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# Former Crew Members Attempted to Turn in Fuglvog

By [Libby Casey, APRN - Washington DC](#) | September 26, 2011



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When Senator Murkowski's fisheries aide pulled out from consideration for an influential job in the Obama Administration two years ago, he said it was because the process was taking too long. It turns out Arne Fuglvog was under investigation by the very agency he would have run.

Fuglvog pleaded guilty last month to breaking commercial fishing law before joining Murkowski's staff, and resigned from his Senate job right before the charges became public. His admission to falsifying catch records shook the commercial fishing industry in Alaska, where Fuglvog had served on influential councils.

Now former crew members are coming forward saying they tried to turn Fuglvog in to authorities for illegal fishing for years, and felt like they were ignored.

As early as 2007, two of Arne Fuglvog's crew members tried to alert authorities to his illegal fishing. One would not go on the record for fear of being blacklisted by the fishing community but the other is talking on tape for the first time. Dan Pryse was reluctant, but agreed to meet at a diner near his home in the Lower 48.

He gives an example of how they'd fish someplace like the central Gulf of Alaska instead of where they were supposed to, west of Kodiak.

“It’s over a 20 hour run, so to run out there will cost you thousands of dollars in fuel,” Pryse said. “There’s no numbers of fish there, so what you can do in a 10 hour period in central Gulf will take you a week west of Kodiak, plus it’s gonna cost you an extra \$5,000-\$10,000 in expenses.”

“So to save that and to save time so we could get home, he could get to his meetings, we were all into it because it got us home sooner too.”

Pryse worked on the vessel the Kamilar for 16 years, starting when Arne Fuglvog’s dad was in charge. He stayed on board when Arne took over until Pryse lost his job in 2005. He says the crewman who replaced him had his own quotas to fish, which meant the boat could catch more.

He got upset watching Fuglvog rise through the ranks of the fishing management world, sitting on major councils that allowed him to shape policy and gain influence. Yet Pryse knew that even as Fuglvog was held up as a model fisherman, he’d been breaking the rules for over a decade.

Fuglvog went to Washington to work for Senator Murkowski on fisheries issues in the fall of 2006, and the following spring, Dan Pryse started calling law enforcement.

At first he was scared, using anonymous pay phones and trying to find out if he would get in trouble. But he says the feds told him they weren’t in the habit of hanging out to dry the people who helped them.

On May 11, 2007 alone, Pryse’s phone records show nine calls to National Marine Fisheries law enforcement in Alaska.

He says initially the feds seemed interested. A crew member who shared Pryse’s concerns and knew he was blowing the whistle tipped Pryse off in June 2007 that the Kamilar was docking in Petersburg with illegal fish.

Now, Arne Fuglvog was not on board – he’d gone to Washington, leaving in charge a hired skipper. But Pryse says evidence on the boat could’ve exposed information about when Fuglvog was captain.

“I called Marine Fisheries and told them here’s your opportunity to get the log books, get the computer, and find out I was telling the truth,” Pryse said. “All they had to do was a standard boarding, if they did a regular detail boarding they’d find the illegal fish, and it would give them probable cause to do everything that they needed to do to get the information.”

One day later, federal officers with National Marine Fisheries, or NMFS, boarded the boat and seized rockfish and halibut that weren’t reported on the fish ticket. The crew said they were for personal use, not to sell, but it was a lot – the rockfish weighed 1,300 pounds after being headed and gutted.

They’d hid the catch, packing the rockfish in two totes that were covered in cocoa mats to make them look unused.

The feds and state slapped the skipper and boat with about \$11,000 in penalties for misdemeanors and violations, including lying to an official. But in the course of the investigation, an Alaska Wildlife Trooper interviewed a crew member who provided some damning information.

The deckhand had been aboard the Kamilar for over 20 years and said, “this has happened every year. Once or twice a year.” He talked about taking bycatch off the boat at night or

offloading to tenders that wouldn't be boarded by authorities.

He said he knew it wasn't right, but that if he'd blown the whistle he would have been out of a job.

NMFS officials won't say whether those comments prompted follow-up or if they were looking at a bigger problem than the isolated offense of taking home bycatch. But Dan Pryse says they contacted him.

"It was very shortly after, with a day or a couple days, they called and asked me to wear a wire," Pryse said. "They asked me if I would wear a hidden mic and contact Arne, and I just told them no, the main reason was because Arne and I weren't friends, I was pissed at him for taking my job."

"I told him no, it won't do any good and there's no point to it. Plus it would tip the hand I thought."

