

**NWX DOC CONFERENCING**

**Moderator: Laurel Bryant**  
**August 27, 2014**  
**2:00 pm CT**

Coordinator: Welcome and thank you for standing by. At this time, all participants are in a listen-only mode for the duration of the call until the question and answer sessions begin. At that time, if you would like to ask a question, please press star then 1 on your touchtone phone. Today's conference is being recorded. If you have any objections, you may disconnect at this time.

Now I'd like to turn the meeting over to Ms. Laurel Bryant. Thank you and you may begin.

Laurel Bryant: Thanks a lot, (Camilla), and welcome, everyone. It looks like we have a really good crowd on the phone. Thanks for a few minutes' delay there and we promise we'll make up that time as we need it.

Before I walk through a few things on how this process will work, I wanted to let you know who we have in the room and on the phone with regard to the Task Force. In the room with me is Russell Smith, Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Fisheries; and also Deirdre Warner-Kramer, Senior Foreign Affairs Officer with the Office of Conservation at the Department of State.

And on the phone with us we have Dr. (Bill Jones) with FDA. So you've got some good ears that are going to be listening to your comments today.

As (Camilla) said, press star 1 to get in the queue. I would encourage you that if you are going to make comments, if you could do that as soon as possible, that will be very helpful for me in looking at how many of you want to make comments and then how I need to divide the time. So the earlier you do that, the easier it will be in us telling you how much time will be allotted for you.

And with that, I'm going to turn it over Russell. You do have a webinar portion of this, which is a very brief PowerPoint that Russell will walk through. I understand that some of you are not able to access that because of the software, so on the Web page we did post a PDF of this presentation for those that might not be able to access it.

And with that, I'm going to turn it over to (Russell Smith).

Russell Smith: Thank you, Laurel, and I'd like to thank all of you on the phone for joining Deirdre and I for this important opportunity for us to really hear what you have to say about the issues that are before us.

You all know that for the US, addressing IUU fishing is an important issue because IUU fishing undermines all of our efforts to ensure that the fish reset we use - the fish reset that we depend on are sustainably managed. It also creates some inequities with respect to the economics of those who are playing by the rules and those who don't.

Similarly, seafood fraud misidentification, substitution of one product for another, also has economic costs as well as undermines the ability of our buying public to be able to accurately and effectively identify what it is that

they're consuming and where it's coming from. And these are issues that we are trying to address through this process and hope to get your contributions on how we might best achieve that.

This task force that I will talk about in a second provides us with an opportunity for collaboration among a number of different entities - a number of different stakeholders -- the government, the industry, the public and private sector that have interests in our seafood sources and in our seafood sustainability. And we really look forward to learning from you and working with you as we go through the process of preparing recommendations.

As you may know, in July of this year, the White House issued a memorandum from the President directing that a task force be established to look at the issues of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing and its impact in the US, as well as the issue of seafood fraud. That task force has been established. It is being co-chaired by Undersecretary of Commerce Cathy Novelli, who's also the Administrator of - sorry, Undersecretary of State Cathy Novelli and Undersecretary of Commerce Kathy Sullivan, who's also the Administrator of NOA.

In addition, we have representatives from a number of different agencies throughout the government. They include, obviously, the Department of Commerce and the Department of the State; but also agencies like Homeland Security, Department of Defense, Department of Interior, the Department of Justice, the Department of Agriculture, Health and Human Services, as well as various pieces of the White House organization including the Office of Management and Budget, the Office of Science and Technology Policy, the Office of the US Trade Representative, the Council on Environmental Quality, and the US Agency for International Development.

We have a very short time period within which we have been directed to report back to the President with recommendations for the implementation of a comprehensive framework of integrated programs to combat IUU fishing and seafood fraud that emphasizes the areas of greatest need. We started this process by setting up several public engagements, opportunities for us to hear from you about what the issues are and how we should focus on them. This is the third of those engagements. We've done one additional public webinar like this as well as a public meeting in Seattle last week, and we will be doing another public meeting here in DC tomorrow.

We are very eager to hear from you and we appreciate the fact that you have taken the time to join us. I should also note that we have opened a Federal Register process and we're accepting comments through that process through September 2. For those of you who are able to see the webinar portion of this, the NOA Web page with information on this task force process is up. For those of you who can't access that information, you can go to the NOA site - the NOA fisheries site, and then click on "international" and you'll be able to see this page.

