

FEDERAL COMMERCIAL FISHERY ADMINISTRATION
IN THE UNITED STATES

by

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ABSTRACT

The paper describes the origin, structure and function of the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries and the coordination of the work of the Bureau with other government agencies directly or indirectly concerned with one or more aspects of the fishery industry. It emphasises that the basis of good fishery administration is a sound national policy geared to the potential of the fishery resources and to the national interest.

The paper also states that an appropriate place in the overall governmental organization is as necessary to effective fishery administration as is a forthright fishery policy.

In U.S.A. the national government prefers to leave to private initiative all those functions which private enterprise can perform or next, to use the governmental level most concerned with the problem.

The commercial fishery industry and educational institutions are expected to make their appropriate contributions to the overall task.

International organizations, and UN Specialized Agencies such as FAO have contributed materially to the increasing knowledge and understanding of fishery problems. International Fisheries Commissions have offered effective means to ensure cooperation between governments in the conservation of jointly exploited resources.

The need for the careful assessment of problems and the establishment of appropriate priorities in programing is stressed.

Most fishery administrative organizations in the United States—whether Federal or State—

were established with only the staff and resources necessary to meet pressing fishery problems which could not be handled well with the existing governmental machinery. Growth occurred thereafter as crises developed, additional knowledge was needed, or pertinent legislation was enacted.

For example, the Federal fishery organization in United States began in 1871 as a Commission established to investigate the "decrease of food fishes of the seacoasts and lakes of the United States and to suggest remedial measures." From this modest beginning, which contemplated biological research and the collection of statistics, there has developed, in the ensuing 89 years, a substantial Federal fishery administration whose primary concern is the material contribution the fishery resources make to the Nation's economy. Instead of one, about 50 legislative acts now govern the scope and direction of its activities.

This organization currently conducts not only biological research but technological, oceanographical, marketing and economics research as well as numerous allied activities and services. For example, it operates a market news service, conducts educational programs and produces motion pictures, explores for fish and tests gear, loans money to fishing vessel owners, helps establish cooperatives and then monitors their activities, manages the world's largest fur seal herd, enforces laws and regulations relating to the commercial fisheries under several international agreements, develops standards for fishery products and inspects and certifies these products, promotes the use of fish in the National School Lunch Program, participates in the activities of nine international fishery commissions, functions as the research agency for inter-State

fishery organizations, and coordinates Federal and State activities concerned with development of the salmon fishery program in the Columbia River.

The basis for good fishery administration is a sound national fishery policy geared to the potential of the fishery resources and to the national interest. The declaration of policy should spell out the Nation's desires and include appropriate general directions with regard to organization and operation. In the United States we have been fortunate in that the Congress has established a comprehensive national policy with respect to fishery resources which recognizes the important part our fisheries play in our national economy. It has been much simpler to administer fishery matters in my country with the policies, authorities, and organizational pattern expressed in this Congressional Act which is cited as the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956. (See Annex 1.)

An appropriate place in the overall governmental organization is as necessary to effective fishery administration as is a forthright national fishery policy. This position must be well recognized and in keeping with the fishery administration's responsibilities. If not, the relations of the fishery administration with other governmental organizations, the fishing industry, or in international and technical fishery fields will suffer accordingly.

In the United States, the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries—one of two bureaus in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the Department of the Interior—is recognized as the governmental unit primarily concerned with commercial fishery resources. (See Annex 2.)

Certain fishery activities hitherto conducted by a number of departments of government have been concentrated in the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries to maintain this centralized operation. For example, fishery transportation rate studies and all fishery standards, inspection and certification activities were transferred from the Department of Agriculture where they had been conducted for years along with somewhat similar agricultural work.

In other instances, where it appeared that functions or authorities were in conflict or over-

lapped, or that there were gaps, but that a transfer of function was not warranted, arrangements have been made to insure orderly functioning. Examples of such arrangements include those made with the Food and Drug Administration, which inspects all food products; the Federal Trade Commission, which is concerned with all marketing and trade practices; the Department of the Army, which collects certain statistics on vessel movements; the Bureau of the Census, which collects production and inventory data on all edible oils; and the Department of Agriculture, which collects monthly cold storage warehouse information. These arrangements have resulted in a much more effective and economical fishery administration.

In achieving this objective we occasionally find such peculiarities as a fishery specialist inspecting and certifying frozen onion rings and an agricultural specialist doing the same work on frozen tuna pies. This occurs, in each instance, because these products happen to represent a very minor part of the plant's primary product but, nevertheless, inspection and certification is wanted on the total output.

