

# FISHERMEN'S NEWS

*The Advocate for the Commercial Fisherman*



## Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations

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## An Introduction

By Tim Sloane

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR ME TO write PCFFA's signature column in *Fishermen's News* is a bittersweet one.

Bitter, due to the circumstances which have given rise to this opportunity. For nearly forty years, PCFFA has been helmed by the inimitable William F. "Zeke" Grader, a champion of the fisheries and the fishing men and women who depend on them. Zeke has also run PCFFA's sister organization, the Institute for Fisheries Resources (IFR) since its inception in 1992.

Zeke's decision to step down from the Executive Directorship of PCFFA brings with it the loss of his firebrand activism and practical imagination. Zeke wrote or co-wrote nearly every PCFFA column for *Fishermen's News* since its inception back in 1994.

But the opportunity is also sweet, in that I am incredibly lucky to have been selected to succeed him. It is not common for a person to be called to inherit the job of a hero.

Zeke's ability to discuss every aspect of the fisheries, including fish, habitat, management, politics, biology, history, philosophy and future, is incomparable. His accomplishments are innumerable. Even luckier, he is sticking around to guide me as I transition into PCFFA's new Executive Director. Zeke is an incredible mentor, and for me, green and malleable, my course has been set with

the master at the charts.

I grew up on the coast in San Diego county and spent most of my time, as young people there tend to do, at the beach. I fished Oceanside pier with my dad, surfed some, and consumed a near-daily ration of fish tacos.

I went to college at UC Berkeley where I studied history and developed a sort of general environmental ethos, more Monkey-Wrench Gang than Sand County Almanac. Thereafter, I spent five years in the fabrication shop where I mostly welded and did some rough carpentry and mechanical maintenance.

Juxtaposed against the classroom setting, I developed a great appreciation for those crafts. I came to admire the men and women who ply the skilled trades, who use intellect to produce tangible results. Theirs is a physical production unlike the purely intellectual machinations of most modern working environments.

Commercial fishermen and women are quintessential members of that group of skilled tradespeople. There are so many things to take into account to be a successful fisherman: vessel operation and maintenance, fish biology and life history, business negotiation, legal compliance with fishery and safety regulations, and utter self-reliance, to name a few. I'm amazed that one doesn't need a college degree to fish for a living.

I enrolled in law school at Golden Gate University in San Francisco when the recession forced me out of the fabrication shop. I studied environmental law under Helen Kang and Alan Ramo, two champions of the environmental justice movement. Professor Ramo suggested that I intern with Zeke at PCFFA.

My first experience at PCFFA was sitting in one of the deep, blue easy chairs in Zeke's office, trying to block out this ranting lunatic so I could determine exactly what was going on in that prayer rug taped to the front of his desk. For those of you who haven't seen it, Zeke keeps a relic of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in his office that depicts a fiery gun battle between Russian helicopters and Afghan grenade launchers. I had thought I was supposed to be doing something with fish.

At that time, PCFFA was focused on battling arbitrary IFQ allocations in the groundfish fishery, while at the same time developing a framework for Community Fishing Associations. PCFFA's body of work, and décor, resonated with me: the organization was fighting on behalf of the skilled tradespeople that comprise the fleet, and doing so by demanding stewardship of their environment and natural resources.

After that experience, I kept in touch with Zeke, started reading more



about salmon and water, and followed PCFFA in the news. I interned with folks working on global warming and food sustainability, environmental justice, and Clean Water Act enforcement.

I passed the bar, practiced in a more traditional legal field for a piece, and now I find myself following in the galosh-steps of one of the most important advocates for fish and fishermen that ever yelled at a politician.

I am honored to have been asked by the PCFFA Board to carry this mantle, and I look forward to stewarding the fisheries on behalf of the men and women who depend on it for their livelihoods.

I have been apprenticing with Zeke for about six weeks now, getting a feel for PCFFA's work and identifying areas that might need some building up. When I was asked to write the column for this month's *Fishermen's News*, I figured that this was an opportunity to do the same thing for the fishery in general, and I see one particularly glaring need: better data.

### Science-Based Management

Fisheries management has jumped head first into science-based management. This philosophy puts a huge premium on having good data available to evaluate the costs and benefits of a particular management measure. PCFFA agrees with this management approach for a couple of reasons.

First, when making fisheries management decisions, we are working with incredibly varied ecological systems with massive numbers of variables. Scientifically gathered data categorizes those systems so they are comprehensible by humans in a way that enables decision-making. Without data collected in the past, assumptions about the future are just shots in the dark.

Second, using published data puts all participants in management decisions on the same playing field, and checks governmental managers who might otherwise control the discussion. The public has a right to review data

provided by the state and determine whether it rises to the level of "best-available;" other analyses might exist that reach different conclusions.

