

October 10, 2002

VADM Conrad C Lautenbacher, Jr., US Navy Retired
Undersecretary of Commerce for Oceans & Atmosphere
US Dept of Commerce NOAA
14th and Constitution Ave, NW, Rm 5128
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Admiral Lautenbacher:

I was very encouraged by your comments at the September 13th Boston meeting regarding Trawlgate. Since then a number of things have happened.

A group of experienced fishermen went on the video cruise to observe the net in action. These experienced fishermen found that the trawl warp offset was not the only problem with the survey gear, and possibly not the most significant problem. (Please see attachment A)

Next a two-day workshop was held in Woods Hole to review the findings. This workshop developed a Consensus statement regarding the survey issues. Mr. Boreman stated that the survey was broken and that discussions regarding notifying the Court were beginning. As this was the opinion of the experienced fishermen in attendance, this was greeted with a collective sigh of relief. They knew that any one of these problems could cause significant changes in catch rates, species mix, and age class representation. They also knew that fixing only one or two of these problems and then testing would not give viable results because the unfixed issue could and most likely would, mask the effects of the other fixed issues.

I had been planning on writing you and John Boreman as the industry is extremely confused as to the plans to implement the Consensus agreement from the Woods Hole workshop. I also was curious as to the timing and content of any notice to the court.

But, meanwhile I found out that the Albatross IV went back out on the survey with the faulty doors and net. This fall survey will not be comparable to the prior surveys (because they fixed the trawl wire offset issue) and will not be comparable to any survey with tuned gear (all problems fixed) and will not be comparable to any future survey using different gear and procedure. This seriously brings to question whether the Center is entering this effort in good faith.

- Ignoring expert opinion because it came from the fishing industry (as well as the lack of the most basic procedures to assure consistency of gear) got us all in this mess.

- Ignoring known problems with the gear and doing the survey anyway calls into question the scientific validity of any Center work.

Tuesday night a subset of the participants in the Workshop received notice of a meeting this morning (October 10th) in Woods Hole. Where is open and transparent? Have they so quickly forgotten that these men are fishermen, thus they are not waiting around for the beck and call of the Center? There are a number of people who would have been interested in going if given notice and input into date and location.

The purpose of this October 10th meeting is unclear. The experienced fishermen have already stated and thought the Center agreed that it was useless to only address one of the problems. It is clear from the email announcing this meeting that only the warp issue will be addressed. It is unclear what purpose this would serve. The email states “...*we would not expect this experiment to provide estimates of calibration coefficients to adjust current survey indices for any warp-length effect.*” which gives the impression that this is just a step in the process. The New England Fishery Management Council (while not notified nor invited to the October 10th meeting) has been told that the results of this cruise may well allow the Center to decide which sensitivity analysis is appropriate.

Let me restate that without fixing all of the current trawl survey gear problems – that is those gear issues that make the difference between a tuned up set of trawl survey gear and the current unbelievably sloppy gear, as opposed to what style and type of gear might be best appropriate to conduct this type of survey – **there can be no valid results.** The masking effect of the unfixed element can be huge. Attached (attachment #B) is a list of questions that industry members who could make this October 10th meeting will try to raise and obtain answers. These are extremely serious questions. How can anyone proceed until there is a clear understanding of when significant changes occurred? I understand there is an overwhelming desire to retrieve the broken trawl data. But anything less than a well thought out process will get us right back to where we are now - with **junk science.**

I also understand that Mr. Boreman will be explaining to the Council what he meant by broken. It was clear what was meant at the workshop and the industry agreed. I also have heard that there is now no intent to inform the Court. I do not understand where and when the totally independent review you promised will occur.

Please clarify for my clouded mind. I cannot conceive that the Administration is encouraging junk science. While what little time I get to spend in my office is extremely valuable to me, I am willing to come to Washington to discuss this matter with you, if you would find it helpful.

In hopes of useful science,

Barbara Duer Stevenson