Carrying out a national fishery policy is not necessarily wholly a task for the fishery administration in the central government structure. States, the fishing industry, educational and research institutions, and international organizations—all play a part to the degree that circumstances permit.

In our country, the national government prefers to leave to private initiative all those functions which private enterprise can perform, or next, to use the governmental level—municipal, country, or State—most concerned with the problem. Cooperative arrangements also are encouraged. Only if such efforts are inadequate does the national fishery administration function as a residual or sole participant.

Thus, the States regulate the fisheries in their territorial waters, conduct biological research—mostly directed towards management—and collect fisheries statistics in varying degrees. A few conduct some marketing, technological, and educational activities.

We look to the commercial fishing industry to discover or adapt technological, improvement in producing, processing, marketing, and distributing fishery products, particularly in those instances where their efforts and expenditures can be directed largely for their own benefit. Thus, the fishing industry is expected to develop new resources found by the government's exploratory fishing vessels and to incorporate results of Federal basic research into their processing techniques, or the results of governmental economic surveys into their market promotions.

Educational institutions are expected to devote appropriate effort to training fishery scientists to meet industry and governmental needs. Their research efforts also are expected to be directed, to an adequate degree, toward the fishery problems in their areas and within their competence. The fishery administration, for its part, assists with grants and contract research to the extent necessary to stimulate maintenance of such efforts on the part of the educational institutions.

Both the commercial fishing industry and governmental fishery administrations are encouraged to use private research organizations. Such organizations should be available to industry as a local, technical fishery center to which industry can take the scientific testing or research which it is not equipped to handle. These organizations also supplement the research facilities of the governmental fishery administration advantageously, usually with intimate knowledge of local problems, and often the possession of highly specialized personnel and technical equipment, seldom found in fishery administration laboratories. Good administration dictates support of these organizations with contract research sufficient to maintain their interest, facilities and skills.

International organizations are becoming more important in the national fisheries picture. The fullest advantage should be taken of their contribution. The fisheries division of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has been of the greatest assistance in coordinating fishery activities, stimulating exchange of knowledge, issuing authoritative

reference books providing international compilations of data, conducting training centers, and administering technical assistance projects.

Fishery administration in the United States has made good use of the results of FAO's activities. Attendance at international meetings on fishing vessels, fishing gear, sardines, statistics, etc., has been especially helpful. FAO's publications fill gaps in knowledge and are particularly useful as references in trade and tariff matters. We have even had technical assistance in the form of aid in research vessel design and in problems concerned with raising fish in rice fields in Arkansas and neighboring States. Fishery administrations have much to gain from making the fullest use of FAO's service—often available from a nearby regional office.

A successful fishery administration should also be alert to other international organizations. Some play an important part in stimulating research. One deals with labor matters of vital importance to fishing vessel and industrial operations. Even the United Nations itself has been deep in fishery matters with its sponsorship of the Law of the Sea Conferences in Geneva in 1958 and 1960.

In recent years another type of international organization has come to play an important role in the conservation of marine resources. My Government is a member of nine international fishery commissions, each responsible to a greater or lesser degree for the investigation and management of fishery resources exploited by the fishermen of several countries, and each comprised of representatives of the governments of those countries. We are joined with Canada in three such commissions which are concerned respectively with the halibut resources of the North Pacific Ocean, sockeye and pink salmon resources of the Fraser River system on the west coast of North America, and our mutual fisheries in the Great Lakes. With Panama and Costa Rica we have formed a commission for study of the tunas of the eastern Tropical Pacific Ocean. Canada, Japan, and the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics are joined with us in the conservation of fur seals in the North Pacific. With Japan and Canada we have established a commission to

deal with our joint North Pacific fishery problems. On the Atlantic side we and Canada are joined with ten European nations to conserve the fisheries of the Northwest Atlantic Ocean. We are members of the International Whaling Commission, although our once world-wide whaling activities are currently limited to three shore stations on the Pacific Coast. In July 1960 our newest organization held its first meeting—the Cuban-United States Gulf Shrimp Commission.

These organizations have offered a means of bringing about effective cooperation between governments in the conservation of jointly exploited resources. While a number of them have not been in existence long enough to demonstrate their effectiveness completely, certainly the old ones—the Pacific Halibut Commission and the Pacific Salmon Fisheries Commission—are generally acknowledged to have achieved a considerable measure of success.

