

**Recreational Saltwater Fishing Summit
Alexandria, VA April 16, 2010
OPENING REMARKS of ERIC SCHWAAB**

NOAA Fisheries AA will serve as master of ceremonies at the outset of the meeting. He will welcome the attendees, offer substantive opening remarks, introduce the facilitators and hand-off the summit to the facilitators.

- 1) Welcome and Opening Remarks**
- 2) Introduction of the Summit facilitators**

1) WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

Welcome to Alexandria and to the Recreational Saltwater Fishing Summit.

That we are here today is a reflection of NOAA's, Dr. Lubchenco's, and my commitment to proactively engage you, the recreational fishing community, with the ultimate goal of improving stewardship of our living marine resources.

I know many of you from my previous involvement in natural resource and fisheries management with the State of Maryland, from

my work at the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, or through my service on the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee, but for those of you whom I have not yet met, my name is Eric Schwaab and I am the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries at NOAA.

I want to first express my appreciation to all of you here today for the time, effort, and expense associated with traveling here to participate in the Recreational Saltwater Fishing Summit. Thank you for coming. It is important to us that you are here.

I also want to extend a heartfelt thanks to the staff of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, especially Laura Leach, without whom this meeting would not have been possible. From my staff, I want to specifically acknowledge the Herculean efforts of Forbes Darby and Gordon Colvin, who have lived and breathed this summit for the last few months. Please join me in giving Laura, Forbes, and

Gordon a round of applause. And I want to recognize Andy Winer, Director of External Affairs for NOAA, who many of you have gotten the opportunity to work with in recent months, and Russ Dunn, our new National Policy Advisor for Recreational Fisheries, who you will get to know going forward from today.

Next, a brief administrative note about our schedule. Dr. Lubchenco, the NOAA Administrator, had planned to offer opening remarks here today. However, she was asked by the President to participate in a related event celebrating America's Great Outdoors, where her participation will highlight the importance of our coasts, and recreational fishing to all Americans. To enable her to carry her message regarding this summit to the President in person, we shuffled the agenda and she will be joining us at 1:00 pm today.

I understand that many of you would rather be out on the water doing what you, and all of us in this room, love to do—fishing. I want to acknowledge taking particular heat from my friends in Maryland – as tomorrow marks the opening of the spring striped bass season there.

At last count, I understand that we have roughly 170 participants here today from all around the country. The signal that your participation in this summit sends to me is a powerful one: we have many issues of mutual interest to work on.

I participated - from where you sit - in the last recreational fishing summit held by NOAA Fisheries, in St. Petersburg, FL, in 2005 and I understand the feeling that NOAA Fisheries fell short of the commitments made at that meeting, and particularly in follow up on the subsequent recreational fishing strategic plan. It's this past

experience that at least partially explains one of the pre-summit survey's starkest conclusions - you don't have much confidence that NOAA will live up to its promises.

I'll be honest, it's not the kind of news someone coming into a new job likes to hear! But it was not a complete surprise to me. I knew what we were up against when I took this job as head of NOAA Fisheries. People ask me why I left the state to take on this job. It's for the same reasons that many of you are here today. Despite the history and doubts, we realize there is a bright future worth fighting for – and it is attainable. And there is a belief that I – that you, that we – can have a hand at shaping that future.

I would like to see three outcomes from this summit:

- 1) to walk away with a clear and common understanding of the issues of concern and some sense of the relative importance of those issues, nationally, regionally and strategically,**

- 2) to outline a process by which we will continue to work together on these issues, and**

- 3) to identify steps that can be taken to address these concerns; this will form the basis of an action agenda.**

Reading over the pre-summit survey results and drawing on my history with members of the recreational fishing community and recent conversations with many of you, I know the issues we'll be talking about over the next couple of days are complex:

- Catch and effort data**

- Stock assessments**

- **Access and allocation**
- **Socio-economic data**
- **Habitat degradation**

--and this is not an exhaustive list.

With so many interwoven issues, I often find it helpful to break them down into distinct and manageable components to assure we are addressing the real problem. The summit offers us an opportunity to slow down and do just that. To parse issues, identify the root causes of problems, and formulate a plan to jointly address them.

Also, too often we get stuck in our past ways of thinking – about framing problems and about solutions. I mentioned striped bass, and it might be useful as an example. Today’s fishery is recognized as a national success story, where science, cooperative management and

strong support from fishermen led us from a depressed stock and failing fisheries to robust stocks, stable fisheries and (generally) happy fishermen. But today's fishery looks very different from the fishery that existed in the 1950's, 60's and 70's. It recognizes productive limits of the stock, it recognizes the need for vigilance in science and management, and it recognizes a variety of ecosystem factors that influence long-term success.