Why don't I - Deirdre, I don't know if you have any opening remarks you'd like to make before we open up the phone lines.

Deirdre Warner-Kramer: Thank you very much, Russell, and welcome to everybody and thanks to everyone for participating in this. Certainly, Russell has already emphasized the importance of these issues - why they matter to all of us and why it is important that we can take every possible action to combat them. And this public engagement process is particularly important because, as we've noted, we have a fairly short period of time to develop some recommendations.

So it will be essential that we hear information about not just the sorts of challenges that we might face in these issues, but the sorts of activities and opportunities and possibilities that may already be out there. And in particular, from our perspective, we'll be interested in hearing not just domestic experiences, but if there are views and comments and information to share on international aspects as well because that will be an important part of the overall comprehensive strategy that we develop.

Russell Smith: Great. So with that, let me go back to Laurel and...

Laurel Bryant: Great, thanks Russell. Okay, we don't have that many people in the queue right now, so plenty of time. I will give only a maximum of five minutes, and right now it looks like we only have three people in the queue so you guys, at this point, can use your full five minutes. I'll be timing you and I will give you a thirty second warning. And when you come on the phone, I'd appreciate it if you would give everyone on the phone your name and affiliation.

And with that, (Camilla), why don't we open up to the first questioner.

Coordinator: Again, if you would like to ask a question on the phone line, it's star 1. Our first person that wants to ask a question is (Paul Raymond) from the Federal Law Enforcement Officers' Association. Your line is now open.

(Paul Raymond): Hi there. This is (Paul Raymond). I'm a retired NOA special agent. I was at (ASAC) for twenty years in the Southeast, and I'm currently the agency president for the Federal Law Enforcement Officers' Association for NOA; as such, my comments will be primarily based on agency President for NOA.

We have over 26,000 active and retired federal law enforcement agents and officers in our organization, which includes most of the current active NOA

agents and US Fish and Wildlife agents; as well as APA agents, DoS agents, et cetera. So many of the folks that are actively enforcing or have enforced IUU and seafood fraud issues and my primary comment is going to be about the support for this task force and for the efforts for the administration to have this initiative to move forward.

A huge problem -- probably the biggest problem -- in the fisheries world is seafood fraud and IUU issues. We've worked many of them ourselves, both internationally and domestically. Our major concern is that in the last five years, NOAA officers of law enforcement has sadly reduced its special agent core from a peak of about 165 agents down to less than 100 now -- so that's drop off of - whatever that is - close to 40%. And we continue to lose agents from the downsizing effort, and those are the very people that are trained and have been doing and would continue to do IUU investigations.

There is some effort to replace those agents with a federal uniformed officer, which is more of a patrol aspect for domestic fisheries -- the folks that basically will measure fish in the local ports under the Magnuson Act. Those are not the investigators who are trained or even tasked with the mission of IUU enforcement or seafood fraud, which takes often undercover work, analysis and white collar crime work, and financial crimes.

And so our concern is that administration is counting a very good initiative on IUU crimes, yet at the same time it may not know that within NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement, we're on a downward spiral losing agents - continually losing agents and the very folks that are tasked with doing this. We want to bring that to your attention as the task force and we would like it addressed. You can't lose your investigative arm while at the same time trying to be the leaders of the world of investigating IUU issues.

Laurel Bryant: Okay, thank you very much, (Paul). And Operator, why don't we go to our next speaker.

Coordinator: The next person is Jeff Kaelin from Lund's Fisheries, Incorporated. Your line is now open.

Jeff Kaelin: Thank you. It's Lund's Fisheries in Cape May, New Jersey. We've written a few pages of comments on this. I'm just going to read a couple of paragraphs to give you a sense of our take on the task force.

I agree with the previous speaker. I think the biggest problems we have in the country are reduced budgets for the people who are enforcing the existing laws. We think it's vitally important for the task force to explain to US seafood consumers that existing federal law already prohibits the mislabeling of any food product, including seafood products, and any form of economic fraud. The Departments of Commerce, Agriculture, Fish and Wildlife, Food and Drug, all share some portion of this authority in addition to state and local health inspection and true labeling standards already in place across the country. This is precisely why we opposed Mr. (Markey)'s bill in Congress, which has not been approved by Congress but has been transformed into this task force.

