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An Open Letter to NOAA Fisheries Assistant Administrator Chris Oliver about the resumption of Observer coverage



8/7/20, Mr. Oliver. Recently you sent out an announcement about the resumption of Observer coverage set to begin on August 14th in fisheries where coverage had been suspended due to the Corona virus outbreak for the last 5 months. Personally I find your reasons for the resumption of observer coverage to be not only reckless, but dangerous to the health and safety of the American fishermen who make their living from the sea.

On a national level the Corona virus has now embarked on a second wave of infections that may be more dangerous than the first wave. Additionally, new research only raises more questions about its spread, while States that have lifted restrictions have re-imposed them, and those that didn't have

restrictions are now facing massive infection rates, resulting in more closures.

Yet you, in your infinite bureaucratic knowledge of what is right and what is wrong, think that at this time it is vitally important that observers be placed on fishing vessels where they can endanger the health of not only the crewmen but their families.

Interestingly, you have not put your own employees at risk. You have cancelled trawl survey's for the remainder of this year so as not to risk their exposure to this lethal disease. This despite the fact that the NOAA trawl survey vessels are state of the art, and their crew could actually be quarantined before a trip to assure their safety. I'm sure they would be happy to collect two weeks of pay for sitting around watching TV somewhere.

You justify your decision on the fact that the observers will abide by whatever standards the fishing industry abides by. HELLO, Mr. Oliver, the fishing industry on the east coast is a bunch of family owned small boat operators who don't have any such thing as standards, except that they know their crew, and trust them to behave responsibly. Or else we CAN them. That's where you actually fire someone, because they are not doing their job, or are endangering the rest of the crew. Being a lifelong bureaucrat I'm sure you're not familiar with that concept.

So my question is; why is a government employee, who actually produces nothing except politically motivated job destroying regulations, more valuable than a fisherman who actually produces something of value? I'd love to see you try to do this to a farmer. You'd be on the unemployment line in short order. The fishing industry on the other hand is just a disorganized bunch of freeloaders raping the ocean for profit. There's nothing noble about feeding people if the energy industry is involved.

Hence you are willing to risk the lives of thousands of fishermen and their families so that the observer providers can remain solvent. It's well known within the industry how a certain former regional administrator pushed for observer's in all fisheries while serving in his official capacity, and then when he left that position created his own observer company to profiteer off of his previous work. One of his main supporters during that time was the PEW charitable trusts, hence the energy connection, and their subsequent villainization of the fishing industry.

So answer me, is a government employee's life more valuable than a fisherman's? Because that is exactly how your mandate comes across to everyone in the fishing industry. The spring and fall annual survey's by the NEFSC are the backbone of the science used to estimate population dynamics of every stock on the east coast, yet you simply blow them off so as not to endanger government employees, but you are more than willing to risk the lives of fishermen for data that is totally redundant, and has minimal effect on stock assessments. Observers have been onboard fishing vessels on the east coast since the 1980's, day after day, same boats, same tows, same catch, but somehow this is vitally important information worth risking lives for.

There is nothing vital about it except that it is typical bureaucratic empire building, your science sucks, so you need more information, except that even with more information your science still sucks. President Trump put forth an edict for all government agency's to reduce the regulatory burden on our country's industries two years ago. Perhaps you at NOAA didn't see that memo. Placing observers onboard fishing vessels in the middle of a pandemic the likes of which has not been seen in our lifetimes is not reducing regulations on industry. It is endangering industry. Unless you want to be looked at like Governor's Cuomo, and Murphy who thought it was a good idea to put Covid sick people into nursing homes, with the easily predictable genocide that caused, I suggest you cancel all observer coverage before you and the observer providers predictably end up being sued for manslaughter.

In the meantime maybe the GAO should do a thorough review of the Fishery science centers and the end result of their work. This would be called a cost assessment benefit analysis, which most industry's do on a regular basis, to weed out useless protocol's so they can actually produce a profit, while government just simply demands more money for less results and always claim they need even more money, and that's why their results suck. Instead of dreaming up ways to increase the staff at NOAA, maybe you need to be thinking of practical ways to reduce the regulatory burden on not just the fishing industry, but the fishery managers. Fishery management could be really simple if certain vested interests weren't so intent on making it incomprehensible. It's time for a serious look at what is going on at the Commerce department and their minions in NOAA/NMFS.

Thanks, Jim Lovgren