

Fisheries management has improved significantly over the past 30 years, and the whole seafood industry is working hard to limit its impact and improve transparency, but the seafood industry continues to make headlines for the wrong reasons. The Netflix documentary *Seaspiracy* questions the credibility and transparency of the sustainable seafood movement, and a recent *Guardian* article has put seafood fraud back in the spotlight once again. This meeting looked at misinformation as a key issue facing a responsible seafood supply chain.

Mike Mitchell, Common Language Group Chair introduced the topic and referred to the origins of the CLG. This session has been prompted by a documentary which has echoes of the very first CLG meeting held in Hull in the wake of a Greenpeace campaign back in 2005 which raised significant questions and asked for the seafood supply chain to reject the worst, select the best and improve the rest. This remains the core principle of most responsible sourcing policies. This also established the evident value of convening a diverse group of stakeholders. *Seaspiracy* has raised concerns amongst consumers on many levels. This industry does seem to continually have to address reputational challenges over sustainability. How do we as an industry address these?

[From fishery science to fake news: how misinformation about the ocean evolves.](#) Ray Hilborn, Professor in the School of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences, University of Washington.

- There is no shortage of fake news with four big stories highlighted: including deep sea trawling is clear cutting the seafloor; all large fish (largely tuna) gone by 1980; all fish gone by 2048 (one of the most cited papers ever in the fish world); and bottom trawling causes as much carbon as air travel. All these headlines/stories have been completely discredited. There is often little relationship between the press release and the paper contents. *Seaspiracy* has effectively packaged up these bogus science stories.
- The steps to address this covers: 1. Funding the research; 2. Writing the papers; 3. Peer review (which is where the problem really lies) - most of these headlines are due to a failure of peer review (with either not qualified or biased reviewers), also biased editors; 4. The press release is a big issue and editors have become much more savvy in ensuring attention-grabbing headlines. There is often very little connection between the paper and the headline. 5. Media uptake – bad news makes a better headline. 6. It gets assimilated into a “narrative”. It is about the money. Many organisations depend on the oceans being emptied which creates the narrative for fundraising. Without concern about the oceans the \$300,000,000 per year in grants from US Foundations would evaporate – private donations would be down as well.
- The solutions.
 - Ignore Science and Nature – their review process simply fails most of the time.
 - Global studies” are the main problem – we need regional results that can be evaluated and get more papers retracted
 - If it can be shown to be wrong based on evidence at the time it should be retracted but even when retracted they are still there.
 - We need a new approach to peer review with paid experts to review and better education of journalist

Discussion and Q&A

- **Q. What is your view on social media and its role in perpetuating these myths?**
A. It has a big impact especially during the Trump era and fake news. It is something we have to live with. We have a web site and a twitter feed and have had a lot more hits since *Seaspiracy* (around 195,000).
- **You've talked about the structural problems, but what are your thoughts on the constructive response when falsehoods like this happen that don't come off as attacks that make people question the critique more than the source publication?**

A. My approach is to try to partner with experts linked to other NGOs. We did commission a project looking at problems with published papers and whether a rebuttal of a paper works. We have found the rebuttal will get a lot less coverage. The real push needs to be to get papers retracted. Very few do, often because a paper must be fraudulent to be retracted.

- **Q. Have you had any engagement or interaction with the Seaspiracy producers since the film was first aired? Would you want to?**

A. No we have not felt there would be anything to gain in trying to converse with him.

- **Q. What is the best way to overturn 'fake news'? Do you think your website is effective or do people make up their minds once they see films like Seaspiracy?**

A. Some of both. It is frustrating when people are influenced by misinformation.

- **Q. Would you make a Netflix documentary on fake news?**

A. We are talking to some film makers about doing something like that. We estimate it would cost \$£500,000 to do this. The obvious people to do this would be the MSC. We would love to see them take on a project such as this.

- **Q. While no doubt doing reputational harm to industry, do you think sensational negative media releases (Seaspiracy) play a role in driving positive change? Would that change be slower without it? (a devil's advocate question!)**

A. This is an interesting question. You could argue the media coverage in the 1990's has led to the positive change and response we have now seen. But the improvement and change were already well underway in many places. The constructive engagement we have seen in management processes has been much more responsible and effective.

- **Q. Do you think it's having a negative impact on the consumption of seafood right now or will we see the true realisation of these fake news stories in 10-20 years' time with the Gen Z population rather than millennials and boomers?**

A. That is the risk. Now we have not really seen any immediate decline in seafood consumption. Plantspiracy (which is very short) adopts the same approach and is worth watching. There is likely to be some reductions in the consumptions of an environmentally-friendly source of protein as a result.

Further information

- **Contact Ray Hilborn hilbornr@gmail.com**
- **[Sustainable seafood. The science of sustainable seafood, explained](#)**

[What Seaspiracy means for the sustainable seafood movement in general.](#) David Parker, Marine Stewardship Council.

- We need to treat critics with respect - just because Seaspiracy isn't respectful to us doesn't mean we should respond tit for tat.
- Seaspiracy has clearly got many of its facts wrong but the truth is that its main charges do ring true at a global level: There is significant overfishing in certain areas; illegal fishing is a problem; fishing crews can be abused; and global fishing can have a significant impact on ocean wildlife. But sustainable seafood is not a myth and sustainable management works.
- The inconvenient truth is that Seaspiracy shows consumers that all food production comes with a price, an environmental, social, and economic impact, but the film fails to address the real context of sustainable seafood.
- We need to empower the viewers that Seaspiracy reached to help drive positive change: enabling collective action rather than Seaspiracy's proposed collective inaction and abandonment of issues.
- Responding to Seaspiracy really does matter. It takes the challenge to a new generation. Too many were too quiet following the release of Seaspiracy.
- Public accountability is crucial. The ability of the sustainable seafood movement to maintain and grow its impact, legitimacy and credibility directly depends on our ability to collaborate and co-create solutions to emerging challenges.

