

# Problems Of Fisheries Administrators In The Atlantic States

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FISHERIES ADMINISTRATORS along the Atlantic Coast have at least one thing in common. They are almost continually being placed on the defensive by commercial fishermen, sportsmen, conservation clubs, or affiliated interests which are dissatisfied with fisheries conditions, and believe the administrator is solely responsible for the unsatisfactory situation. What is there about the industry to generate such heated emotion and controversy for so many years?

The answer is complicated. By attempting to analyze some of them it is hoped to portray a few administrative problems that currently exist along the Atlantic Coast. Illustrative examples which have been documented in Annual Reports of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission will be presented. Interstate matters also seem to fit into the pattern, but few involve all the factors included in the discussion.

Fishery administrative problems are generally a complex of biological, economic, sociological, judicial and political pressures so interlaced it is difficult, and sometimes impossible, to separate and analyze them. Few administrators have been fortunate enough to be faced with a fisheries problem that is strictly biological. Unfortunately, when that happens, the administrator usually finds there has been little or no research on the particular problem involved. Some officials then decide they must wait from five to twenty years for the research to be accomplished, (assuming funds for research are available immediately) and in the interim, nothing is done because of inadequate information. This situation has arisen in a number of Atlantic states and may be compared to an illness the physician is unable to diagnose. Instead of attempting a remedy on a trial and error basis, the doctor says, "We do not know the answer, so we will do nothing. It is too bad if the patient dies but it cannot be helped. Treatment will have to wait until the exact cause has been determined and specific drugs perfected to effect a cure."

Few people today would be satisfied if the medical profession assumed that attitude. Nor should our fishery administrators be complacent enough to take such a position when faced with a comparable problem. Fortunately, most of our administrators do not reason along these lines. It is obvious that in our life time we will not know the biological answers to all of our fishery problems. But in the absence of such complete knowledge it is essential to utilize the facts at hand, on an experimental basis, in the hope that the right management formula can be deduced and applied. This procedure offers the opportunity for much quicker solutions to some of our biological problems. Maryland is now embarked upon such a program. There biologists are attempting to evaluate results, so that the management equation can be changed, if it does not solve the problem. This method of approach to fisheries problems might be termed "experimental management."

The greatest advantage of this approach from a research standpoint is that it enables the scientist to inject a single variable into a problem in a controlled manner. The administrator, on the other hand, is always subject to intensive pressure to relax existing regulations before sufficient time has elapsed to evalu-

ate the experiment. Every state administration along the Atlantic Coast is recognizing the need for additional biological information. Ever increasing requests for expanded research are being relayed to the proper authorities by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

Within the past five years fisheries research groups have been established to some degree in almost every state along the coast. At the same time, additional encouragement has been given the federal government in expanding its research program. Errors of judgment have been made, it is true, in deciding whether a specific problem should be attacked by the Federal government or by the states involved. However, considerable progress has been made toward expanded research, and the Atlantic Coast administrator can look forward to getting more facts, that will help solve some of the many pressing fishery problems confronting him.

Local species of fish which do not migrate widely are usually classified among the easiest to manage. In such cases the administrator can act with a minimum of delay. This is not true of migratory species, which move from the territorial waters of one state into another. An excellent example is the shrimp, which is abundant from South Carolina to the central portion of Florida's east coast. Here the administrator has been supplied with many biological facts and recommendations but they are not applicable because of sociological, economic and political factors.

Individual shrimpers are reluctant to have restraints placed upon their operations since these may result in increased catches elsewhere. The small dragger is at odds with the large dragger and sportsmen in turn are at loggerheads with the commercial operators. The administrator is then faced with a course of action which will attain the desired results and at the same time placate the determined demands of the special interests. Administrators in the South Atlantic States are meeting this challenge by a united front based on facts. Their programs will be accomplished only after all groups concerned are properly educated to the facts.

The problem of fishery controls in Delaware Bay, however, are not nearly so simple. Here Delaware and New Jersey have a joint fishery, but act under independent laws which do not necessarily bear any relationship to each other. Biological facts, sufficient for management, are not available for most species with the result that it is difficult to bring order out of the confusion. Again, economic and political factors exert an important bearing on the problem. Because neither state has lived up to a solemn compact made many years previously, there is mistrust on the part of political and industrial leaders of any action taken by the other state. The administrators must in this case assure the leadership in order to dispel this mistrust and to guide the two states to some mutual understanding.

The Maryland-Virginia relationship is somewhat the same, although these states do have the benefit of many years experience in attempting to solve common problems. As is so often the case, however, even if agreement is attained, the home fishermen and political leaders are not necessarily convinced of the soundness of the program, and may refuse to cooperate in its fulfillment.

Traditionally each state has assumed the responsibility for managing its own fisheries affairs. This has resulted in a hodge podge of laws and regulations which all too frequently have no real basis except possibly to please one or

more special interest groups. The fishery administrators, at the earliest possible time, must dispense with this limited sectionalism in so far as migratory marine species are concerned and begin to consider the overall needs in a given fishery. The migratory striped bass is an example. This fish migrates from Chesapeake Bay to Maine and back again. Each state has an interest, either from a commercial or sports-fishing standpoint. The administrator must be informed of the biology of this species before taking a position on its management in any given locality. It is probable that the Atlantic States have done a poorer job of managing the striped bass than almost any other species. In spite of extensive research, legislation has been enacted in some states which is entirely illogical. The state of New Jersey, for example, prohibits the commercial capture of striped bass in her waters. And yet, all the bass found in New Jersey are migrants moving either north or south along the coast. Since bass do not spawn in New Jersey waters, this prohibition has little or no bearing on the total population. The administrator in such a case must lead the way by pointing out the inadequacies of the law. This must be followed by suggestions for amending the outmoded statute.

These cases have been given to demonstrate the difficult and diverse problems facing the fishery administrator today. Most administrators are faced with problems of management on non-migratory species which are just as difficult as those described above. He must fight a deeply engrained tendency on the part of watermen to resist the adoption of new methods and the application of new techniques. He must evaluate and handle pressures originating from both the commercial fishermen and the sportsmen. He must referee disputes between various segments of the commercial fisheries, who are competing with each other for a share of the same fish population. And finally, he must resist the efforts of pressure groups to influence his decisions because of political expediencies of the moment.

In closing let us consider personally the typical fisheries administrators of the Atlantic Coast. Before assuming their present capacities they were either real estate salesmen, lawyers, politicians, biologists or fishermen. None is fully equipped by training or experience to meet the diverse problems confronting him. Yet all are striving sincerely, usually against almost insurmountable odds, to improve the fisheries, and thereby raise the economic and social level of the people of their states. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission has done a great deal to inform and help the administrators, and to equip them better for their jobs. Even at best, however, the job is not easy. Pity the poor fisheries administrators! In addition to the burden imposed by his fishery problems in most cases he carries the weight of the electorate on his shoulders.

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## **Problems Of Fishery Administration In Florida**

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ACCORDING TO THE LAST FEDERAL CENSUS Florida is the third fastest growing state in the union. Its population has increased 46 per cent in the past ten years, and people still are moving in at the rate of 1,000 a day. Communities are growing into towns and towns are growing into cities. Industries are mush-