The first step in achieving clarity and solving problems is honest conversation. We have structured the summit to provide a venue for respectful, yet frank back and forth about the issues that concern us all.

We are here with a view toward the future, intent to build on previous successes, while learning from and avoiding mistakes of the

past. Over the next two days, we'll have some focused discussions – about our desired outcomes, and pathways toward those outcomes.

You will also hear me talk as clearly as possible about our commitment to end overfishing and rebuild overfished stocks. We will also be open about other constraints upon us – our need to work through the council system, and to comply with a variety of applicable statutes.

These aren't excuses for inaction. There will be things we can do to resolve issues of concern to the recreational community, and there will be things we can't do. When we can't do something, we will note that and work with you to find alternative solutions. This does not mean we will meet with success in every situation or be able to resolve every grievance, but I will hold my staff and myself

accountable for making every honest effort to listen with an open mind and work with you to find the best possible solution.

While I look forward to the results of our conversations here, and to improved dialogue, I want to emphasize that from our perspective, dialogue itself is not enough. Re-opening this conversation is not the end we seek, but is rather only a means to an end— we must use the results of this summit to develop and implement an action agenda capable of addressing our joint interests.

There is also a need to begin looking down the road—now—to a time when our fisheries have recovered and to start crafting a long-term vision for our fisheries. So, part of my challenge to you is not just resolution of the immediate issues before us today, but to work with us in thinking about the future – the difficult decisions don't end when the fishery is rebuilt. All of our thinking—NOAA's, the states,

the councils, and the recreational and commercial communities— must evolve as we move forward. One of the lessons we learned from the striped bass recovery is that, even with a completely recovered biomass, we could not restore all of the uses, to all of the users of the stock that had been occurring prior to its collapse. As we set goals for recovered fisheries, we will need to address what uses— recreational and commercial—they can sustain. One of the tools we can use to help answer these questions is a better understanding of the human dimensions of recreational fishing.

I want to challenge you to think differently about some of the big tools and approaches available to us today. Tools that I am sure we will talk about – like Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning and catch shares. I know in this room there is fear, skepticism and in some cases outright animosity toward these and other concepts. But there are also people here who see opportunity in planning and in thinking

about adding new tools for addressing allocation. I would only ask you to listen carefully and consider the opportunity at the same time you evaluate the peril.

As I draw to close, I want to note that a key principle to any successful effort is follow-through — even the best laid plans will fail without sufficient follow-through. I have already made this concept, and my commitment to the idea of follow-through, unmistakably clear to my staff. I commit to you that under my leadership, and with the support of Dr. Lubchenco and your help, NOAA Fisheries will focus on addressing the issues of concern to the recreational fishing community with the utmost disciplined attention. And while I do not want to put too much pressure on him in his first few weeks on the job, Russ Dunn will be our point person in ensuring daily attention from the top of NOAA Fisheries to follow through on actions we identify here and others that will follow.

But Russ will not be alone. I want to acknowledge the 22 newly appointed members of the MAFAC Recreational Fisheries Working Group, most of whom you will see here at the summit. If you would please stand up so we can see who you are. This group will also help us keep the focus on your interests and our action plan. I look forward to working with you here and in the days ahead.

I would also like to ask our NMFS Recreational Coordinators to rise so that the participants can recognize you as well. Many of them will serve as your table moderators and recorders over the next two days.

Thank you and before I introduce the facilitators, let me just say people have told me that one of the underlying problems is that NOAA Fisheries just doesn't "get it" when it comes to recreational fishing interests -- that NOAA doesn't fully appreciate the social or

economic contributions recreational fishing makes to this nation. I can assure you that given my lifelong passion for recreational fishing, my background with the State of Maryland and with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, I do get it. During my tenure as Assistant Administrator, I am committed to moving NOAA Fisheries towards an understanding of the value that a strong partnership between government and the nation's sports fishermen can have.

INTRODUCTION OF THE FACILITATORS

Now, I would like to introduce to you Bob Jones and Jeff Blair from the Florida Conflict Resolution Consortium Consensus Center at Florida State University, who have assisted my staff in organizing this summit, and will be serving as facilitators for the next two days.

Bob, Jeff, if you would, please come to the microphone and say a little something about your background, what you/we will be doing the next few days, and touch on the principles for working together.

Thank you.