

Dr. William Hogarth
Talking Points to the New Council Members
Regional Fishery Management Council Training, October/November 2006

Welcome, I am so pleased to see so many of the newly appointed Regional Fishery Management Council Members in attendance. This is the third year of this revised training orientation session. In 2004, two ocean commissions published their reports. Both of these reports concluded that more training for council members was a necessity. We agreed and revised the orientation session, previously given only every two years, to the program you are attending over the next few days. We moved so fast in fact that the U.S. Ocean Action Plan did not need to include new council member training. The White House was very pleased with NOAA's proactive action on this issue.

We recognize that the materials you will cover over the next few days are comprehensive and numerous. The goal is that they will provide for you most of the tools you will need to competently execute your duties as a member of fishery management council.

Tomorrow, you will attend a joint session with the Deputy Secretary of Commerce, Dr. Sampson. The good news is that this is the first time a Deputy Secretary has addressed both the council chairs and new council members. In this case, we have to remember that the Deputy Secretary will address the need for Councils to effectively discharge their responsibilities. The goal of this Administration is to end overfishing and rebuild our stocks. When a Council delays in preparing a FMP or its amendment, Secretarial action is required. Summer Flounder and Red Snapper are specific examples of this that the Deputy Secretary may mention.

I want to share with you a question that was asked of me and it appears to be very indicative of the atmosphere under which we are operating: "If the Councils aren't willing to make the hard decisions, why do we need them?"

Councils can have a very positive value in ensuring proper use of this important renewable resource, as authorized by the Magnuson-Stevens Act and guided by the National Standards. The Councils' job, your job, is about making choices. Your keystone choice is in how much resource to use now and how much to leave for later use. Your goal, the goal of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, is to provide resource sustainability based on the best scientific information available.

Fisheries stewardship is often difficult. You are considering the current gain even--the continuance of a fishery--balanced off against the long term health of the resource and the fishery. You will need to make hard choices, especially when stocks are being overfished and information is uncertain. With many voices discussing how much to harvest and who gets it, you will be making decisions about open access or limited access to these resources.

The bottom line is that you, as new council members, must meet the requirements and standards of all relevant statutes. You need to do this in an expeditious manner to end overfishing and continuously monitor the progress in rebuilding stocks.

You are the future and our nation is depending on you to assure sustainable, healthy marine fisheries for the benefit of the entire nation.

Thank you.