

2005 NOAA Fisheries Employee of the Year Nomination Narrative

Nominee's Full Name:

Tracy K. Collier

Category for which Nominated:

Supervisor

Address at Least One of the Following Factors in the Justification Below.

Contributions to NOAA and NOAA Fisheries programs that resulted in:

- Enhanced economic viability of commercial and/or recreational fishing;
- Enhanced public appreciation for the mission of the agency;
- Enhanced safety or health of NOAA Fisheries employees;
- Enhanced staff morale or inspired NOAA Fisheries excellence in others;
- Enhanced stewardship of NOAA Fisheries protected/managed species/associated habitats;
- Improved accuracy, reliability, or reproducibility of scientific results;
- Improved customer service;
- Increased efficiency and/or reduced cost of operations;
- Improved equal employment opportunity or diversity in NOAA Fisheries;
- Strengthened ties to other NOAA elements or NOAA Fisheries constituents; and/or
- Unusual credit to NOAA Fisheries or its staff.

For Managers and Supervisors:

Demonstrated exceptional leadership, staff development, and/or program management.

Background. Dr. Tracy Collier is the Director of the Environmental Conservation Division of the NWFSC, which is comprised of approximately 85 scientists, in four separate programs. He has worked within this Division for over 30 years, starting coincident with his freshman year as a Fisheries student at the University of Washington. During this past year he was named Director of the Environmental Conservation Division (ECD). As Director, he has provided excellent guidance and inspiration to ECD staff.

Leadership, inspiration of NOAA Fisheries personnel to excel, and marine resource stewardship:

A primary impetus behind Tracy's nomination is the leadership and dedication he displayed in coordinating a multi-divisional effort to respond to critical agency needs following Hurricane Katrina. In the wake of this catastrophic storm, there was great public and scientific concern about the safety of seafood in the northern Gulf of Mexico, as a result of the massive storm surge and the necessity of pumping the floodwaters from New Orleans into that nearshore ecosystem. There was fear that the \$700 million dollar fisheries of the region might be closed. Immediate response was required to assess both seafood safety and environmental damage, but most NOAA facilities in the region were suffering from their own storm-related damage and were not able to respond. Because of the long history of ECD in responding to other environmental disasters, such as the EXXON Valdez and North Cape oil spills, a request for assistance was made on September 8 for assistance, just 2 days after the de-watering of New Orleans began. Dr. Collier said that he would coordinate a response, at the time thinking that there would be one to two weeks to prepare a crew, sampling gear, and protocols. However, he learned late in the day on Thursday September 8 that the field crew from Seattle needed to be in Pensacola FL on Monday, September 12, and that the sampling cruise would begin that same day. Moreover, in addition to sampling for chemical contamination (a strength of ECD), microbiology expertise was required, due to the public health concerns over pathogens in the nearshore waters. Incredibly, a team of 7 scientists was assembled by Dr. Collier, including scientists from [the Resource Enhancement and Utilization Technologies \(REUT\) Division](#), by 10 am on Friday. Tracy's leadership and experience was a key factor in people's willingness to participate in assembling this team. Because much of the gear needed in the field (nets, sediment grabs, trawl doors) was too heavy to bring on aircraft, it had to be shipped by courier, by Friday afternoon. The rest of the gear was assembled over the following day, and the science team left Seattle on Sunday. This was a large group effort between the two divisions, but Dr. Collier provided the requisite leadership and the inspiration for the effort, and his own personal efforts were critical to this coming together in the short time allowed. Dr. Collier also oversaw efforts to ensure the safety of the field crew, making sure that all who were going to the field (himself included!) were aware that there were unknown risks, and worked with the entire team to develop safety protocols even as they were flying on Sunday.

Once in the field, Tracy served as the leader for the Seattle contingent (7 of the 10 scientists on board). He oversaw the almost around-the-clock operations, and ensured that samples were collected using rigorous and documented procedures, and continued to inspire the crew to their own high performance standards. He then personally took the bulk of these critical samples under his wing as it were, and flew back to Seattle with them to personally deliver them to the laboratories, where staff were waiting on the following weekend to begin processing.

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Narrative (continued)**

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His leadership then switched its primary focus to sample analysis and reporting the results rapidly. Within a week of the samples arriving at the analytical facilities, data had been generated, and within another week a report was finalized, submitted to NOAA, and posted on the NOAA website. These were the first data available on seafood safety in the region. Subsequent sampling events, analyses, and reporting were done under Dr. Collier's supervision* over the next two months, and the provision of these reports helped to keep the fishery open. Even now, no data other than the data from NWFSC is publicly available concerning analyses of seafood, post-Katrina. Dr. Collier demonstrated excellent communication skills in dealing with sensitive information and maintaining appropriate communication protocols within the agency.

In addition to the Hurricane Katrina response, there are other examples of Dr. Collier's leadership and contributions during this past year. Upon becoming Director of ECD, he organized a staff retreat to review and invigorate research programs. He identified and empowered up-and-coming program and team leaders and inspired staff to identify new directions and reaffirm their dedication to the Center's and agency's mission and goals. He successfully encouraged and aided development of collaborative studies on environmental health issues with faculty at the University of Washington's School of Public Health. These studies were recently funded at approximately one million dollars. Dr. Collier's briefing for the Army Corps of Engineers on delayed mortality of migrant juvenile salmon was critical for funding research projects in ECD. Dr. Collier also sponsored a number of visiting scientists at the Center during this past year, and he volunteered as a formal mentor in the Center's new mentoring program. Dr. Collier's scientific vision, planning and effectiveness were highly successful this past year, and the groundwork that he established will certainly lead to a bright and productive future for ECD.

Dr. Collier's leadership was also apparent on regional, national and international levels. He was invited to speak at a number of national and international science symposia and meetings, for example, in Australia, New Zealand and Sweden. He also received a fellowship as visiting scientist in Australia. He was appointed to an international steering committee for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). The steering committee addresses issues of environmental protection from oil spills and the APEC Marine Environmental Training and Education Center (AMETEC). Dr. Collier co-authored a successful proposal to fund an APEC-sponsored workshop to be held in Xiamen, China. On the national level, Dr. Collier was invited to give keynote addresses in Berkeley CA and in NYC for the Hudson River Foundation. His expertise has also been sought out to advise on funding proposals and research initiatives, for example, in the national research review panel for NOAA's Oceans and Human Health program. He participated in regional panels including the Management Committee for the Puget Sound Assessment and Monitoring Program and represented the scientific community in front of regional managers and congressional staff. Clearly Dr. Collier had an excellent year and was highly sought out for his insights and vision of environmental science needs at many levels.

Based on all these accomplishments this last year, we most enthusiastically nominate Dr. Tracy Collier for Employee of the Year for 2005.