

The Reactor

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Just a little fishy

If George Lee, who has headed a small family business — Save More Meats — for the past 36 years, wants to sell his business neighbor, Lundy's restaurant, a pound of prawns, he has to get a "fish wholesaler's license."

The state of California legally considers Lundy's, a small neighborhood restaurant, a "re-seller," and that would make Save More a wholesaler. You or I can buy 100 pounds of prawns, red snapper, salmon or rock cod from George. But by George, he can't sell the little business next door so much as 17 ounces of prawns without paying, would you believe, \$700 to the state.

In its singleminded pursuit of greed at the cost of logic, mercy or fairness, the Department of Fish and Game wants every store, no matter how little "wholesale" business it does in seafood, to come up with \$500 for a "fish wholesaler's license." That's bad enough, but they also want \$200 more if that store sells as little as one (repeat one) pound as a "Primary Fish Receiver."

After Lee, or any other small business owner in the same predicament, has had the sales ability and good luck to sell 25,000 pounds of fish, the fee will total \$1,000. What small business owner do you know who makes enough income from seafood to justify paying such outrageous fees or keeping the detailed records required by the Department of Fish and Game nightmare makers?

Did you know that a commercial fisherman who takes a fish home to eat must complete a "personal use receipt?" Any fish he sells direct to you or me must be "documented on a fish landing receipt."

In the words of the Department of Fish and Game: "If the fish are removed from the point of landing prior to their sale, a fish transportation receipt must be completed before moving the fish ... A tax report must be sent each month even if no fish were landed." Now isn't that asinine?

Safeway and Lucky are big. They can afford the lawyers to deal with bureaucratic obfuscation. It takes about the same amount of effort for Safeway to deal with this nonsense as it does for George Lee. The difference is that Safeway sells millions of pounds, and has specialists who know how to cross every "t" and dot every "i" when it comes to government regulation.

A rule Safeway can handle with ease becomes an impossible burden applied to one of the thousands of small businesses who would like to sell small quantities of seafood. These regulations will simply put them out of business.

My paranoid suspicion? This may be the whole idea. If the government keeps the little guys bogged down in legal technicalities and wrapped up in red tape, soon they'll give up the unequal battle and leave all the business to the big boys.

I think somebody may just have planned it that way. The whole thing smells... well, just a little fishy.