In reading of the task force formation and activity, one is led to believe that unregulated fishing is occurring in the United States, which is absurd and needlessly confusing for domestic consumers. The task force should immediately work to avoid this perception from being perpetuated by its work and public pronouncements. There's no evidence that we've seen -- and we've been in the seafood business for forty years -- to indicate that legitimate domestic seafood producers are guilty of widespread mislabeling of their products, which would be almost impossible given the extensive regulation

and auditing already taking place today -- including audits under the Global Food and Safety Initiative, Safe Quality Foods program, the Quality Management program, the Marine Stewardship Council, USDA, packed under Federal Inspection Labeling program and the FDA's program to name those that we currently participate in.

We would support a new federal requirement that all imported seafood be labeled by common name or acceptable market name and by Latin name by using the existing FDA seafood list, which is the nationwide uniform labeling laws' foundation. We're not in support of using scarce federal resources to build sustainable fisheries outside of the USEEC. Instead, the government should strengthen labeling requirements for imported seafood and if the country can be identified as an IUU fishing country, fishery imports from the country should be eliminated.

And that's essentially where we're coming from. We appreciate everyone's time, but the reason why we opposed this bill on the Hill is because there is already so much regulation in place that we're trying to deal with. And as the gentlemen spoke earlier, the big problem we have in this country are reduced budgets. And I also think so far the task force pronouncements have had the potential to confuse US consumers about the job we're doing as US producers; and not only in the area of preventing economic fraud, but also in developing sustainable fisheries in the US.

So those are my comments. I appreciate the opportunity to make those preliminary comments. We'll be sending something in by the second.

Laurel Bryant: Thanks a lot, Jeff. Appreciate it.

And (Camilla), can we go to (Ben Freedus) next?

Coordinator: Your line is now open.

(Ben Freedus): Hello. My name is (Ben Freedus). I'm a Marine program officer working on fishery trade issues with traffic, the Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

As you previously mentioned, illegal unrecorded and unregulated fishing jeopardizes marine ecosystems, the sustainable management of fish stocks, food security, and livelihoods around the world. IUU fishing also distorts competition, puts responsible fishers at a disadvantage, weakens (unintelligible) of communities, promotes tax evasion, and strictly associated with transnational crime such as drugs and arms trafficking, forced label, and (unintelligible).

The scale if IUU fishing is known to be significant with just illegal and unrecorded fishing estimates that account for a third of the (unintelligible) catch, representing between ten to twenty-two billion dollars annually. Some especially vulnerable high value fisheries levels of IUU approach 50% of the total catch. Much of this global IUU enters international trade and major import markets like the US, which is the single largest country market for imported seafood in the world. A recent study suggests that the usual amount of reported catches represent up to a third of wild-caught imports (unintelligible) into the US in 2011 valued between \$1.3 and \$2.1 billion.

IUU catches are able to infiltrate global markets because of the complexity and lack of transparency of many supply chains and the lack of documentation on the legal origins of catches and other requirements for secure chain of custodies. Many US customs codes do not even differentiated between farmed and wild-caught products, and current country of origin labeling departments

only capture the information for the location of where the fish was last processed, not where or who caught it for example. So a fish caught off the coast of West Africa (unintelligible) vessels are reprocessed in China and they are exported from China to the US, where it will be reported as a product in China, obscuring the origin of the catch. This makes it difficult for regulators or supply chain actors to obtain the information necessary to determine source fisheries are operating illegally.

The task force in the US now has an incredible opportunity to put in place meaningful reforms under existing authorities such as the (Lacy) Act and other statutes to require new rules to combat IUU products from entering our market and establishing a comprehensive system to block imports of IUU products, and establishing full chain traceability to verify the illegal sources for all seafood products sold in the US.

The US should complement the emerging efforts made by other major market states to prevent these products from entering the market by requiring this information on the origin of catches, such as the who, what, when, where, and how of fishing. Everything that is already currently required of domestic fisherman must provide basic licensing information and reporting of catches under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Full chain traceability is the tool that is needed to have this information immediately associated with the product as they move through the supply chain.

