

Mosquito fleet will not be intimidated

Groundfish Amendment 18 and policy safeguards for independent fishermen are gaining steam, but so is the opposition. Now more than ever, it is critical that the voices of independent fishermen and allies are heard, despite the fact that many are told to stay silent and threatened if they speak out.

Recently, in response to proposals to protect fleet diversity, New Bedford industry businessman Carlos Rafael publicly referred to smaller boat fishermen, saying, "The maggots screaming on the sidelines, they are done. They can scream all they want. Nobody can save them."

Coming from a four-generation family of smaller boat fishermen, I admit I took offense. As the New England fleet consolidates, we're seeing hard-working fishing families go out of business with nowhere to turn – fishermen who have poured their blood, sweat, and tears into this industry hoping someday to pass on the tradition and opportunity to the next generation. I believe Mr. Rafael owes an apology to families like mine.

However, I did agree with him on one point. He also referred to smaller boat fishermen as mosquitoes, relentlessly biting away at policy makers until something changes. It clearly was not a compliment, but I took it as a sign of a growing power in the independent, mosquito-like fleet.

Like a solo mosquito, an independent fisherman doesn't stand a chance when

GUEST COLUMN



by Brett Tolley

confronting the powers that be. But a swarm of them, all biting at the same time, can affect major change.

In fact, during public meetings held last year, fishermen and allies stated the need for a level playing field and sensible safeguards for small-, medium-, and large-scale fish businesses while protecting spawning and juvenile stocks. And, a New England Fishery Management Council report revealed that support for Amendment 18

outnumbered opposition five to one.

Right now, Amendment 18 is on the council's top-priority list, and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Regional Administrator John Bullard has repeatedly stated the importance of this amendment. He stressed that it should move as quickly as possible, saying, "The agency stands ready to provide assistance to the council during the amendment process. I look forward to the future council discussion on accumulation limits and fleet diversity."

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Gaining traction

The mosquito fleet is clearly gaining traction, but when it comes to Amendment 18, those benefiting from

consolidation are preparing to squash fleet diversity. The minority opposition continues to advocate for no safeguards and for a fleet owned and controlled by just a few players with the deepest pockets.

On two occasions, while testifying publicly on this subject on behalf of fishermen who could not attend council meetings, my microphone was turned off to silence my words. And, we are hearing reports of fishermen who support Amendment 18 being bullied at sea and on land.

Fewer fishermen are on the water now as a result of fleet consolidation, so it's no surprise that fewer fishermen are attending policy meetings and speaking directly to decision makers. This makes the policy arena ripe for manipulation, intimidation, and corruption.

A 2011 third-party audit of the fisheries management decision process confirmed a lack of direct engagement between fishermen and decision makers. The auditors urged NMFS to "increase industry participation across programs."

To its credit, NMFS recently reached out to sector presidents and managers on the issue of juvenile and spawning groundfish aggregations. Yet, we learn that one fishing industry organization has asked its members not to speak directly to decision makers.

There is a pattern here, and it all revolves around whether or not we dare to speak the truth.

Let us refuse to be silent about ensuring access and opportunity for the next generation.

If fishermen and their families stay silent on issues that matter, we will further lose the democratic nature of our public process and the freedom to speak. This is exactly what the opposition wants.

As civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

Regardless of our political views on Amendment 18, we should take a stand for the right of all stakeholders – small or large – to engage in respectful and meaningful debate. We must denounce hate speech and protect free speech.

So let us refuse to be silent about fleet diversity. Let us refuse to be silent about ensuring access and opportunity for the next generation. And, let us refuse to be silent when perceived leaders threaten or intimidate.

Amendment 18 will be discussed at upcoming council meetings in September. Let policy makers know that the fishery should not be owned and controlled by just a few players. E-mail council Executive Director Tom Nies at <tnies@nefmc.org> today and make sure your voice is heard loud and clear.

Brett Tolley

Brett Tolley is a community organizer for the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance (NAMA) and coordinator of the "Who Fishes Matters" online blog, which can be found at <http://whofishesmatters.blogspot.com>.

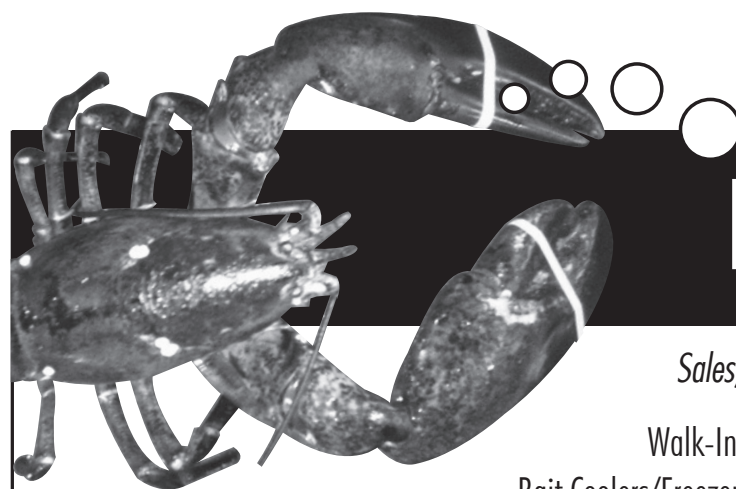
Shop Talk

Continued from previous page charts and map habitat and marine archaeology sites.

Jon Williams' red crab boat Benthic Mariner is sporting a new paint job these days. The big former Bering Sea crabber has been seen on sea trial runs lately around New Bedford Harbor.

Several long-term tie-ups at the **NORPEL** plant in New Bedford appear to have moved on to other ports. The midwater trawler **Nordic Explorer** and the seiner **Western Hunter** were gone in mid-August. The plant area is almost completely quiet these days, except for occasional visits from New Jersey-based midwater trawlers **Retriever** and **Enterprise**.

Ditto for **Reidar's Trawl-Scallop Gear & Marine Supply** in Fairhaven as ship cradles are all that remain on the grounds where dad **Reidar** and sons **Hans** and **Tor** often were seen building and rebuilding nets. The Bendiksens will keep a presence at the site for now, while letting customers know about their new location at New Bedford's North End (see CFN August 2013 for details). /cfn/



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