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Catch share 'study' bid reunites old ties

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It was back in 2004 that Jane Lubchenco — then an entrepreneurial scientist, now President Obama's administrator of oceans and atmosphere — was wooing the Intel founders' foundation to help finance one of her projects, a pan-university research organization known by the acronym PISCO.

The Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans, which she co-founded in 1999, has prospered — with grants estimated at more than \$100 million, primarily from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation and the Lucille and David Packard Foundation — and links dozens of researchers from multiple West Coast campuses.

Now, the Moore Foundation — patriarch Gordon Moore helped found the processing giant Intel — has decided to reach its own conclusion about the efficacy of catch shares in practice.

It has commissioned a five-year assessment of the system, funded by a \$2.7 million grant to MRAG Americas — whose president, marine scientist and NOAA's former Northeast chief, Andrew Rosenberg, cites Lubchenco as a reference on his resume.

Since 2004, PISCO's foundation and scientific partners have pushed the nation to control fishing, privatize the ocean's resources in the name of conservation, and contending that commodification and fish share trading would save revitalize the oceans and spawn an economic golden age of harvest from the sea.

According to PISCO documents examined by the Times, the PISCO business plan for the years 2010 through 2014 is to integrate science and economics to "create incentives for marine reserves through catch shares — and vice versa."

Now, the process has brought catch shares to the New England groundfishery, with what Gov. Deval Patrick, U.S. Sens. John Kerry and Scott Brown and Congressmen Barney Frank and John Tierney, as well as a large contingent of scientists and fishermen, contend has been an economic "disaster" for the region's ports, including Gloucester.

The governor's filing in November of socio-economic studies of accelerating consolidation and job loss along with a request for a disaster declaration remain on the desk of federal Commerce Secretary John Bryson.

The Moore grant proposal ties together a number of longtime allies.

Rosenberg got a master's degree in 1980 at Colorado State University where Lubchenco long held court as one of the nation's preeminent activist-scientists. And in 2009, Lubchenco gave Rosenberg a small, but prestigious appointment as a "senior advisor" to the White House Council Environmental Quality for its work on "marine spacial planning."

President Obama issued an executive order creating the commitment to organizing the bureaucratic systems that would manage the form of planning that critics and skeptics in Congress describe as "ocean zoning" by executive overreach.

"We have international examples and research that demonstrate the ecological, economic and social benefits of catch shares," Barry Gold, program director of the Moore Foundation's Marine Conservation Initiative, said in a press release. "Now we have an exciting opportunity to measure the performance of these new management systems as they are implemented on the water."

Moore expects "high quality and objective evaluations" from MRAG Americans.

But skeptics abound, citing Rosenberg's close affiliation with Lubchenco.

"It's laughable for anyone to believe that an 'assessment' paid for by the same folks who spent millions working to establish these programs will be anything close to honest or 'objective,'" said Congressman Walter Jones, a North Carolina Republican who sponsored legislation to end federal financing of new catch share programs.

Frank and Tierney voted with Jones last February when his amendment won a 100-vote majority as a budget rider. But catch share forces — spearheaded by the nonprofit giant Environmental Defense Fund, where Lubchenco served as board officer before being tapped to head the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration — hired a ring of lobbyists and saw the Jones amendment eliminated via parliamentary maneuvering in late November.

"We all know that catch shares are designed to consolidate the fleet; millions of dollars of slickly produced, sham 'assessments' won't make people forget that," Jones said in an email. "If fishermen come together and decide they want catch shares, fine. But these outside groups should spare us the charade of their 'objectivity'."

It was in 2008 that EDF, together with the Marine Conservation Biology Institute and World Wildlife Fund, commissioned a policy paper that urged President Obama to adopt catch shares or watch fishing predation empty the seas of all but the jellyfish.

"There is scientific consensus that fishing is fundamentally altering ocean ecosystems which are increasingly likely to yield swarms of jellyfish rather than food fish," wrote the authors — including Lubchenco, Rosenberg and scientist Steven Gaines.

Gaines, who is Lubchenco's brother-in-law, was one of the original founders of PISCO, and was in the group strategizing in 2004 on how get the Moore Foundation to begin a funding stream.

The immediate goal then was \$31 million, which was achieved in combined grants by Moore and the Packard foundations.

One strategic planning session, on March 5, was dedicated to creating a "vision document for the Moore proposal," according to minutes of the meeting obtained by the Times.

The documents indicate that Gaines and Lubhenco were present, along with four senior members of the PISCO team. Bruce Menge, Lubchenco's husband and co-founder of the organization, was not present, according to the notes of the informal discussion.

The group discussed "examples of things Moore cares about ... to include in the 'Fit with Moore Mission.'

"We would have a hard time getting funded elsewhere because we are too integrative; not fragmented into individual disciplines," Lubchenco, Gaines and company agreed.

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