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Drifter Issue

An article in the UK Guardian on Oct. 15 indicated that 100 tons of iron sulphate were released into the Pacific Ocean as part of geoengineering project off the west coast of Canada in July <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2012/oct/15/pacific-iron-fertilisation-geoengineering?intcmp=239>

The article says that this was done with "equipment loaned from US agencies like Nasa and the National Ocean (sic) and Atmospheric Administration."

What was NOAA's involvement?

NOAA's Global Drifter Program was approached by Haida Salmon Restoration Corporation in mid-July 2012 in search of ocean current data in the North Pacific. When NOAA communicated that there was limited drifter data in that region, Haida with an offer to launch offered to asked if NOAA could donate 20 deploy 20 satellite-tracked buoys for the drifter program to be deployed in the North Pacific. On occasion, NOAA uses non-NOAA vessels to launch drifters and other devices used in its overall mission.

Why was that offer accepted?

Yes. NOAA accepted greed to donate 20 drifters to the Haida Salmon Restoration Corporation's offer to deploy 20 drifters for deployment in the North Pacific. This offered as it would provide the chance to place drifters, which float on top of the water, to gather data from in a part region of the ocean where we did not have enough had limited ocean drifter data. These drifters float on top of the water, and have instruments that improve weather forecasting and provide information on ocean currents to the global scientific community. T, and their data is publicly available.

Is it common for non-NOAA entities to contact NOAA's Global Drifter Program to request drifters?

Yes. Roughly 15-20 research efforts each year approach NOAA's Global Drifter program requesting a donation of drifters to collect ocean data. A determination to donate drifters is made based on the Global Drifter Program's special coverage needs at the time of the request.

Did NOAA know that the ship being used to launch the drifters was also discharging material into the ocean as a geoengineering experiment?

No. NOAA learned of the discharge via the Guardian article on Oct. 15, 2012.. NOAA was originally told that this was for a salmon restoration study the drifter data would be used to collect ocean current data in support the Haida Salmon Restoration research effort.

Did NOAA or its scientists know that the drifters would be contributing to the **dumping** experiment?

No. ~~No~~ NOAA personnel were ~~was~~ only aware of the interest in ocean current data in support of the salmon restoration project. ~~Unknown to NOAA, the Haida Salmon Restoration Corporation planned to use the data collected by the drifters to monitor the discharge as it moved through the ocean. [Isn't this speculation, albeit reasonable, on our part? -RL]~~ The drifter information is publicly available.

Did the drifters affect the experiment?

No. They are observing devices. While NOAA was misled about the intent of the use of these drifters, valuable ocean information is being collected.

Does NOAA often accept offers from non-NOAA groups to launch drifters?

Yes. The Global Drifter Program routinely works with national and international partners using merchant and research ships to launch these drifters throughout the ocean. Given the vastness of the ocean, NOAA relies on such occasions to launch equipment to obtain much-needed information to help it carry out its missions.

Is there a list of those partners?

Yes, some of them are listed at: http://www.aoml.noaa.gov/phod/dac/gdp_objectives.php

Can the general public follow these drifters?

Yes. Part of the program includes joining with schools that Adopt-A-Drifter and children can track the progress as well as learn about various aspects of the ocean.

Are these drifters the same as the Argo floats?

No. The Argo floats descend into the ocean and send back information every 10 days; the drifters float on top of the water and relay information approximately hourly via the ARGOS satellite system; hence the confusion. More about the Argo array can be found at: <http://www.argo.net/>

Is NOAA going to take action against Haida?

It has not yet been determined.

Will this cause a change in the way NOAA ~~uses "ships of opportunity"~~ conducts volunteer deployment opportunities"?

Yes. NOAA is reviewing its policies for cooperating with deployment volunteers to ensure this does not happen again.

Why is the NOAA NESDIS logo on the Haida Salmon Restoration Corporation's website?