Information on the legal origin of the catch should be accessible to regulators just as health and safety information is under the (Asset) system and this subset of information available to other actors in the supply chain. Standards for segregation, processing, and transfer products should be in place with the information from the point of capture to the final sale. New information should be transmitted electronically.

Finally, the government should work to establish a verification system that ensures that the information is honest and accurate, and that it is risk-based to target those products' inspection that may be at higher risk from IUU fishing, and so is not to endure or impede the flow of legal, reported, regulated seafood products entering the market. It is clear that some fisheries will not be able to automatically meet many new requirements, so (unintelligible) system may require transition times for smaller scale fisheries to meet minimum standards.

However, any new rules to establish the legal origin of catches and full chain traceability necessary to combat IUU fishing and seafood fraud and prevent the US market from being the immediate destination for these products means that a system should be comprehensive and applicable to all fisheries.

We thank the task force for this opportunity to provide input and we'll be providing additional written comments for the September 2 public commentary. Thank you.

Laurel Bryant: Thanks a lot, (Ben). And I do want to remind folks if you want to get into the queue, please press star 1 and we can get you in the queue for making comments. (Camilla), let's go to (Jerry Leep) next.

Coordinator: The next question comes from (Jerry Leep). Your line is now open.

(Jerry Leep): Thank you and thank you, Russell and Deirdre. (Jerry Leep) with the Pugh Charitable Trust and Pugh is very excited about the potential of the formation of the task force and the potential for its recommendations.

As with earlier speakers, Pugh will be submitting a longer written statement, so I just wanted to highlight a few key areas which will be included in the broader statement we have.

First is on mandatory unique vessel identification numbers. We would like to urge the US to continue to support establishment of mandatory IMO numbers for fishing vessels. Without an IMO number, an owner can mask the identity of a vessel with remarkable ease by painting a new name on its hull or erasing different flags. Mandatory IMO numbers help authorities find and prosecute illegal fishers, and so we'd encourage the task force recommend that the US continue to propose at appropriate international forums that all vessels fishing outside their flag state waters have IMO numbers and permanently mark them on their hulls.

We also would like to see a continued effort of training for under-resourced countries. We are impacted by the illegal fish that's caught there because some of it comes here for our consumption. So we would like to see the US provide enforcement and capacity-building training to help improve the efforts of these developing countries to tackle IUU fishing and to try and get it before the products of these crimes reach our shores.

Human rights -- numerous recent reports have exposed a strong link between IUU fishing and human rights' abuses. We would like to see the United States take the lead in ensuring human rights on board fishing vessels. It should formally recognize large-scale IUU fishing as transnational crime and criminal activity, and should develop a comprehensive strategy for fighting the crime.

And finally, we would like to see continued support for Interpol's Project Scale. We'd like to see the task force recommend that the United States

continue to fully support the effort there that a program created to help combat IUU fishing and related criminal activities around the world that has enjoyed great success in its first year.

And we'll have more formal comments in our written submission, but thank you for giving me the opportunity to make a statement.

Laurel Bryant: Thanks, (Jerry).

Okay, Operator. Our next commenter, please.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Chris Shopmire) of the VP of Agency of Affairs of Federal Law Office Association. Your line is now open.

(Chris Shopmire): Thank you, panel, for the opportunity for hosting this opportunity for us to comment. Like (Paul Raymond), I serve as the National Vice President for Agency of Affairs for the Federal Law Enforcement Officers' Association. I'll dispense with the background information that (Paul) gave you and not duplicate any of the areas he's covered.

We do represent 26,000 agency officers from sixty-five federal law enforcement agencies, including Homeland Security and Agriculture, the Natural Resource Agency. And some of the areas that I want to touch on quickly that (Paul) did a very good job of articulating in the beginning here are - (Paul) and I did recently meet with NOA leadership and quite honestly we heard it loud and clear from both our membership and non-government organizations, stakeholders, and even past violators of NOA Fishery, including the Department of Justice Environment and Natural Resource Division and some of the respective districts - that NOA, in their effort to reduce the number of agents they have and increase the number of uniformed

enforcement officers they have - where our numbers have now dropped below 100.

