

RIGHT WHALE NEWS

A Publication of the Georgia Environmental Policy Institute

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Changes for *Right Whale News*

Recent events have caused *Right Whale News* to address the link between editorial influence and financial support. This issue, faced almost universally by both print and broadcast media, was brought to the fore by an exchange of letters with the National Marine Fisheries Service (see below). As a result, *Right Whale News* has reaffirmed its role as an independent voice for right whale recovery. With this affirmation, *Right Whale News* will no longer be a publication of the southeast and northeast implementation teams or the National Marine Fisheries Service. An additional change, perhaps overdue, is that beginning with the next issue, *Right Whale News* will be distributed electronically. Now in its second decade of publication, these changes should improve the value of *Right Whale News* to its more than 800 readers. As always, your comments will be appreciated.

SPECIAL NOTICE

If you would like to receive future issues of *Right Whale News*, we need your e-mail address. Please send your address to the Editor at hansneuhauser@bellsouth.net, enter the word “subscribe” in the subject box and provide your name and e-mail address in the message.

NMFS Attempts Takeover of *Right Whale News*

On February 24, the Editor of *Right Whale News* received a letter from James Lecky, the Director of the Office of Protected Species in the National Marine Fisheries Service. The letter reads in part:

“The purpose of this letter is to request that the editorial policies and procedures of *Right Whale News* be modified prior to the next edition of the newsletter. *Right Whale News* is supported, in part, by funds from NOAA’s National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and is represented as a publication of the Southeast and Northeast Right Whale Recovery Implementation Teams. However, the editorial board does not include implementation team members with the exception of yourself and the very recent addition of the Southeast Regional Office’s Barb Zoodsma; there is no accountability to the

Implementation Teams; and the editorial process does not appear to incorporate a balanced perspective. Consequently, it is not presently accurate to represent *Right Whale News* as a publication of the Implementation Teams.”

Mr. Lecky then proceeded to outline the changes NMFS wanted:

1. Formal editorial procedures should be developed in consultation with, and approved by, both Implementation Teams;
2. Implementation teams should be involved in the selection and approval of editorial board members. NMFS prefers the editorial board consist of a majority of, if not all, Implementation Team members.
3. The content of Right Whale News must be kept consistent with federal lobbying regulations (31 USC, Section 1352).”

To reinforce NMFS’s “request” for what amounts to editorial control of *Right Whale News*, they asked the acting leadership at the Gray’s Reef National Marine Sanctuary not to distribute the February 2006 issue, thus exercising what amounts to veto power over an issue already in production. Hence, the issue was not mailed to you on schedule.

Right Whale News to Remain Independent

The Editor submitted the following response to Mr. Lecky’s letter:

“I have received your letter of February 21 in which you request what amounts to full control of the editorial policies and content of *Right Whale News (RWN)* by the Southeast Implementation Team (SEIT) and the Northeast Implementation Team (NEIT) and by extension, the NMFS, in that NMFS names the members of the two teams.

“Your letter contains a number of assumptions that are incorrect. I will attempt to correct the most serious of these.

“The first incorrect assumption is that NMFS owns and therefore has the right to control *RWN*. I started *RWN* in 1994 as a means to help advance right whale recovery as described in the first *Recovery Plan* (1991). Initial financial support for *RWN* was provided by The University of Georgia. The SEIT and later the NEIT endorsed the newsletter. *RWN* is not and never has been the press secretary for either Team.

“The next incorrect assumption is that NMFS currently funds *RWN*. While the agency has provided modest support in the past – never more than 20 percent of total production costs of an issue – we have received NO funding from the NMFS since September 2004 and our invoice for the August 2004 issue of *RWN* was never paid. We have received NO funding from the SEIT since May 2005. (Another agency within NOAA does support *RWN*.)

“Based on my experience as Editor of *RWN*, I believe that you are also mistaken in your assumption that if NMFS controls the content of *RWN* that the result will be “a balanced perspective.” When one of your staff provided editorial comments on a recent issue, she sought to manipulate facts, delete other facts and otherwise distort the reporting of your agency’s actions to suit her own agenda. In addition, the members of both the SEIT and NEIT are appointed by NMFS and serve at the pleasure of NMFS. With the now limited focus of the two Teams on educating people about right whales being struck by ships, neither Team is likely to provide “a balanced perspective” of the broad spectrum of right whale recovery needs – needs that go far beyond ship-strike reduction education.

“You call for consultation with and approval by the Implementation Teams. I find it ironic that your Office did not consult with either the NEIT or the SEIT before you signed the February 21 letter. Is this a harbinger of the consultation and approval we can expect in the future if *RWN* is under your control?

“Publication of the next issue is scheduled for May 2006. The SEIT does not meet until May and the NEIT – a nearly moribund entity - hasn’t met since April 2005 and has no plans to meet again.

“After consultation with other members of the *RWN* editorial board, I find I must reject your request to take over editorial control of *RWN*. Instead, *RWN* will continue to be published as an independent newsletter without the endorsement of the SEIT and NEIT. The newsletter will continue to promote right whale recovery and the sharing of information between the diverse and international community that participates in right whale recovery. The newsletter will continue to promote the free and open exchange of information on right whales. If in so doing, *RWN* finds it necessary to report on events that reflect critically on your agency, we will continue to do so.

“Sincerely, Hans Neuhauser, Editor, *Right Whale News*”

Right Whale News to be Distributed Only Electronically

In order for *Right Whale News* to continue as an independent newsletter that promotes right whale recovery and that is distributed without charge to readers around the world, we have to cut costs. Since printing and postage are significant costs, we have decided that *Right Whale News* will no longer be distributed in hard copy starting with the next issue. We plan to place future issues on a web site and notify subscribers as to when each issue has been posted. The web site will also be the repository for all back issues of *Right Whale News* starting with Volume 1, Number 1 (1994).

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Right Whale News is a publication of the Georgia Environmental Policy Institute. The editor is Hans Neuhauser; the Associate Editor is Jim Hain. The editorial board consists of Bill Brooks, Moe Brown, Scott Kraus and Sigrid Sanders.

The Massachusetts Environmental Trust (www.MassEnvironmentalTrust.org), The Georgia Environmental Policy Institute and individual contributors underwrite the costs of *Right Whale News*. Thanks to their support, *Right Whale News* is produced quarterly and is distributed free of charge via the Internet.

To subscribe to *Right Whale News* or to submit news, articles or commentary for publication, please contact the editor, Hans Neuhauser, at the Georgia Environmental Policy Institute, 380 Meigs Street, Athens, Georgia 30601 USA. Telephone 706-546-7507. Fax 706-613-7775. E-mail: hansneuhauser@bellsouth.net

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