

# FISHERMEN'S NEWS

The Advocate for the Commercial Fisherman



## Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations

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## Time to Say Goodbye

By Zeke Grader

LATE LAST SUMMER I WAS diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. I had not felt well for most of the summer and thought it was psychological – that I was just becoming burned out, having been too long on the job. It was more than that.

My first thought after learning what was wrong – well, after “Aw s \_\_t” – was where was the nearest hospice, and then wondering how my wife would cope without me doing the physical work around the house, and thinking about all the work left to be done on the job. My doctors, however, were more optimistic, telling me some new treatments had been developed that made my chances for survival better than I thought. They recommended a chemotherapy regimen that I began in mid-September.

I have been fortunate thus far and have been able to keep working. But I have not had the energy, nor the strength to put in the hours, or do the travel the job as Executive Director of the PCFFA requires.

I notified the PCFFA Board right away and in October we met and began planning on a job search to find a replacement for me. Rather than going through an advertised job posting, the consensus was to talk to individuals we knew were competent and had an idea of what the job entailed. Most were



Pietro Parravano, left, with Zeke Grader on the deck of Parravano's boat the *Anne B*. Photo courtesy of Zeke Grader.

colleagues working on most of the issues PCFFA was engaged in and, frankly, were more valuable to us in the positions they hold. Moreover, many were nearing retirement, meaning PCFFA would be going through an Executive Director search again in a few years.

After that it was decided to take a look at some of our past legal interns and AmeriCorps personnel who had worked in the office, who knew the organization and had some idea of the PCFFA Executive Director job.

One of our past legal interns, Tim Sloane, who is now a lawyer, was interested. Tim, 31, was raised in San

Diego and went to law school in San Francisco and at the time was working for a large East Bay law firm. The PCFFA Board's Executive Committee conducted the interview and was impressed with his qualifications and attitude. They gave a positive recommendation and in March Tim was hired. He was given a 90-day trial period and plans are that he will officially take over from me by summer.

This is my 40th year on the job with PCFFA, and even without the health issues, I was feeling it was time for a replacement, for me to step down – at least from the Executive Director position. It was time for some new blood, new energy and new ideas.

Working for PCFFA and IFR, has been a dream job. Since boyhood I never really thought about anything but fish work, whether working on a fishing boat or in a fish plant. Much of my youth was spent on Noyo Flat in Fort Bragg, playing on fishing boats and running through fish plants, watching fishing boats being built and diesels rebuilt, boats coming in and out of the harbor, unloading the fish, loading ice and fueling, and it seemed growing up that our house was always filled with fishermen and politicians. I wrote in this column at least once about it (see FN, September 2005, [www.pcffa.org/fn-jul05.htm](http://www.pcffa.org/fn-jul05.htm)). You can also see an interview I did last winter on my work,



go to: <http://theforcesofnature.com/movies/zeke-grader-2>).

As a teenager with college looming, thoughts went to careers like a teacher/fisherman, lawyer/fisherman or even a fisheries biologist. Seasickness, however, pretty much ruled out working on boats.

By the end of law school I was beginning to wonder where I would end up. At that time, fishermen along the California coast were working to unite California's fish marketing associations into a statewide organization with full-time staff to address all non-price related fishery issues. The timing was fortuitous for me, as soon after passing the bar these groups came together and the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations was incorporated in March 1976. I was offered the job as its first staff member; the rest is history.

I have never once regretted taking the job, nor staying around for 40 years. I have regrets at times about my own actions over those 40 years, wishing I, or we, might have done something differently, handled a situation better, or approached an issue from another angle. At the same time, I am extremely proud of what we have accomplished, even though there is much left to do.

Part of what we were able to accomplish came about from some excellent guidance. My first mentor was my father who I tagged along with as a kid to many of his fishing meetings. Later, after going to work for PCFFA, he would offer up advice, although mostly reluctantly since he did not want to interfere in my job or the workings of the organization.

My other mentor for most of the past 40 years has been Bill Kier, a fishery biologist who headed the California Senate's Office of Research when I first began working with him. I had first met Bill about 10 years earlier when he and my father worked together at the California Resources Agency and were engaged in everything from parks acquisition, to coastal protection, to fisheries.

I was also extremely lucky in having a number of veteran fishing men and

women, both on and off the PCFFA Board, who were there to offer me counsel and support. Indeed, many were "Highliner of the Year" recipients; I had guidance from some of the best.

PCFFA has been blessed with Directors who were visionaries and not afraid to act, coupled with having some activist Presidents who were willing to put in time – far beyond a couple of terms – that made a real difference. They made my job a lot easier and were great fun to collaborate with; the late Nat Bingham, Pietro Parravano and, now, Dave Bitts immediately come to mind.

Looking back over the past 40 years, a lot has been accomplished. It was PCFFA, for example, that got language in California's Coastal Act to protect commercial fishing facilities within the state's coastal zone (they would have otherwise been at the mercy of large developers). We did that in 1976.

