

July 11, 2005

Note for all NOAA Fisheries Employees:

You have recently received two e-mail messages from Asst. Administrator Hogarth (June 30 and July 7) denigrating the results of a survey that Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) and the Union of Concerned Scientists conducted among your colleagues. The survey found NOAA Fisheries scientists in the field and regional offices reporting –

- Frequent political interference with scientific determinations;
- Fear of being candid about resource-related concerns inside and particularly outside the office; and
- Low levels of trust and respect for agency management and deep concern about political selection of Regional Directors.

You can see the complete survey results as well as selected essays from your colleagues on the PEER web site: [http://www.peer.org/news/news\\_id.php?row\\_id=542](http://www.peer.org/news/news_id.php?row_id=542)

We agree with Dr. Hogarth's statement in his July 7 e-mail that "all [NOAA Fisheries] decisions must be based on the best scientific information available and must ultimately meet our Congressional mandates to rebuild and sustainably manage our living marine resources for the long-term utilization and enjoyment by all United States citizens." However, Dr. Hogarth's reaction was troubling for the following reasons:

### **1. He Only Seems Open to Good News**

Regardless of his methodological quibbling, the answers and essays were from NOAA Fisheries professional staff. Whether voiced by ten or by a thousand, Dr. Hogarth should be willing to take concerns raised by NOAA scientists seriously rather than dismissing them because they conflict with an agency-sponsored feedback program.

In his latest message, Dr. Hogarth refers to the results of the survey as "accusations" and goes on to invite you to contact him personally to discuss this "serious and important" issue. If Dr. Hogarth reflexively dismisses bad news why would he think that employees are going to give him candid feedback?

### **2. He Is Patronizing of NOAA Fisheries Scientists**

In the June 30 e-mail Dr. Hogarth wrote:

"I can say, however, with strong confidence that we do not change our scientific documents at NOAA Fisheries Service, as the survey implied."

In fact, some of your colleagues reported precisely, not by implication, that the agency does change scientific documents. Dr. Hogarth continued:

“Any decision made in a natural resource agency of this size and importance involves many factors. Every decision we make starts with a scientific base. After that, we look at many other factors before we make final decisions, and perhaps this makes the rationale for decisions unclear to some. I encourage you to talk with your leadership and ask questions where you do not understand the basis for management decisions.”

PEER believes that the scientists who answered the questionnaire know perfectly well what other “factors” are at play. Many of the decisions made in accordance with the Endangered Species Act are supposed to be guided by the science and not subject to management discretion based upon political objections of stakeholders.

### **3. He Mischaracterized the PEER Survey**

In his initial message to all employees Dr. Hogarth dismisses the survey because it did not include the Science Centers and laboratories. For this survey, PEER deliberately included only scientists at regional and field offices because that is where the rubber meets the road in terms of management using science to formulate policy. PEER is aware that the scientists who received this survey are professionals, many with master’s degrees and PhDs, contrary to the characterization conveyed by Steven Murawski, chief science advisor at NOAA Fisheries, to the Associated Press that the survey respondents are primarily low-level staff.

If employees from other parts of NOAA Fisheries wish us to conduct a similar survey especially geared toward the function of their units, please feel free to contact us, on your own time of course.

Sincerely,

Jeff Ruch  
PEER Executive Director

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