

Responsive Management™



130 Franklin Street
Harrisonburg, Virginia 22801

September 10, 2009

Dr. Donald McIsaac
Executive Director
Pacific Fishery Management Council
7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 101
Portland, Oregon 97220-1384

**RE: September 13, 2009 Council Meeting
Public Opinion Polls Conducted by Responsive Management**

Dear Dr. McIsaac:

This letter concerns a letter submitted to the Board on or about August 25, 2009, by Ms. Gaffney of the Ocean Conservancy regarding public opinion polling conducted by Responsive Management under contract to the Alliance of Communities for Sustainable Fisheries. We were provided a copy of the letter, and we would like an opportunity to respond to the points made in that letter.

We submit this letter simply to comment on our polling; being objective researchers, we do not wish for the submission of this letter to be construed as taking sides on this debate. Indeed, we make no stand on the issues before the Council.

The following shows the comments in the Ocean Conservancy letter in *italic* with our response following.

The biggest flaw with the national poll is that many of its questions are premised on a false policy choice....

We set up a scale from one extreme to the other extreme to see where most people would fall on the continuum, and they fell out where they did. In no place in the survey did we say that either end of the continuum is where the current policy effort is being directed, so it did not undermine where people placed themselves along the continuum. The scale used in this analysis is shown on the following page, along with the lead-in to the questions. The scale included five questions,

from one extreme to the other. The introduction made no implication that one approach was currently being pursued over another. Furthermore, the questioning was worded to include both “agree” and “disagree” so as to not bias the respondent’s answers.

The survey questions were as follows:

Next, I am going to ask you about several different approaches to the management of U.S. ocean waters and resources, and I’d like to know if you agree or disagree with each one.

Do you agree or disagree that...

...all U.S. ocean waters should be open to public human use?

...all U.S. ocean waters should be open to public human use but should be scientifically managed for sustainable use?

(IF ASKED: "Scientifically managed" means managing resources based on scientific study and understanding of the resources.) (IF ASKED: "Sustainable use" means the use or harvest of the ocean resources in a way that does not permanently deplete or damage the resources.)

...some U.S. ocean water areas should be protected but open to public human use and scientifically managed for sustainable use?

(IF ASKED: "Scientifically managed" means managing resources based on scientific study and understanding of the resources.) (IF ASKED: "Sustainable use" means the use or harvest of the ocean resources in a way that does not permanently deplete or damage the resources.)

...some U.S. ocean water areas should be fully protected with no human use allowed?

...all U.S. ocean waters should be fully protected with no human use allowed?

For each question, respondents were given the following answer set:

Strongly agree

Moderately agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Moderately disagree

Strongly disagree

The results of the five questions were then analyzed relative to one another. In this analysis, the most agreement was for the question in the middle of the scale: “some U.S. ocean water areas should be protected but open to public human use and scientifically managed for sustainable use” (91% agreed with this approach). This was followed closely by “all U.S. ocean waters should be open to public human use but should be scientifically managed for sustainable use” (82% agreed with this). The lowest agreement was for both the questions at the extremes.

In spite of this flaw, the national poll shows...support (94%) for ocean protection.

This comes from another line of questioning in which we asked, “In general, do you support or oppose efforts to protect U.S. ocean waters and ocean life?” In this very broad question, we found much support (78% strongly supporting and 17% moderately supporting) for protecting oceans waters and ocean life. However, this result must be examined with the follow-up question in mind: “When I say “protect” U.S. ocean waters and ocean life, what does the term

“protect” mean to you?” Only 8% gave an answer (the question was open-ended without an answer set being read to respondents) that related to full protection with no human use allowed. Most commonly, responses related to sustainable use (29%).

Fully 55% of respondents agreed with the statement that “some U.S. ocean waters should be fully protected from all human use....

Again, this points toward a middle ground, as the statement indicates that “some” waters should be protected.

Question 10...sets up a false dichotomy....

Again, we simply set up a premise for the survey; we did not indicate that either of the options is being favored over the other at this point. Rather, we simply stated two options that could be considered (as we assumed that no options were excluded at this stage) and asked people which of those two they prefer.

...93%...support designation of sanctuaries.

Yes, in a quite broad question, most people support some protection through the designation of sanctuaries.

...64% believe that sanctuary managers should have the power to make rules...

While this is true, it relates to “power” to make rules (i.e., people do not want a “puppet” at the top but want a manager who can manage), but this should be taken in context of the rest of the survey where people indicated more directly policy that they wanted to see enacted. This finding is not the same as wanting managers to necessarily *make* those rules. One would not want to simply examine this result without looking at questions that related more directly to the actual rules people wanted promulgated.

...68% say it is...important to create additional MPAs where fishing is restricted or banned...

Again, this is true. However, the results regarding people’s wishes to have more areas under protection should not be divorced from questions that directly pertain to how they want that protection to be enacted.

Given the polls many flaws...

We do not see flaws. We set up premises, and certainly other premises could have been set up, but we would not describe these as flaws. Furthermore, all the results have been made available, so we, as researchers, are not seeking to hide nor obfuscate results. They are what they are.

In summary, we do not doubt that many people favor protection. But the surveys obtained quite extensive data on what exactly people mean by “protection,” and those results should not be divorced from the rest of the results. In fact, as researchers, we would urge both sides not to simply cherry pick a few results of our polls without considering those results in context of all the surveys that have been conducted.

Sincerely,

Martin Jones
Senior Research Associate
Responsive Management