I am one of those. I just recently retired after twenty-six years as a NOA agent (unintelligible) United States. Our concern is that they're also looking at closing some critical offices, (unintelligible) in the areas such as the Southeastern and Southwestern United States. And these offices are in marine-rich environments and areas that have extensive investigative responsibilities of IUU fishing activities.

And with all of the comments and information that we've heard from various sources including our membership, we take a strong opposition to closing any of these offices and we have put together a package which we will make available to your committee. I'm going to ask (Paul Raymond) to (unintelligible) that's used our agency President (unintelligible) NOA fisheries.

The other thing I want to touch on quickly here is that in an effort to reduce the number of agents, the OIC report indicated an increase in the number of uniformed officers. Although most days it seems to have a balance similar to what the OIC is proposing, those agencies have a twenty-year law enforcement certified retirement that those officers come into. NOA does not have that.

Now why is that important? It's important as far as retention goes. If you're going to reduce agents and you're going to replace them with uniformed officers, you're going to have to have a package that's similar to the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, and the National Parks Service in their uniformed divisions, or else we're going to be nothing more than a revolving door. Yes, we will hire uniformed officers and

we'll put them in these locations, but if I was a uniformed officer after two to three years, I'd be looking to get into a position that gave me the same law enforcement package that my counterparts and my colleagues have in these other agencies.

WE all know how important enforcement is. We all know how important the biological side of this. No management plan works unless all the gears are lubricated at the same time.

The final thing I'd like to offer is this - I think it's just briefly been touched on. We represent the Park of Homeland Security Agency. We're all well-aware of what's going on right now in Isis and what's going on with Al-Qaeda of the past. It's not a stretch to think about the protection of our food supply, which includes seafood.

And I must say this -- they are a modifying threat and as you've seen through the media and what we're receiving in intelligence briefings where we've been invited on the Hill with Congress and through our interaction with agency directors, make no mistake about it we have to be concerned with not only seafood product and seafood safety, but with a threat to our seafood supply from international terrorist activities. And believe me folks, that's not a stretch.

I thank you for the opportunity to comment here, and I'm sure that our agency President, (Paul Raymond), will supply those comments as I was talking - that I elaborated on here. Thank you.

Laurel Bryant: Okay. Thanks very much (Chris). Right now, we really don't have anyone in the queue that is from the public. I would really like to encourage if anybody wants to make comments, this is a great time to get on. We've got lots of you

on the phone. So I'm going to give that a couple of more minutes. Well, maybe not a couple of minutes. Sixty seconds seems very long in silence.

So again, looking for anyone that would like to make comments -- members of the public, please.

Coordinator: Again, if you would like to make a comment, please press star 1.

Laurel Bryant: Thanks, (Camilla).

(Camilla), can we go to (Mariah Boyle)?

Coordinator: Next question comes from (Mariah Boyle). Your line is now open.

(Mariah Boyle): Great, thank you. Thanks Laurel and others. My name is (Mariah Boyle) and I'm a Project Director at Fishwise, an environmental NGO based in California. Fishwise is pleased to see the creation of the task force. We see it as an important step against IUU fishing and the work to improve seafood trades ability. We know that IUU fishing is a problem globally. Illegal fish is imported into the US market and is sold in international markets. This undermines the sustainable fisheries management and undercuts those fisheries and seafood business following the rules.

As previously mentioned, human rights' abuses and IUU fishing often co-occur. The lack of at-seas surveillance systems, lack of transparency of the vessel owners and vessel histories, and the availability of low-cost migrant labor creates an environment at sea in which human rights and environmental violations can occur with impunity. The true extent of illegal activity and human rights abuses within seafood supply chains is difficult to quantify

because these practices are intentionally hidden, monitoring and enforcement efforts lack sufficient resources and are undermined by corruption.

However, we are seeing progress. Seafood companies are implementing measures in their supply chains to combat these problems. Governments are collaborating at an international level and advances in technology are allowing monitoring and enforcement to improve on the water. However, more action is needed.

We believe there are measures underway that would benefit from continued focus and support, such as to encourage incentivized traceability improvements by seafood companies. We suggest supporting unique vessel identifiers like IMO numbers and the creation of a global record of fishing vessels will benefit this effort; continuing to support ratification and the implementation of the Port State Measures Agreement globally; encouraging international efforts to improve transparency and monitoring control of surveillance; and lastly, updating inter-agency agreements to encourage collaboration to address all of these challenges.

