many accounts it possesses, using only approved accounts will ensure that NOAA and DOC know who is responsible for each account.

Employees using a social media account in an official capacity should conduct themselves in a professional, courteous, and honest manner in all public communications. Posted information on official social media accounts should be accurate and factual. Although there is often a trade-off between speed of communication and accuracy, employees speaking in an official capacity should take all appropriate steps to ensure that the information that they provide is correct and cleared through the appropriate channels.

In general, employees on official social media accounts may only post from agency-approved accounts information that represents official agency positions (i.e., not personal opinion). Please remember:

- **DO NOT** use or post materials protected by copyright, trademark, patent, trade secret, data rights, or related protection for intellectual property.
- **DO NOT** post any personally identifiable information unless disclosure has been officially authorized by NOAA General Counsel and the DOC General Law Division.
- **DO NOT** endorse commercial products or services.
- **DO NOT** post commercial advertisements or otherwise engage in activities that might lead

to a conflict of interest; appearance of endorsement, affiliation, or authorization; or otherwise lead the public to believe that your operating unit supports the views, products, services, etc. of third parties. Only “like” or follow organizations that have a similar mission or goals. When considering demonstrating support for local/community efforts or organizations, please contact the General Counsel Ethics Office to ensure that support complies with relevant DOC and ethics guidance.

- **DO NOT** like or follow individual accounts. Social media managers on NOAA accounts should not comment on, share, retweet, or repost content from any personal, individual accounts.
- **DO NOT** include surveys, polls, questionnaires, etc. on official social media and websites unless the questions have received Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Paperwork Reduction Act clearance.
- **DO NOT** include requests to contact a member of Congress, a jurisdiction, or an official of any government (federal, state, or local) to favor or oppose any legislation, law, or appropriation. These activities are prohibited by the Anti-Lobbying Act.
- **DO NOT** establish relationships with working groups or affiliations that may reveal sensitive information about one’s job responsibilities.

**If a NOAA Fisheries social media account is not operated in accordance with the operating plan—or the DOC and NOAA Fisheries policies—the account will be shut down by the NOAA Fisheries Office of Communications.**

#### **More Guidelines on Use and Management**

- Fisheries social media content should be factual and reflect the agency’s position, policies, findings, and information.
- Because the baseline audience for all Fisheries social media channels is the general public, the information posted should be in plain language.
- The management of Fisheries social media accounts and the clearance/approval process for posting content are the responsibility of a designated point of contact as stated in the operating plan.
  - For headquarters/national Fisheries accounts, the point of contact is the Director of the NOAA Fisheries Communications Office or a designee in the Fisheries Communications Office at headquarters.
  - For each regional office or science center account, the point of contact is the respective member of the Fisheries Regional Communications Council or a designee as specified in the operating plan for that individual social media platform.
- Social media account holders must secure their NOAA-owned accounts on third-party platforms using all available options provided by that service. At a minimum, such accounts should follow DOC policy requirements:
  - All social media accounts must be tied to an official (@noaa.gov) email address; use of personal email accounts is prohibited.
  - Social media account holders must follow the specific IT Security Guidelines in the DOC policy.
- Most social media sites have added additional security controls and, if available, social media coordinators should use them.

For further information on implementation and guidelines, refer to [How to Contribute Content to NOAA Fisheries Social Media](#) on InsideFisheries.

### **Social Media Commenting Policy on Official Government Accounts**

- All social media accounts with a “comment” function require diligent monitoring. All Fisheries accounts must publish, reflect, and enforce NOAA Fisheries’ standard [commenting guidelines](#), also available on [InsideFisheries](#), the agency’s national intranet site. Only publish comments that adhere to the published comment policy. Operating units should post commenting guidelines prominently, when technically able to do so, and apprise public users of it regularly. Contact the Fisheries Communications Office for any further guidance.
- Fisheries staff who manage social media accounts must remove comments that violate the comment guidelines, including:
  - Comments regarding a political party or a candidate in a partisan political campaign (a campaign in which a candidate is identified by political party)
  - Requests to contact a member of Congress or official of any government, to favor or oppose any legislation, law, or appropriation.
  - Advertisements, endorsements, or promotions.
  - Vulgar or abusive language, personal attacks of any kind, or offensive terms targeting individuals or groups.

### **Social Media Rules of Behavior for Personal Accounts**

If you use personal or unofficial social media accounts, please follow the NOAA Fisheries Rules of Behavior and Disclaimer Language (Appendix B). If you are using posting information about government-funded work to personal social media, you must include the social media disclaimer.

### **Resources**

Refer to the following resources when using and managing social media accounts:

[DOC Social Media Policy](#)

[DOC Social Media Guidebook](#)

[NOAA Social Media Handbook](#)

[NOAA Fisheries Comment Policy](#)

Approval signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eileen Sobeck', written over a horizontal line.

Eileen Sobeck, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries

Date