It was PCFFA that developed the legislation for California's salmon limited entry program; it crafted the Salmon Stamp legislation with a fishermen committee to oversee the program; it wrote the bill establishing the California Salmon Council, and a citizen's California Advisory Committee on Salmon & Steelhead Trout. In fact, much of PCFFA's work has been to empower fishermen, giving them more say over the resources they depend upon.

When not in the halls of the Legislatures, or in Pacific Council or Fish & Wildlife Commission meeting rooms, PCFFA has been in court, mostly on behalf of the salmon – from the Columbia to the Central Valley, litigating for flows and habitat essential for these fish. Our string of cases, mostly wins, is nearly as long as our list of legislative accomplishments. There would be no salmon fishery left in California, I believe, had it not been for PCFFA.

Salmon is not the only fishery PCFFA has been involved with. We drafted the legislation, after all, to allow set gillnets (and, thus, small boats) to catch herring in San Francisco Bay, with a bill creating a research program for

the fish. While we might have liked to see some changes, it was PCFFA that initiated the legislation for crab limited entry and, later, trap limits, as well as requiring limiting effort in the squid fishery and mandating a management plan for California's largest fishery.

PCFFA has fought – so far without much success – to ensure access for the small boat fleet (hook-and-liners, light touch trawl) to groundfish, including development of experimental fishery permits to test different gear to avoid species of concern, and establishment of community fishing associations (CFAs) to protect small boat fleets in our coastal ports. It has worked, as well, on everything in between, from a ban on a highly toxic bottom paint, to protections for fish from the apex (white shark) to the base (krill) of the ocean food chain.

At the federal level, PCFFA only played a peripheral role in passage of the Fishery Conservation & Management Act in 1976. It, however, has been a member of the Marine Fish Conservation Network for the past two Magnuson-Stevens Act reauthorizations, pushing the legislation now making the US fishing fleet the most sustainably-operated in the world.

So, yeah, there's been all of that and a lot more that PCFFA and I am proud of. And while I have been given a lot of credit for accomplishments over the course of my career, I, we, did not do it alone. Key friends in the Congress and state Legislatures and their staff have been critical to making these things happen, as have been the allies among other fishing associations, among recreational fishing groups, among the Tribes and conservation organizations, foundation funders, and among scientists in the bowels of the fishery agencies who really do care about the fish and fisheries despite their agency policies.

But at the end of 40 years, I am not here to look back. The challenges ahead are daunting; more challenging, I believe, than what we faced the past two score of years. Consider what Tim Sloane and the young leaders of other



fishing organizations have to look forward to.

**Drought/Climate Change.** The current drought in the West threatens salmon specifically, but also could affect estuarine dependent fish (e.g., crab) in the future. It is going to be difficult to keep what little flow there is in-stream for fish, given the magnitude of the scarcity and demand by cities and agriculture for that water. Worse yet, with climate change, these droughts are predicted to be even more severe and of longer duration – pointing to a need for fishermen to get behind measures such as water conservation, water recycling, groundwater management and cleanup, and development of green desalination technology. All of this is on top of warming and more acidic oceans.

**Preventing Investor Takeover of our Food Supplies.** We are already witnessing Wall Street investors getting control over large commodity crops (e.g., almonds, grapes) in the US and abroad. Unless we are careful, our fisheries could be next, making sharecroppers out of fishermen. Catch share programs and individual fishing quotas may make fishing better for some, but unless these programs are carefully crafted and tightly enforced, they will be the pathway for third party takeovers of our fish stocks.

**Unsustainable Aquaculture.** A third major challenge is to prevent government and some NGOs – anxious to have “green” farmed fish on our shelves – from promoting and approving as “sustainable” aquaculture that’s not sustainable. Today, there is no open water aquaculture that is sustainable, despite their claims; problems remain with open water and

even some on-shore facilities using antibiotics and non-sustainable food sources (e.g., wild fish, feed made from GMO crops). Aquaculture can be sustainable, but it’s mostly not today and won’t be until it is set on a different course.

IT IS TEMPTING TO WANT TO stay on the job, given the challenges ahead, but for me it’s time to say good-bye as PCFFA Executive Director, and to step down at IFR as well.

I have every confidence in Tim Sloane and some of our younger board members. It is now their time. I plan to be around, depending on my health, helping out and lending counsel when asked. PCFFA/IFR Northwest Director, Glen Spain, is putting off his retirement to also stay around and help Tim.

What I ask from all of you is to lend your support to this next generation of fishery leaders, as I plan to. They will need it; our fishing industry is depending on them.

I want to thank *Fishermen’s News*, and you its readers, for the opportunity over the years to voice my thoughts on these pages. I am grateful, too, for the wonderful people I have had the privilege of working with in the course of this job. Finally, I cannot begin to express my gratitude for the privilege of serving for the past 40 years the very best people on the face of this Earth – working fishing men and women. 

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