

June 11, 2004 American Bar Association National Spring Conference on the Environment – Legal and Policy Responses to Declining Marine Ecosystems, University of Maryland School of Law:

The conference, announced prior to the release of the U.S. Oceans Commission's Preliminary Report, this became a major focus of the meeting. While not one of the speakers on the various panels, nevertheless, AFRF utilized this opportunity to rebut some of the more misleading information set forth by various organizations invited to speak such as The Ocean Conservancy, NRDC, Oceana, the Marine Conservation Biology Institute, Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space, Earthjustice Environmental Law Clinic, Stanford Law School and the Center for SeaChange (the followup organization to the Pew Foundation's Oceans Commission). AFRF was the only organization present to present the views of albacore scientists and fishermen with regard to various issues such as: the U.S. Oceans Commission's Preliminary Report; FDA-EPA mercury advisories on tuna fish; the Council systems alleged capture by commercial fishing interests; bird, turtle, and marine mammal interactions with various fisheries and appropriate reactions to these problems; the need to bolster attempts at ecosystem management with increased scientific research; the characterization of various litigation brought by ENGOs and commercial fishermen; the overall health of our oceans; and the threat of overfishing.

This was an important forum since those present included Margaret Spring, General counsel for the Senate Oceans Committee (who was very helpful in the passage of the implementing legislation); Dr. Richard W. Spinrad, Assistant Administrator for Oceans, NOAA; Jean Williams, head attorney for the Department of Justice's Marine Resources Division which defends all cases against NOAA-NMFS; Sam Rauch, III, the NOAA General Counsel for Fisheries; academics from a number of Law Schools with ocean law programs; and at least 12 attorney's from the legal office at NOAA-NMFS in Silver Springs. In addition, important channels of communication were opened with Kameran Onley, President's Council on Environmental Quality, who will be responsible for the Executive Branch's response to the U.S. Ocean's Commission; David Sandalow, former Assistant Secretary for OES, State Department, and now at the Brookings Institution; Brooks Bowen of the U.S. Oceans Commission; and Gene Buck of the Congressional Research Service.