



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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For Immediate Release
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October 20, 2010
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RECREATIONAL CATCH SHARE WORKSHOP IN WYOMING 10/21-10/22 Enviros Directing Captains How To “Assign The Privilege” Of Recreational Fishing

Advocates from the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) want recreational fishing captains to know – ‘catch shares’ aren’t just for commercial fishermen anymore! In fact, nonprofit EDF together with international ‘for profit’ consulting firm MRAG Americas, is apparently now working with recreational captains to identify catch share opportunities for sportfishing industry insiders and early investors.

Documents obtained by the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) disclose that EDF’s comprehensive Catch Share Design Manual has been excerpted for use this week in private ‘invite only’ meetings in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, as EDF has invited select representatives of America’s recreational for-hire sector to a private catch shares workshop. A paper prepared by MRAG Americas in advance of the October 21- 22 workshops reveals “EDF has contracted MRAG Americas to identify the necessary steps that must be taken to understand and communicate how catch share programs might work for recreational for-hire fleets in the United States.” MRAG Americas says the workshop “is being held to draw on expertise from members of the for-hire industry and others working in or with this sector to adapt the existing Design Manual for the for-hire sector of recreational fisheries.”

According to EDF documents, “a catch share program allocates a secure privilege to harvest a specified amount of a fishery’s total catch to an individual or group.” The catch share campaign was originally launched by EDF and Pew Environment Group several years ago when marine biologist Dr. Jane Lubchenco was vice chairwoman of the EDF board. Now as NOAA Administrator, Dr. Lubchenco has helped put the EDF catch share plan to the forefront of fisheries management in 2010. “Catch shares are fundamentally different from other management approaches and have generally been implemented after a variety of other approaches fail or are insufficient at meeting specific goals,” the EDF manual states, adding “Most commercial fisheries start as open access where anyone who puts in the effort is allowed to catch fish. As competition increases, managers often limit access through licensing of participants.” According to EDF, when other methods can’t effectively control fishing effort and catch, managers are forced to implement more effort-based regulations, with catch shares fitting the bill.

“We’ve said all along that EDF and Pew weren’t going to be satisfied with just putting ‘open access’ commercial fisheries under catch shares rule, and now we see where this is headed, right into the heart of our sector,” said RFA Executive Director Jim Donofrio. “Pew funds EDF, EDF pays the fisheries consultants at MRAG Americas to get tie-in from a few charter and head boat captains, they’re pure divide and conquer tactics,” Donofrio added. “The only reason our current fisheries management approach is failing is because these groups set it up to fail through their ongoing lobbying efforts. It’s failure by design using catch shares as the solution to the problem.”

Donofrio said he received the document when it was forwarded via email from a charter captain invited to attend the private workshop. The origin of the email is said to be Dr. Erika A. Zollett, senior marine scientist at MRAG, who explained that the paper provides an overview of the topics being discussed at the workshop. “The other document provides excerpts from the existing EDF Catch Share Design Manual,” Dr. Zollett writes in her email, adding “we will be discussing how we can adapt this manual for recreational for-hire fleets.”

A spokesperson for MRAG Americas’ told RFA that confidentiality agreements would not allow him to provide information about the meeting except to confirm it was an EDF-sponsored event by invite only. RFA has posted the MRAG Americas workshop paper at <http://www.joinrfa.org/press/DesignForFor-HireManual.pdf>. The paper outlines a number of key issues to be considered in the design of catch share programs, some of which are “unique to recreational/for-hire fisheries.” According to the document, “Stakeholder involvement and public outreach are essential to inform managers, educate stakeholders, garner support, and fight political resistance.”

Donofrio said it's clear that RFA members are in for a tough road ahead. "The fact these venture capitalists included the term 'political resistance' in their design document is appalling, as they know our recreational anglers will not support those participants willingly selling out the rest of our industry," Donofrio said. "Just reading the paper will make your skin crawl as MRAG and EDF outline a step-by-step process of defining who gets shares of fish and how that 'privilege' is assigned. It's horrible to think that some members of our national fishing industry would actually support this sell-off," he said.

Donofrio said the MRAG Americas paper also assumes that since the for-hire sector of the recreational fishery is a commercial enterprise, it should fall under similar management approaches as the commercial sector. "It appears anyone who makes money off sportfishing will fall under the catch shares umbrella in the future, including tackle shops, hotel and lodge owners, even the pilots who carry our fishermen into town," Donofrio said. "We can't have division between the industry and anglers on this, we have too much to lose."

While EDF and MRAG representatives are hoping to gain endorsement for share allocation between a handful of captains and their customers, the pre-eminent industry coalitions in the U.S are continuing their vocal opposition plans to separate the recreational fishing sector into the 'haves' and 'have nots'. According to RFA national board member Capt. Bob Zales, II, as president of the National Association of Charterboat Owners and Operators (NACO), he's been actively pressing his members to understand that EDF and others were trying to push catch shares within the recreational fishing sector. "If charterboat owners didn't believe that EDF was in the business of pushing catch shares in the for-hire sector before, here's the documented proof today," Zales said pointing to the MRAG Americas paper.

Zales said a small group of charterboat owners is being used to promote EDF's effort to reduce charter fleets across the country. In the Gulf of Mexico, Zales said EDF has pushed to separate the charter boats from the head boats, as well as from private anglers, using separate sectors for each. "EDF has consistently told charterboat owners that sector separation is not about catch shares," Zales said. "EDF's real agenda is now confirmed after you read these documents, as sector separation is the first and most important step in implementing catch shares."

The Marine Resources Assessment Group (MRAG Ltd) headquartered in London is registered as a consulting firm with the Department for International Development (UK), European Commission, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and the United Nations Development Program. MRAG Americas, Inc. is registered as a consulting firm with the U.S. Department of Commerce and is led by Dr. Andrew Rosenberg, the Deputy Director at NMFS from 1998-2000. A source at MRAG Americas said Rosenberg is not involved in day-to-day operations there, and is said to now be working with a group called Conservation International.

According to the Gloucester Times, MRAG Americas, Inc. is one of four firms qualified to provide on-board monitoring worth as much as \$6.5 million a year when the New England fisheries go under catch system rules May 1. "EDF is running around citing the World Bank and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations as saying that catch shares drive economic growth, but what they're not saying exactly is who it is that's getting rich on this scheme," Donofrio said.

"Catch shares will allot ownership of our public resources to a handful of venture capitalists, but whether or not those shareholders actually share with anglers is not be up to us to decide," Donofrio added. "As EDF says in their socialist manifesto, perhaps that decision will ultimately be up to the local fish cooperatives, permit banks and community fishing associations who are granted the privilege of original ownership."

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The Recreational Fishing Alliance is a national, grassroots political action organization representing recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on marine fisheries issues. RFA's Mission is to safeguard the rights of saltwater anglers, protect marine, boat and tackle industry jobs, and ensure the long-term sustainability of our Nation's saltwater fisheries. For more information, call 888-JOIN-RFA or visit www.joinrfa.org.