

Waterman's Gazette

Maryland Watermen's Association
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**Politicians in the
trenches & a good
team at DNR**
President's Podium


by **Larry Simns**
President,
Maryland Watermen's Association

First, I want to thank Senator Mikulski, Senator Sarbanes, Representative Gilchrest and our Governor Ehrlich for their continued commitment to taking care of Maryland citizens during and after the hurricane. Our elected officials truly went to the mat to help those in need during these recent days of recovery. I had many phone calls myself from officials who either were asking what they could do to help, or explaining to me what people needed to do to get aid quickly. We were able to mail information to all our board members immediately with phone numbers and detailed explanations of what steps watermen needed to take to find help. It really makes you feel good about elected officials when they are worried about the little people in time of need; they didn't leave the work to bureaucrats, instead they were personally involved from the beginning. And they continue to be personally involved as we get deeper into understanding what the long-term impacts of the storm really were.

I also can't say enough about the individuals who reached out to help one another - whether they were watermen or residents - so that anyone who was in real need found some kind of resource to keep them steady. My personal observations in Rock Hall alone were deeply inspiring. I saw town council members and our town manager driving the trucks to help haul things away and showing up to clear trees and debris.

Then there were the people that were sent as official representatives of help-based agencies (FEMA, etc.) The people went beyond the call of duty to ease the concerns of those affected. They were pleasant to talk to and they helped people fill out paperwork and took the time to answer all

of our questions. I just don't know how to convey my gratefulness at how decent and helpful everyone was. I must give credit to our elected officials because they clearly let everyone know there were folks who needed to be taken care of, and the people in the field were giving their personal best. I also admit that despite the best efforts of the individuals, the regulations themselves constrain what financial assistance is available, so many people and businesses are falling through the regulatory cracks and receiving little or no aid. But it is the language of the rules, not the people administering them, that is the limiting factor.

Whatever can be done is being done, and I need to remind everyone that when election time comes, whether or not you agree with a person's politics or foreign policy agenda or whatever, what really counts is how they deal with the people they represent. I can tell you our elected officials were in the trenches and paying close attention to making sure Marylanders got the best possible treatment during this crisis. It is a lesson I will not forget.

And while we are looking at the big picture of politics and fair treatment, I want to also say that while we have people at DNR with different views and various backgrounds, they are together making a fine team for managing the state's resources. Because of the diversity in views, we have a team that will be fair to all the fishing user groups - commercial, recreational and charter boat.

At the top is Secretary of Resources Ron Franks, who is an avid sportsfisherman (especially fly fishing) and also a long-time member of CCA. So the recreational people should be very happy with him in place. And even though he's been a CCA member for a long while, I feel he will also give a fair shake to the watermen as well as the recreational fishermen in our state. I have no reason to believe otherwise.

Second in command is Pete Jensen, who has been known for a long while as being very fair. Sometimes the recreational fishermen felt like he was on the side of the commercial fishermen because he didn't agree to take fishing away from us. That made him an enemy in the eyes of some recreational fishermen who would like to see commercial watermen disappear. But I can't think of one thing he's done to hurt recreational fishermen in his positions at DNR over the years, and yet I can think of many things he's done to help them as well as those in the charterboat fishery. And of course, he's always been fair to commercial watermen. Now, we didn't always like what he did, but we always felt he was being fair.

Third in command is Mike Slattery, who comes from working with inland game species, so he's not necessarily coming from either a commercial or recreational fishing point of view, so that makes him pretty neutral. This leads me to think he would be nonjudgmental of any group. So far, that's exactly what he's been, and he continues to show a willingness to work with everybody.

Now as Fisheries Director, we have Howard King. Howard has been with DNR for many years and has always been noncontroversial in his work. He has, in fact, probably been to more recreational and charterboat meetings than

anyone else at DNR. Now I can't say the same for his attendance at commercial meetings, but I have the utmost confidence in his fairness in working with us regardless. In observing Howard over the years, I can say first-hand that he has always been fair-minded.

Then we come to the newly-appointed Deputy Director of fisheries - Kenny Keen. I've had the pleasure of working with Kenny at the MWA over the years and found him to also be very fair-minded in dealing with controversies between gear types. He's always been able to listen to all sides, regardless of what his own background is. Many people think that a waterman is a watermen and we all think alike, but that's very far from the truth. We have many different gear types who are often fighting against one another, and if they aren't fighting because of their gear, then we still struggle with differences between geographical regions. Sometimes I think we are our own worst enemy because we are all so independent in our work and often in our thinking.

Kenny has always been able to see issues here at the MWA from all sides and come to a fair and even solution to the problem at hand. If he can do that with watermen, I figure the rest of the state will be much easier! I know of no better person for that job given his past experience as a waterman and as a businessman. He brings a common sense background to the rich scientific knowledge of the Department to help build a smoothly running team of natural resource managers.

I see no reason why a few outdoor writers have tried to sow seeds of discontent amongst the recreational community over Kenny's appointment because he happened to be a waterman. *Since when does being a waterman make you unqualified to do any other job?* I was a little disappointed by some of the people who made comments that were quoted in these articles and not surprised by some others who argued he's not qualified. I know that there are those in the recreational community who simply don't want to see commercial fishermen on the water. They may veil their statements as conservation, but the truth comes out when you get to the real logic of what they are saying.

To condemn Kenny, despite his knowledge and experience, simply because he has worked professionally on the water, seems to show the bias of those who simply want watermen out of the resource. Let's look at the bigger picture and recognize those who can do a fair and reasonable job and also realize we have differences among the backgrounds of our regulators. These people are there because they are qualified and committed to their work; that's what I expect from all of them and no less from Kenny.

I want to reassure the recreational, charterboat and commercial fishermen that Kenny will be fair and very level in any decisions he might make, which will be few, considering that the people over him will be making most of them. So I think the fears that the outdoor writers tried to instill in everyone are ill-founded. And I think time will bear out the truth.

I also want to let watermen know that there will be times when Kenny will do things that watermen will not be happy with, just as Pete Jensen had to do over the years, as must anyone in that position. I don't want anyone to think we'll get a free ride, because that is far from the case. The important thing is that we protect the species we harvest and make

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(Podium, cont'd from previous page)

this a priority. I know that Kenny will do that because he knows our future depends on these resources.

And while I am acknowledging our DNR team, I'll add that Gina Hunt, who is filling Howard's previous position, will also show herself as an asset to the Department. Gina has become very knowledgeable about fisheries issues over the years and I'm sure she will be a great resource not only to her superiors, but also to all the user groups who need information, just as Howard was when he served.

And we further recognize Chris Judy and Tom O'Connell in the oyster program. Chris will manage the Chesapeake shellfish programs while Tom will coordinate fisheries restoration. Chris has decades of knowledge on oyster issues in the Chesapeake and he's always been helpful to oystermen in sharing his skills. Tom is also a veteran of the Department and we look forward to his continued efforts on behalf of our native species. So between the two of them we'll be in good hands, and we know that what can be done, will be done.

Once again, I have to give credit to the Governor and the Secretary for making strong, though not always popular decisions. They have the insight to see what is needed and confidence to stand by their vision to make sure we have effective resource management. They are here to govern fairly and wisely, and in looking at the team they have assembled, as well as their compassionate response following Isabel, I think we have a lot to be thankful for.