

IN a communiqué from Bob ?? to Rusty Hudson he states:

The reason this flaw has not been explored is that the science is too political and scientists back themselves into corners when they become the advocates of 'saving fish'. What do they do when they find a fundamental flaw in the stock assessment that shows there is no overfishing in a given fishery? There is no room to move - they shut up and do nothing except defend the indefensible using their status as scientists to avoid scrutiny.

This problem, I believe, is crippling marine science and leading to increasingly unsustainable fisheries management and the PR spin has the whole world believing that only overfishing causes declines in fish stocks.

Hi Bob,

Good observation.

It seems the public needs the drama of a "bad guy," and the easiest candidate with the marine issues becomes the commercial fisherman.

Some of the environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) seem to thrive off of the current incomplete assessment science (to describe overfishing) that has dominated our US fishery agency for decades, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The ENGOS appear to want to keep a crisis ongoing while seeking further funds for what appears to be a preservationist agenda in many ways. Several steps past a conservationist platform in my book anyhow. Extremism versus the middle road.

I've had to work side by side with several entities of the shark academia and the ENGOS such as National Audubon Society, The Ocean Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund and others during the past decade. These entities have participated in the major downsizing of what had been a growth industry, the US directed shark industry, which lasted until the NMFS implementation of the Atlantic Shark fishery management plan (FMP) during April 1993. Now it is a limited access, mostly small boat fishery which remains shut down most of the year since. Mortality for sharks is down by over 80% some estimates have stated. It is hard to measure since the NMFS really did not keep good records with regard to sharks since the NMFS encouraged fishermen to market sharks since the early 1980s. It may be more still.

What was left of the US Atlantic directed shark industry has been decimated even further by more incomplete science, and further accusations of "overfishing" by these same entities since the FMP for Atlantic sharks began nine years ago. They don't appear to like working with us, but it appears the ENGOS thrive when working against us. It serves them well.

Meanwhile based on various indicators, our US Atlantic shark populations are blooming, especially nearshore causing the NMFS and shark academia PR concerns because of the major increase in US shark attacks since 1993. Perhaps the draconian shark regulations during the past ten years are having a positive effect. The last two years were record years with regard to total US shark attacks. We used to average a dozen a year before 1994. Now that annual number has doubled and tripled since then. Mostly in Florida which accounts for over half of the commercial shark fishing since 1980.

But since the NMFS appears to be a political agency who hires scientists, maybe it is not in their best interest to admit that shark regulations may be working and to then favor returning to an open population stock assessment modeling that was used to originally underpin the Atlantic FMP for all 22 species of large coastal sharks (LCS) managed by this regime.

Instead the NMFS, shark academia and ENGOS have favored the closed LCS subpopulation approach of 1998, which focused on two shark species as a proxy for the 22 LCS species from Maine to Texas. It served their purposes to do what amounts to a pseudo-science and seek to eliminate what remains of the US directed shark fleet in favor of 30 to 40 year LCS rebuilding plan, while hiding behind the false assertion that some of the US LCS complex is still threatened

with extinction from our fishermen, both commercial and recreational.

That mass shark fishing reduction was supposed to be the end result of the 1999 implementation of the new NMFS rules but the federal court kept the NMFS from completing the final destruction of this commercial shark fishery. The NMFS later chose to agree to a settlement agreement and repay our attorneys most of his fees. The ENGOS are still seeking legal remedy to turn that court ruling around by forcing the NMFS to go to even more reduction to the LCS quotas based on the poor 1998 shark science. That serves to eliminate our economy, and our voice it seems if accomplished.

Shark tag recaptures strongly show the straddling shark stock is significant between Mexico, Cuba and others with the US and that because they are highly migratory in nature, an open population stock assessment model is the best way to describe both the hypothesized biomass and understanding the difference in sustainable fishing and a false crisis about "overfishing" sharks.

Based on the latest spin from shark academia, the NMFS, and the ENGOS, having real science instead of political science is years away for the LCS management complex still, when it should have begun years ago. Hindsight is 20/20 I am told, but I believe it can be 20/10, if folks really want to see what has been done, or not.

Attached is a document I recently produced for distribution explaining the various regulatory effects that have benefited the LCS shark populations.

Rusty

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