After that Pryse heard nothing. He says when he called NMFS he was told a variety of things including that the case was being pursued by the state. But no news on what the feds were doing about his accusations against Fuglvog, which were much bigger than failing to report home pack on a fish ticket. Pryse's phone records show at least 16 calls to NMFS law enforcement that fall.

"The next time I called, they told me that their supervisors, the people in charge of Juneau Enforcement Office, they said their boss told them that the case was over, they had done a complete and thorough investigation, they could find no wrong doing, and that the case was closed," Pryse said.

But Pryse – and three other long time crew members say back in 2007 and 2008 authorities never questioned them as part of an investigation.

Whether the feds dug into Pryse's claims is unknown. APRN has requested records but the recent Acting Director of NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement, Alan Risenhoover, would not be interviewed and said in writing that it "does not comment on whether it is or has been conducting investigations" and that it "takes all complaints seriously and acts on them as needed."

So Fuglvog stayed at his job at Senator Murkowski's office. And Dan Pryse grew increasingly upset.

Then in April, 2009, Fuglvog had been so successful in Washington that he was one of two candidates being considered to run the National Marine Fisheries Service. Pryse found out almost by accident.

"One of the phone calls that I made, I was just calling to say hello to one of the crew, and his wife said oh you heard about Arne? I said what. Oh he's going to be the head of the National Marine Fisheries Service. I said my ass, and they said yeah. And I said I gotta go. I sat right down, and stayed up all night, typing up as much as I could writing a letter trying to expose everything I could," Pryse said.

Pryse says he couldn't believe that the man he'd been trying to turn in for two years might run the very agency Pryse was trying to make listen.

"At first I called up National Marine Fisheries Office in Juneau. And I asked them what happened to the case from before, and they told me there never had been one. I guess this was

April of 09. And they told me there was no case. There was never any conversation, there never was an investigation. There was no case against Arne Fuglvog,” Pryse said.

Pryse spent the summer trying to get a response. He sent out his email detailing his claims against Fuglvog to bloggers and anti-catch share activists in the fishing world.

Then a crew member came up with the actual log books, which showed where they’d really fished, as opposed to what Fuglvog documented in the official logs. Pryse says he faxed a copy to the NMFS law enforcement.

But Pryse never turned to a major media outlet, and didn’t contact Fuglvog’s boss, Senator Murkowski. He says he wanted the authorities to take him seriously.

Believing that NMFS was ignoring his information, he finally called the FBI ethics office in Anchorage. He heard that NOAA Fisheries Enforcement was being investigated by the Inspector General’s Office of the Commerce Department, so he emailed the IG’s office in July and called its complaint hotline.

“That night at like, 9, 10, 11 o’clock at night, I got a phone call, with a conference call with 5 federal agents, and they talked to me for 2.5 hours,” Pryse said. “And started asking me the entire, from start to finish what happened.”

Pryse got a follow-up email in October from a special agent in the Inspector General’s investigations wing apologizing for the delays and asking to talk more.

Meanwhile, other things were starting to happen. Pryse’s email was making the rounds. It got into the hands of a top guy at Greenpeace USA, John Hocevar, the Oceans Campaign Director. He took it seriously, even though he didn’t know the former fisherman who’d written it.

“The allegations that we received really had a lot of information about where the fishing was taking place, the amount of money involved,” Hocevar said. “It really lended a certain amount of credibility to the allegations.”

Hocevar says he’d gotten similar phone calls claiming that Fuglvog had for years illegally fished. So in June of 2009 he forwarded the email to the woman responsible for hiring the new NMFS director: Dr. Jane Lubchenco, the head of NOAA.

Hocevar did not hear back but assumed his message got through.

“While I didn’t receive a response from Jane Lubchenco I was pretty confident she would take action,” Hocevar said. “It’s not unusual for them to avoid wanting to comment on things that involve legal issues.”

By the end of July, news reports said Lubchenco had reopened her search for a NMFS head. The Massachusetts newspaper the Gloucester Times reported that weeks earlier the acting director of NMFS was told he’d be sticking around longer than planned. Fuglvog officially pulled his name out of consideration on July 31, saying the process was taking too long.

But it turns out that by then, an investigation was underway and crew members were being interviewed.

NOAA’s Dr. Lubchenco will not comment on the timing. APRN caught up with her in Washington at a recent event where the U.S. pledged to combat illegal fishing.

“It’s not appropriate for me to comment on individuals, but you know I’ve been following the progress of that story as it’s unfolded,” Lubchenco said when asked about vetting Fuglvog for

the NMFS job.