So in conclusion, we thank the task force for this opportunity to make these comments and we'll also submit our recommendations in writing. Thanks very much.

Laurel Bryant: Thank you, (Mariah). And (Camilla), can we go to our next commenter, please?

Coordinator: Next commenter is (Melissa Raymond). Your line is now open.

(Melissa Raymond): Hi everyone. My name's (Melissa). I'm just participating in this conference call via my uncle. Thank you very much for keeping me informed.

So I would think that my main concern coming from just the general public would be how do we get this more prevalent? How do we get more people involved? I think this would be something that would be very interesting to see in a - there's a Youtube channel called "RSAnimate," just getting that story out there, getting people involved. So if anyone has any suggestions as to links or Senators to call, any - all these actions, please feel free to get in the queue and contribute.

As far as the Isis and general safety concern goes, I was curious to see if that would be more so on - what level would you see that being open to the general public? Would that be at your grocery stores, at the restaurants? And then I would also probably support the IMO numbers. It sounds like - we were talking about - it kind of sounds like a VIN number for your vehicle. I thought that was interesting.

And so - yes. Thank you very much for holding this conference call and keeping - getting people involved and informing others. Finally, though, none of this matters if we don't take action. So if anyone has suggestions, please contribute. Thank you.

Laurel Bryant: Thank you very much. Operator, can we go to our next commenter, please?

Coordinator: Our next comment comes from (Holly) with ISSF. Your line is now open.

Laurel Bryant: (Holly), are you there? Did you maybe have your phone on mute?

(Holly Coler): Pardon me, yes. This is (Holly Coler). I did have my phone on mute. Thank you for that and good afternoon everyone. My name is (Holly Coler) with the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation. First and foremost, I'd just

like to thank all those - NDC, NOA, and (unintelligible) made this opportunity for us to provide these comments.

ISSF has already submitted public comments, and so I won't go into a lot of detail. Those are available to you already. I just wanted to pick up on a couple of little things that a couple of the other speakers had spoken to -- colleagues from Fishwise and from Pugh.

Thinking about IMO numbers, for example -- those are already required for the (unintelligible) more widespread requirement of those numbers for the reasons that they will outline if something that is a tangible recommendation for existing tools that can be used to comeback IUU fishing. This is something that members of our organization have already committed to by (unintelligible) vessels' IMO numbers. It's unique vessel identifiers.

Another area that we could recommend - again, someone touched on it already in terms of the increase in transparency in some of the existing tools that are out there. For example, there are some areas that could be strengthened in the RFMO context, both in the compliance monitoring component of those RFMO's - (unintelligible) compliance in the numbers as well as how their IUU vessel lists are created and strengthening some of the way that those lists are - their criteria, (unintelligible) that are listed in the process - where they are involved in that. Those IUU vessel lists are a very possible tool and look to buy the marketplace (unintelligible) something more and more and as a place to identify that after. That's been something we encourage the government to consider, ways of strengthening that platform and managing (unintelligible) context.

Similarly, the RFMO vessel registers - that's where authorized vessel lists for these different RFMO's also could be improved. For instance, they could be

strengthened to capture more vessels and to reduce and remove the (unintelligible) so that vessels that are fishing and are authorized to be fishing in an (unintelligible) context outside of national waters (unintelligible) in national waters (unintelligible) RFMO needs to have (unintelligible) and vital information recorded and kept up to date. Again, this is a place that's in the public register, providing that valuable information on vessels fishing in those regions.

We also definitely agree with those that have spoken to - that there are a lot of good collaborative efforts underway between government and industry, a lot of public-private partnership that we can look to to provide a good example.

There's also a range of more modern tools that are emerging and being used more and more, and are being piloted around the world for electronic monitoring. This is remote monitoring and we (unintelligible) in addition to human observers aboard vessels and video monitoring. There's also electronic recording which can allow vessels and observers to lodge their reports on an almost near real-time basis -- reduced time, reduced mistakes. The data would be - feed into national authorities and compliance more quickly.

