



# St. Thomas Fishermen's Association

## Protecting our Natural Heritage and Culture

March 27, 2009

Hon. Barack Obama, President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama;

We here in the Virgin Islands overwhelmingly support your efforts to resolve the numerous problems which you inherited from your predecessor. We are particularly supportive of your position of inclusion and willingness to listen to others which stands in stark contrast to the prior administration's paranoia and arrogance. For us here in "America's Paradise" that view bordered on a paternalistic colonialism in which the Federal Government treated the Territory with open disdain and arrogance.

We are writing to make you aware that at least one element of that approach has apparently survived through to present and to ask for your help in addressing the problems being created by the National Marine Fisheries Service in our islands.

The St. Thomas Fishermen's Association (and our sister St. Croix Commercial Fishermen's Association) have been working cooperatively with the Caribbean Fishery Management Council since 2005 to try and develop fishery management actions which can both protect resources as well as the livelihoods of fishermen and the culture of the Virgin Islands community. In pursuing this cooperation, local fishermen have carried out important studies, undertaken self regulation and worked towards reducing fishing effort. In general, the efforts have been productive. We have been supported in this by our Governor, John deJongh and by our much loved Delegate Donna Christian.

In 2007, when the Congress passed the Magnusan Act Reauthorization requiring an end to overfishing by 2010, that all began to change. Following that requirement, the National Marine Fisheries, in their rush to meet the 2010 deadline, began to brush aside the Council, ignore stakeholder involvement, manipulate the council process and dictate management actions to be taken. We feel this approach is not only inappropriate but of questionable legality. Specifically:

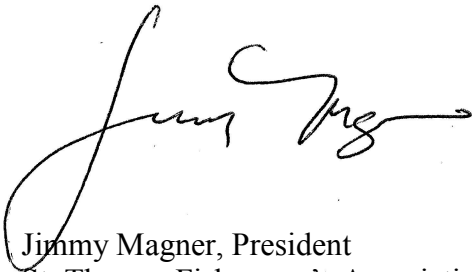
- NMFS employees and ex-employees manipulated a recent meeting of the CFMC Scientific and Statistical Committee and prevented development of values for overfishing levels and allowable biological catch required to develop mandated fishing quotas.
- NMFS' Regional Director used this absence to develop a "scoping document which presented his own view of requirements and refused to acknowledge prior efforts of CFMC committees and stakeholders.

- Such document was not provided to the Council to review until AFTER it was presented at this week's council meeting.
- There was no prior Council request for development of said document.
- Our own efforts to address concerns for fishery management by reducing effort and estimates of fishery based quotas have been insulted and summarily dismissed.
- A 2005 Socio-Economic study of the Virgin Islands undertaken by NMFS which recommended designation as Fishing Communities and would afford protection to our industry has been prevented from finalization and is being suppressed.

As further evidence of this colonial arrogance, when local senators, the Lt. Governor and our Governor came to the meeting to ask that local concerns be considered, the Regional Director and NOAA General Council did not even listen. In fact, while the Governor was speaking, they chatted among themselves, laughed and carried on with their e-mails, not even turning in his direction. Clearly, they feel that Virgin Islands interests are not even important enough to interfere with their checking of sports results.

This is where we are asking for your assistance, Virgin Islands should not be abused by minor Federal Bureaucrats. We should not have unnecessary restrictions shoved down our throats by people who refuse to even listen, let alone consider our concerns. They should not be allowed to brush aside the legally established CFMC and force them to rubberstamp their dictates. Please! Step in and end colonialism in the US Virgin Islands!!

Thank you;



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Cc:

Hon. John P. deJongh, Governor  
Hon. Donna Christian, Delegate to Congress  
Hon. Gary Locke, Secretary of Commerce  
Hon. Jane Lubchenko, NOAA Administrator  
Miguel Rolon, Executive Director, CFMC

[Virgin Islands Fishermen Supporting Intelligent Management of Virgin Islands Fishery Resources](#)