



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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RFA CHARGES PEW WITH RUNNING BAIT & SWITCH Campaign Uses Angler Support of "More Science To Lobby For Less Science"

The big criticism in America today is that nothing ever gets done in Congress. As a political action organization that represents recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on saltwater fishing issues, the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) is confronted by this stark reality on a daily basis.

According to RFA executive director Jim Donofrio however, the blame should not be laid entirely at the feet of our elected officials, as he said mixed messages have helped create Congressional gridlock on important fisheries management reform.

"We the people are partially responsible for own fate in DC, and there's probably no better example of this than in our own recreational fishing industry," Donofrio said. "Congress isn't doing what it can do to protect our recreational fishermen because our elected officials are getting mixed messages. Legislators hear one thing in a meeting, and then see something entirely different in a follow-up press release."

According to RFA, conflicting messages not only leave legislators too confused to take a stance on key issues, but they actually prop up politicians to simultaneous praise and criticism, often by the same coalitions. "One individual who is an advisor in one alphabet soup group praises a Congressman or Senator on a Wednesday, then on Thursday the same legislator receives an angry letter of opposition from that same individual who is listed on the masthead as an advisor to some other group."

RFA cites a perfect example in a Pew Environment Group advocacy email blast sent on August 25 with the subject line, *Australia's Coral Sea: A Biodiversity Hotspot*. "The RFA of New South Wales (www.rfansw.com.au) has been fighting Pew's efforts to create no take, zero access marine reserves there for years, so this latest email from Pew asking folks to sign a letter supporting the establishment of marine parks in Australia's Coral Sea is not a surprise," said RFA managing director Jim Hutchinson, Jr. "It's no secret to anyone that Pew is spearheading efforts to get anglers off the water through creation of marine reserves, that's common knowledge around the globe."

Hutchinson said the confusion begins later in the Pew missive under a separate heading called *Make Fisheries Funding a U.S. Priority*, in which Pew describes how "celebrity chefs, commercial and recreational fishermen and more than 240 independent groups and businesses" are asking Congress to fully fund data collection and analysis programs to help protect and rebuild fish populations. By clicking on the link to *Make Fisheries Funding a U.S. Priority* or by choosing to see the photo gallery of funding supporters, anglers can see clearly how Pew works to divide and conquer the recreational fishing industry.

"There are 240 signors of a letter to the U.S. Senate asking for more fisheries funding, with photos of anglers and activists happily holding up signs that read 'we need better data' which is all well and good until you follow Pew's Take Action button that takes you to a letter which will purportedly help Protect America's Ocean Fish," Hutchinson explained. "The letter that Pew hopes you'll sign says there's already enough scientific information available on all U.S. ocean fish stocks to set annual catch limits, and it openly opposes legislation the sportfishing industry is actually supporting."

"Essentially you have industry representatives at Berkley fishing tackle, IGFA and Sport Fishing Magazine supporting Pew's request for more science, while Pew simultaneously asks supporters to sign a letter which says the science is perfectly fine. Our own industry is being used by Pew activists to encourage the fisheries service to make strict management decisions based on existing flawed data while lobbying against the industry's own piece of legislation," Hutchinson said.

“Pew is making our recreational fishing industry look ridiculous,” Hutchinson said. “How can we possibly expect members of Congress to take us seriously and understand our issues?”

RFA has long criticized Pew and its preservationist allies for employing such deceptive tactics in their ongoing efforts to stop Americans from fishing. “Pew helped rewrite the federal fisheries law complete with all the restrictive language, they’ve openly pushed for no access marine reserves, they continually oppose angler efforts to gain access to rebuilding stocks, and they’ve made a hard push to privatize our nation’s fisheries through catch share programs,” Donofrio said. “They’ve obviously been able to influence a few members of the catch and release set to join their coalitions, but we’re not about to let them sell out the rest of our industry.”

On February 24, 2010, the RFA helped spearhead a 5,000 person fishermen’s rally near the steps of the Capitol in Washington DC calling for reform of the federal fisheries law. While the national protest helped galvanize coastal communities and brought the subject of fishermen and jobs to the front burner in Washington, Pew and its allies quickly tried to douse the flames of angler discontent in Capitol Hill publications.

"There are very real economic problems, but the way to address them is not to allow more fishing," Pew Environment Group’s Lee Crockett told CQ Roll Call after the rally. Crockett went on to tell Roll Call “we are not anti-fishing,” though he also explained how Pew has funded advocacy groups including the Marine Fish Conservation Network and Ocean Conservancy to lobby for the policy of catch shares.

“How can you say you’re not anti-fishing when you tell members of the DC legislative press that we shouldn’t be dealing with our nation’s economic problems by allowing people to fish,” Hutchinson said. “I will never understand how the tackle industry can support this type of twisted logic by joining on with group letters and continued alliances with Pew Environment Group and the advocacy groups they’ve helped create with their grants.”

“Our anglers are confused, our business leaders are confused, and in it only makes sense that the people who write the laws are going to be confused,” Donofrio said. “RFA has often been criticized by members of our own industry for being too vocal in following our mission to safeguard the rights of anglers and business owners while also protecting the resource, but we’re open and honest about our position and that’s precisely what legislators and their staff understand and respect.”

Donofrio said it was regrettable that the national tackle industry was unable or “unwilling” to support the national fishermen’s rally in Washington during the winter of 2010. “Regrettably the same lobbyists who recommended that the industry should stay on the sidelines and keep their distance from the protesters are the same lobbyists who’ve spent the better part of five years fighting our efforts to reform the federal fisheries law, ultimately confusing legislators and members of the angling public into thinking that everything was just fine,” Donofrio said.

“Pew and the Pew-funded advocacy groups like Marine Fish Conservation Network and Ocean Conservancy are not our friends, they don’t want to allow more fishing. The sooner the industry understands that then perhaps the quicker they’ll be able to get their house in order and the faster our anglers can get back on the water,” Donofrio said.

“Things are not fine, and we’re going to need full legislative support to get this fixed.”

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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.