The fight then shifts from whether a conclusion is correct, to which analysis was more rigorous and thus likely to be more accurate. This is a fight that has an element of objectivity, and is therefore much more winnable than arguing over which conclusion is "better," which inevitably is in the eyes of the beholder.

Science-based management demands data, and good data at that. Relatedly, it requires reasonably skilled people, versed in the science, to translate that data into terms that the public will understand. Our fisheries require much more of both.

### An Illustration

I recently watched as various interests wrangled over a proposed West Coast salmon season. One of the major hang-ups was the impact of all of the proposed options on endangered Sacramento Winter-Run Chinook in the California fishery.

At one point in the discussion it was noted that the State of California model for Winter Run impacts was based on contact with approximately fifteen Winter-Run fish in 2010. Fifteen fish to form the basis for determining whether to close huge swaths of California's salmon grounds, for months at a time, with the attendant loss of economic opportunity for the fleet.

This is not to say that those fifteen fish didn't describe a pattern. I also note that those fifteen fish were representative of a very small total population. But there should be more than just fifteen fish to study to justify that kind of closure. Unfortunately, the government agencies tasked with preparing this kind of data are understaffed and lack the resources to prepare an analysis of this scope. So we are thus forced to make hugely impactful management decisions on what little data we've got. Fifteen fish!

### Research Needs

As the foregoing illustrates, more,

and more accurate, stock assessments are essential. The Magnuson-Stevens Act imposes the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) requirement, which is based on the number of fish required to sustain the population. Lacking an accurate assessment of current populations, how can NMFS be expected to come to a fair conclusion about how many fish can be landed?

Lack of information may lead to overfishing, or on the other hand, a failure to take full economic advantage of this natural resource. Better stock assessments mean a more accurate, sustainable and productive use of the fishery.

More research also needs to be directed at climate change and its effect on fisheries. Habitat redistribution due to global climate change is an increasingly important issue for the fleet to follow. Several species are following cooler temperatures as they migrate north. Those more southerly fishermen may ultimately be left out of fisheries in which they once participated.

Moreover, as stocks move north, they may encounter habitat conditions that are different from their traditional ranges, resulting in overall population decline. Additional research on where stocks are headed, and whether they will survive when they get there, is essential to maintaining a robust fishery.

We need actual technical research into functional, cheap electronic monitoring. Like it or not, observer coverage is mandatory in several fisheries, and is not likely going anywhere at anytime soon.

As most former participants in those fisheries know, observer coverage can be prohibitively expensive for small, owner-operated vessels. Electronic monitoring is effective, cheaper, and less obnoxious than an actual human on deck, but it needs to have data behind it to pass muster with NMFS. Research to prove this technology as feasible is a no-brainer for a more equitable, independent and democratic fishery.

Although this isn't an area of research per se, we also propose more



cooperative research involving partnerships between science and industry. Fishermen and women have the infrastructure, knowledge and experience to guide experiments, either by proposing research into an area of interest, or by consulting on experiments generated by researchers. This will lead to leaner and more productive science. Experiments will cost less by using pre-existing fishing vessels to conduct and monitor experiments and to gather observations while fishing, and those experiments will be more squarely directed at satisfying the needs of the fleet.

### Funding

And so comes the age-old question: how to fund it. We imagine that this research would already have been completed if funding and researchers were abundant. They are not. However, PCFFA has been working on this issue for over a decade now, and with some success.

Through PCFFA's efforts, Congress created the "Fisheries Conservation and Management Fund" (16 U.S.C. 1891(b)) in the 2006 reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. This fund is dedicated to providing for the research needs of the fleet in the areas listed above, as well as for marketing of U.S. seafood products.

Unfortunately, the Fund is now financed more or less exclusively by quota set-asides, although it is also permitted to collect pursuant to Congressional appropriations and through private donations.

### Proposal

The Management Fund needs to diversify its revenue

sources, and PCFFA has previously identified several opportunities to do so. One is deserving of renewed attention, given the public's changing perceptions of food as inextricably intertwined with health and wellbeing.

In 2003, PCFFA proposed a small ad valorem tax on seafood products sold within the United States. Given seafood's status as a marginally more expensive product, and a general public understanding that seafood is both nutritious and more in need of stewardship than land-based protein sources, a small tax on products sold at grocery stores and restaurants could be an acceptable option.

Moreover, because ad valorem taxes are based on the value of the item itself, consumers purchasing tilapia would be paying proportionally less than consumers purchasing swordfish.

We recognize that proposing such a tax to today's Congress is sure to incur political flashback, and is a long shot. But we also see survival of our ocean's natural resources as a long shot without proper stewardship, and proper stewardship demands a robust knowledge base.

Whatever the vehicle, we urge readers to engage in the on-going discussion about the fleet's research needs. Your livelihoods and your children's oceans depend on it. **EN**

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