These organizations create as well as solve problems for the fishery administrator. The fragmentation of responsibility which results from the existence of many organizations is not entirely desirable. A sometimes complex and confusing pattern of relationships between national organizations, subnational organizations, international organizations and industries is often created, which greatly complicates the task of the fishery administrator. There is also a danger of oversimplification of objectives, and isolation from the mainstream of fishery administration. They add to that presently almost unbearable burden of a multiplicity of meetings. All in all, however, they appear to work well, though all the returns are not in. Certainly we are aware of no more effective means of dealing with international conservation problems.

With Congressional approval, our States on the coasts of the Atlantic Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Pacific Ocean have banded together into three State Fisheries Commissions for these areas. For the first two, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, the national Bureau of Commercial Fisheries serves as the Commission's research agency. Research and allied programs are reviewed periodically at

Commission meetings and, in general, close relationships are maintained between State research personnel and Federal field staffs. The Pacific Marine Fisheries Commission coordinates the research of its member States. Bureau of Commercial Fisheries personnel maintain close liaison to insure equally good Federal-State coordination. The cooperative efforts of State fishery commissions are effective aids to fishery administrations in making the most of available personnel, equipment and facilities.

The organization of the unit, which is to administer the fisheries, is next in importance to an enunciated national fishery policy and a proper place in government for a fishery administration. Obviously, its scope will be dictated by the functions it has been assigned and the authority it possesses. A new organization must, of necessity, work first on the problem which brought it into being. But in any event, one of the first needs is to collect and compile information on the resource and, if it is utilized, on the products and the trade in them. Once basic facts are available, the most obvious programs can be initiated. Since these differ widely with the need, there is little to be gained by attempting to indicate them in specific terms. It is most important, however, to develop a balanced effort. Much confusion can reign if production is stressed, but processing aids are not available to assist in caring for the catch that cannot be utilized in the fresh state. Nor does it help to make provision for processing, in volume, a product which must have considerable market promotion before it will be widely accepted.

Establishment of priorities is more important than an extensive all-inclusive organization. For example, a loan fund may not be as necessary as dissemination of knowledge on cooperatives. A market news service is justified only when products can be transported promptly to take advantage of price differentials. Introduction of the most modern vessels and specialized gear often is not economically advisable. Applied research in technology and management research in biology often are more important than basic research in either.

Within the funds, facilities, and personnel available, the fishery administration must develop

a program that is balanced—not only to meet current needs, but to anticipate future demands.

The arrangement of the component units of a fishery administration necessarily must change as it matures and its responsibilities usually increase. Insofar as the United States is concerned, our progress has been gradual to the organization we now have. Probably no one thinks it cannot and will not be improved.

The Bureau of Commercial Fisheries operates under a directorate, consisting of a director and an assistant director, and consists of four divisions. These divisions are composed of branches, which are the smallest units with responsibilities for a significant function. (See Annex 3.)

The branches have not changed appreciably in some years, except as new activities were initiated, such as loans and grants, or old activities were discontinued, such as Alaska Fisheries Management, when the former territory became a State.

The branches have been rearranged in the divisions, however, in the interests of placing similar activities together. All administrative or housekeeping activities are in the Division of Administration. (See Annex 4.) All biological and oceanographical studies are in the Division of Biological Research. (See Annex 5.) Technological, marketing, exploratory fishing, and tariff and trade programs are in the Division of Industrial Research. (See Annex 6.)

The Division of Resource Development is mainly a grouping of service activities, with branches for statistics, market news, loans and grants, reports and resource management. The latter includes for seal management, Columbia River development programs, and law enforcement on the high seas. (See Annex 7.)

The personnel in the headquarters in Washington exercise staff supervision only, with minor exceptions, over the programs in their specialized fields. The actual carrying out of programs approved by the Bureau Director, after receiving staff advice, is the function of the seven Regional and Area Directors stationed throughout the country. All field offices, stations, and laboratories are under these Regional Directors and report only to them. (See Annex 8.)

The regionalized organization was changed from a centralized operation, directed from Washington, three years ago. The new system has been in effect long enough to demonstrate the expected advantages. One of these is the development of much closer contacts with the fishing industry and its problems. Another is the better coordination of regional programs and the more effective use of funds, personnel, and facilities. The disadvantages arising from regionalization are mainly in the field of national programming. Our relatively brief test tends to confirm the experience of others that neither regionalized nor centralized direction of operations is superior in every respect. We believe, however, that it is possible to incorporate in our regionalized operation modifications which, in large part, will overcome any disadvantages that now exist.

Without question there are many other problems than those mentioned which fishery administrations must face. These, however, have been among the more significant ones with which fishery administration in the United States has had to contend. No doubt they include the more important problems that every fishery administration must face, sooner or later, if its fishing industry becomes an important factor in the national economy.