Those are just some of the things we'd like to touch on. Like I said, we've already given some comments. We'd also like to see a (unintelligible) commitment to the Port State Measures Agreement and implementation of that tool. And so I just wanted to call attention to a couple of those elements that are captured more completely in our comments. Thank you.

Laurel Bryant: Thank you, (Holly). And Operator, our next speaker, please?

Coordinator: Our next caller is (Andy Cohen). Your line is now open.

Laurel Bryant: Caller, are you on mute?

We are not hearing anything.

Coordinator: Okay, one moment.

Again, the next question comes from (Andy Cohen). Your line is now open.

(Andy Cohen): Are you able to hear me now?

Laurel Bryant: Yes.

(Andy Cohen): Good, okay. Thanks for the opportunity. My name is (Andy Cohen) -- c-o-h-e-n. I am a retired special agent in charge of NOA Fisheries law enforcement and I have a total of twenty-two years working with NOA enforcement and a total of thirty years in federal natural resource law enforcement. I want to echo the comments made by (Paul Raymond) and (Chris Shopmire) and I wanted to add a little historical perspective for the task force.

A lot has been said about a new NOA staffing plan that pretty much guts the former workforce and replaces special agents who are very highly trained and specialized with patrol officers. Now patrol is a very important function of fisheries law enforcement, but of course needs to bear in mind that NOA enforcement pays the coastal states millions of dollars every year to perform a patrol function which is really their forte. NOA's forte, historically, has been complex investigations, detective work that really can't be done by a patrol officer. It's not their mandate, it's not their expertise, and it would be unfair to expect them to do that. I'm talking about things such as complicated financial investigations, money laundering investigations, smuggling, mislabeling, transshipment, and undercover work in some instances.

I would urge the task force to look into this current staffing plan and look into the methodology that was used to make these determinations. I would be very surprised if any of the current senior managers in Office of Law Enforcement either understanding the background of the staffing plan or understand what's really needed because the majority of them are quite new.

The staffing plan is the result of an Office of Inspector General Report and I know from speaking to the Inspector General's investigators firsthand that the staffing plan is based on preconceived conclusions that they had coming in to make the assessment. We were told from the very get-go that NOA enforcement has too many special agents proportionally. I would urge the task force to examine the real reasons. I think you will find that the real reasons were politically-motivated by the Inspector General and certain other people in NOA at the time. And I think that you will find that it's really a poor decision. The task force has such important work to be done. Without a good enforcement agency at the forefront, all the efforts will be for naught.

I was instrumental years ago in a shift away from uniformed officers in NOA LOA towards special agents. I think it was the right decision at the time. We worked very hard. It was an uphill battle. We persevered and we had some amazing results, amazing court cases, things that really made an impact.

Laurel Bryant: Hey, (Andy). This is Laurel. Can I just regroup you? We've heard - a lot of this is - do you have anything with regard to some of the eleven trigger questions that the task force is looking? I know all that's important, but it's getting a little repetitive and would just like to see if I can refocus you. Thank you.

(Andy Cohen): Thank you for that, Laurel. Thanks for that reminder. I don't have any other comments, so I'll get off now. Let me leave you with my phone number if anyone needs to contact me. It is 978.712.8007. Thanks.

Laurel Bryant: Thanks. Presently we don't have anyone in the queue. I'd like to give a couple of seconds in case anyone would like to. Again, it's star 1 if you would like to make comments.

Okay, well seeing that we don't have anyone else wanting to make comments, I will turn it over to the task force members for closing remarks.

Deidre Warner-Kramer: Thank you very much, Laurel, and thank you very much to those who have made comments as well as those who have been on the line. I hope that this has been helpful food for thought for those that didn't make comments. I know for us it's been extremely helpful.

Just a reminder that, of course, written comments can still be submitted any time up until September 2 - can be done electronically through the process that was outlined at the beginning. And then the task force will begin the important work of running through all of these ideas. And of course, according to the Presidential memorandum, the final recommendations will be issued towards the end of this year.

So thank you all very much, again, for your time. We look forward to seeing the written comments that have been reference so far in the call as well as any others that those who are listening in would like to submit between now and September 2. Thank you very much and I hope everybody has a good afternoon.

Coordinator: Thank you. This concludes today's conference. You may disconnect at this time.

END