Lubchenco would not say whether she passed along any information about Fuglvog to the White House since the NMFS job was a presidential appointment, or to the two Alaska Senators who were supporting the home town fisherman in his bid, Lisa Murkowski and Mark Begich. But a NOAA spokesman writes that, “no one outside of NOAA would be told about ongoing investigations.”

Bloggers and critics have asked how Senator Murkowski could not have known that her staffer was being accused by his own crew members, and was then under investigation for a year and a half. The Senator says she didn’t find out until the end of 2010.

But John Hocevar with Greenpeace says the rumors were making the rounds.

“Impossible for me to imagine that Senator Murkowski was not aware of these allegations. I can’t imagine that,” Hocevar said.

Senator Murkowski insists she did not know. And nothing was reported in major media outlets.

“I’m not quite sure what it was that people were hearing because we weren’t hearing it. We weren’t hearing it. I would not have hired anybody on my staff that was the subject of an investigation,” Murkowski said.

So Fuglvog kept his job until two months ago, one day before he was formally charged.

Dan Pryse admits he’s not guilt free. As captain, Fuglvog may not have told the crew everything, but men like Pryse knew some of what they were doing was illegal. So why did he do it?






“I don’t know. I guess there’s no excuse for it. Maybe we were complicit. But I don’t make the laws,” Pryse said.

And Fuglvog did influence the laws, through his seats on councils, as a Senate aide, and representing Petersburg – and Alaska – on the national stage.

Now instead of being the country’s top fisherman, Arne Fuglvog awaits his sentencing hearing, and faces 10 months behind bars.

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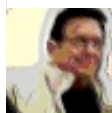
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**Matt Johnson** · Chugiak, Alaska

Murkowski, "We were not hearing it." Is anybody going to follow up on Shannyn Moore's ADN story that she personally reported the allegations to Murkowski's office in spring of 2009? The Senator is just not believable.

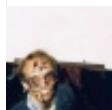
Reply · 5 · Like · September 27 at 1:33pm



**Elstun W. Lauesen** · ★ Top Commenter

Good Job, APRN!

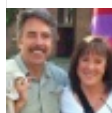
Reply · 5 · Like · September 26 at 11:27pm



**Rick Bray**

Lisa said she wouldn't hire anyone under investigation, but she kept Fuglvog on her staff after she became aware he was under investigation, and even after he made his plea deal. She's up to her neck in this. She also claims she didn't know Fuglvog was being investigated. She's either lying or she's incompetent. (not to mention a bad judge of character) Which is it? I believe it's a case of plausible deniability. I have no trust in Lisa Murkowski's ability to do her job as a United States Senator. She should not be in a position of trust.

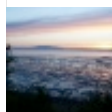
Reply · 4 · Like · September 27 at 12:02am



**Scott Coughlin** · Seattle, Washington

Outstanding reporting.

Reply · 3 · Like · September 27 at 9:00am



**Diane Richard**

thank you for this story.

Reply · 3 · Like · September 26 at 7:13pm



**Bill Reid**

I bet that Fuglvog does not even do the short time in the BIG HOUSE that has been reported, he will most likely squeal on others and get off with way less time and a smaller fine, stay tuned this could get real interesting!

Reply · 2 · Like · September 27 at 10:29am



**Mary Deming Barber** · Anchorage, Alaska

Nice job Libby. Thanks for putting this out there.

Reply · 1 · Like · September 27 at 1:55pm

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**Richard Nelson**



## Richard Nelson

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Women, War & Peace - The War We Are Living. Tuesday, Nov. 1 @ 9pm. Community leader ...

NOVA: The Fabric of the Cosmos "What Is Space?" Wednesday, Nov. 2 @ 8pm.



Steve Jobs: One Last Thing - Wednesday, Nov. 2 @ 9pm. (Photo by David Paul Morris/Ge...



Independent Lens: Deaf Jam - Thursday, Nov. 3 @ 9pm.



PBS Arts from the Blue Ridge Mountains: Give Me The Banjo - Saturday, Nov. 5 @ 8:30pm...



America In Primetime: Man of the House - Sunday, Nov. 6 @ 7pm. PHOTO:Ray Romano (rig...



Masterpiece Contemporary: Page Eight - Sunday, Nov. 6 @ 8pm. An aging spy stumbles o...



Antiques Roadshow: Junk in the Trunk - Monday, Nov. 7 @ 7pm. © Jeffrey Dunn

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