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The Advisory Process

The following are excerpts from a Fisheries and Oceans document, with my comments. Anyone wishing the full document, in adobe reader format, can contact me with their email address.

A Policy to Govern Pacific Regional Advisory Bodies

Fisheries and Oceans
Pacific Region
June 1, 2004

In 2003/2004 it is estimated that DFO has approximately 53 advisory bodies in the Pacific Region. These are bodies where formal committees have been established by the Department, to provide advice on a wide range of topics associated with the Department's mandate.

Comment: If these advisors met once a year, that would be one meeting a week. There is no efficiency in this process. This also means that there is likely no transparency within these groups. Each is a lobby group rather than an advisory group. It is also the department that creates the mandate, which there is no process to advise. This mandate is often based on the perspective, individual's perception, or interpretation, of government agreements or directives.

In 2004 a review of the regional advisory process revealed that, although many of the established advisory bodies have terms of reference, some of them lack a clear terms of reference that describe mandates, guiding principles, structure, rolls and responsibilities, procedures and rules of engagement (also known as committee charter, code of conduct, ground rules). None of the DFO's regional advisory bodies, have associated performance measures, or are regularly evaluated against performance measures. The federal government has no existing policy that provides clear, consistent guidelines and standards for working with advisory bodies.

Comment: This continues today, with no requirement for advisory participants to consult with the industry. There are no code of conduct, no transparency, no conflict of interest guidelines, and no requirement to perform. There is no requirement to achieve the stated goals; this process often has a different agenda to the stated purpose. This allows for government bureaucrats to lead and control advisory bodies to achieve their mandate,

while providing an opportunity for these advisors to posture themselves to benefit from this mandate.

There is a need to address ongoing concerns with consultative processes, by providing new or improved mechanisms to enhance the involvement and level of satisfaction of all interested parties.

There are also pressures to achieve efficiencies within governments. Canada's federal government has made it clear that there will be a new direction for government based on accountability, transparency, financial responsibility and ethical conduct. The February Speech from the Throne referred to "the participation, the engagement, and the active debate of all Canadians." This must be done in a physically responsible manner, consistent with the public service values and ethics, and the departments own policies and procedures, such as the New Directional policy, the departments Assessment and Alignment Program, and the National Consultation Framework. In order to fulfill some of these commitments, many of the department's advisory processes could become multi-stakeholders, eliminating the need to consult separately with individual organizations or groups.

Comment: Although the impression is given that there is a broad representation of industry, this is a total misconception. Analysis of the participants would conclude that the representation was bias toward a particular sector of the industry. It is more than obvious that if an individual can sit on one advisory board representing one license and on another advisory board representing another, and then on a third representing again another group, he is representing multi-license holders. If this individual again sits on various other fishing organization boards, as a director, and this board or organization does not consult appropriately with it's members, he again implies that he represents all of industry, but he does not.

Appropriate Use of Advisory Bodies:

- When dealing with ongoing, operational issues.
- If designed and managed correctly, advisory bodies can provide detailed analyses for project issues, and participants gain understanding of other perspectives, leading toward compromise.
- When it is required to gain understanding of a particular group views.

Inappropriate Use of Advisory Bodies:

- ❑ Limiting membership and scope means they cannot be used to properly gauge public opinion.
- ❑ Should not be used as a surrogate for broad consultations, and
- ❑ Should not be used to consult on emerging issues, new policy questions, or issues that are time limited.

Comment: The existing advisory process falls under the Inappropriate Use of Advisory Bodies. It is limiting membership and scope and is incorrectly, discrediting the dissention, which exists through much of the industry. Individuals that represent those with the largest license and quota holdings say the industry supports their position. Their compromise is to provide peanuts to those that believe that they can survive on peanuts, all while eating your cashews.

It is also the belief, at least by those that are advisors, that it is the individual fishers responsibility to represent them selves politically. With the constant requirement of the advisors to participate in management, it is not possible to be an active fisherman and politically active. It is however the interests of those that are politically active, to insure they do not have to be active fisherman. How would they, or could they, support policy that supported protected and encouraged more active fishermen, if it would require more fishing activity on their part, and less opportunity to acquire larger holdings?

*Although it is common for these individuals to pat one another on the back for all the work they have done voluntarily, it is not without reward. The industry is cannibalizing itself and continues to develop into fewer participants and larger holdings in the hands of fewer, but wealthier individuals. **These are the individuals that claim to represent this industry.***

It's time to change this process.

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