



NWSEO Defends Members from Congressman Barney Frank's Attacks

(October 4, 2010) NWSEO is defending three NOAA Enforcement Attorneys whose work is unfairly targeted by Congressman Barney Frank (D-Mass.). The attorneys, members of NWSEO, were the subject of an Inspector General's investigation into the NOAA Fisheries Enforcement Program. The IG investigation is the result of several Massachusetts state lawmakers and members of Congress complaining of excessive penalties assessed against commercial fishing interests who have broken the law.

"The attorneys did their jobs. They enforced the laws, assessed penalties according to NOAA's guidelines and received awards and recognition for their work," said Dan Sobien, president of the NWSEO. "Now they are being used as scapegoats because lawbreakers are unhappy with the enforcement of a law that Congress passed."

The NOAA enforcement attorneys, who have received a combined total of 38 performance awards for their enforcement actions since 2002, follow agency guidelines and the penalty schedule established by NOAA found at <http://www.gc.noaa.gov/docs.html#gcel>. The performance awards include cases which are part of the IG investigation, such as the multiple enforcement actions against the Gloucester Seafood Display Auction.

Congressman Barney Frank has attacked NWSEO's work with the attorneys, blurring the facts to make it appear as though NWSEO'S work is against fisherman. NWSEO President Dan Sobien has made the union's stand for fair treatment of the NOAA enforcement attorneys while also supporting honest fisherman in his recent response to Congressman Frank's allegations:

"NWSEO is defending only the honest, hardworking fishermen and their families who have obeyed the nation's laws, not those who have gained a competitive advantage by overfishing. When poachers break the rules and catch more than their fair share, the result is fewer fish to catch, higher costs to fish, and low prices at the dock. It makes it that much harder for the honest fishermen across New England to make a living. It is regrettable that Representative Frank has taken the side of proven and admitted lawbreakers.

The enforcement attorneys at NOAA were just doing their job, just doing what they were paid to do and what they frequently received awards for. The attorneys we represent are trying to create a fair playing field for honest fishermen. Anyone who cared about the honest working people in their district would not take the side of the cheaters and big business that game the system.

Further, the claim that the Inspector General's Report was "independent" and "non-political" is not accurate. The IG investigators repeatedly and explicitly told the attorneys under

investigation that there was a lot of political pressure on them in this matter and one investigator also said that they would be accused of a white-wash unless they found wrong doing.”

For more information on this topic and related news articles, please log on to www.nwseo.org.