Discussion and Q&A

- **Q. On the topic of communication tactics, the response to Seaspiracy in some cases was respectful and fact-based, but other times was sensational and accusatory. As we know, sensational and accusatory tends to get more uptake, even by us respectable folks in the industry. Is there space in the accountability communication framework for both communication approaches?**

A. We need to call things out as we see them, and it is possible to do that in a respectful way. We saw the way the NGOs who took part were treated and how their comments were taken out of context. We can question all of this but don't need to respond in a provocative way.

- **Q. That is all highly rationale and diplomatic and we should certainly be addressing the challenges you suggest. However, social media and headline grabbing journalists are not working in a rationale coherent way. Do we not also need a media strategy which tackles these growing trends in media.**

A. We need to be more proactive. This industry can fear the media tactics being used. We can you move forward with integrity, but these are difficult questions that we need to answer. We do need a strategy. We should continue to push and build on the progress we have made already. We need to keep on keeping on and focus on what we are already doing to create positive change.

- **Q. You mentioned the growing awareness that all food production has environmental impact. Do you see this as something we should be more open about publicly, and how do we discuss impacts of all types of diets, vegan included, without getting into tit-for-tat?**

A. In general it is difficult to push your own industry and squash someone else. In the past advertising rules did not allow this. Healthy competition is good. It is absolutely possible to make rational comparisons and sell the virtue of sustainable seafood. It is a difficult message to get across and further thoughts on how we address this would be welcome.

- **Q. Excellent points Dave, really heartening to hear you reiterate the need for balance, collaboration and respect underlying all positive progress. On that basis, what do you see being the main obstacles to further MPA designation with meaningful management and protection in terms of marine ecosystems (as opposed to single species concerns)?**

A. Marine spatial management and MPAs are a fantastic tool in the toolbox but they are not the only solution. How we use science is important. We need to improve the public trust in science and think carefully about how we use, and police science, in the decision-making process.

- **Comments. Absolutely fantastic to see such a balanced and diplomatic response. Really enjoyed your presentation. Agree with the positivity drive! Great presentation, thanks! Nice to hear! I agree with you, I don't think many people will stop eating fish, but it will spurn all of us on to do even better work.**

- **Q. Do you think Seaspiracy will ultimately do more good than harm to seafood sustainability?**

A. I think more good than harm, but right now it may be hard to see that. This is raising awareness with 200 million consumers – some may become vegan, but most people will keep eating fish but will maybe think more about sustainability. This could be a benefit and drive the work we are trying to do.

Further information

- **Contact David Parker** David.Parker@msc.org

Bad Press – Crisis or Opportunity? Helen McLachlan and Clarus Chu, WWF.

- **The global triple challenge:** Food production is the main driver for global biodiversity loss (60%); Fish (wild-caught + farmed) provide 17% of global animal protein intake; 800 million people depend on fish (food and income).

- **Are sustainable fisheries possible? This is based on:** sustainable removal rates based on best science; minimise impact on wider marine environment; no Illegal, Unreported or Unregulated; climate smart; no human rights abuse; effective monitoring and control; and ideally sustainable blue investment.
- The UK Fisheries Act contains a good package of aspirations. This is a really important process. Assurance includes how claims can be evidenced. This includes AIS (gives positional data), Blockchain (traceability), REM (data, compliance) and due diligence. In addition, certification is an important and useful tool on the journey of seafood sustainability.
- **Together possible is the slogan.** For consumers: we need to ask questions; diversify our seafood choices; try climate friendly seafood; eat lower in the food chain; and buy well-managed local fish.

Discussion and Q&A

- **Q. Is the report referenced on Helen's slide 5 (trawler carbon emissions on par with aviation) the same paper that Ray brought up in his talk? Yes. To be fair, the Trawl footprint paper has been called activist science by Manuel Barange and now the scientific process of peer reviewed publishing has been shredded by Ray - I am a SSF specialist and there is no way (even with a PhD in my field) to understand these issues when advising my government, which is my current role.**
A. Re the trawl impact on carbon, a critique has been submitted by a UK team led by Jan Hiddink at Bangor University. They estimate that the paper was estimating 10 to 100 times overestimate of the impact. Also, their proposed solution, of closing areas to trawling was not done properly. They assumed if you closed an area the trawl effort disappeared. If it simply moves elsewhere and if there is no reduced trawl effort and then no reduced carbon resuspension.
- **Q. You've mentioned that seafood can learn from soy and palm but what are the opportunities for soy and palm to learn from seafood?**
A. How we learn from other industries could provide a learning lesson for other sectors.
- **Q. Why is pollock more sustainable than cod? They are both from MSC certified sources. Let's celebrate that so much fish is certified as sustainable and not be critical of one certified fish vs another.**
A. We are not trying to do a fish list. This was one example of trying to diversity from the top five key species to spread their efforts.
- **Q. Interesting to see advice for consumers on choosing species with lower carbon footprints. How are consumers supposed to know which supply chains are low carbon compared to others? Supermarket sourcing policies of 'MSC or in a FIP' are too simplistic and drive sourcing away from local fisheries that may be sustainable but are not certified.**
A. It is difficult especially considering freight and air travel of imported species. Take simple way, choose carefully and just take a look at where and how it is caught.
- **Technology. Q. 1. We can certainly all agree that there are fisheries that are further along in the sustainable journey than others. On the topic of more advanced technology, it is easier to advocate for and implement in developed fisheries in wealthy countries with stable political climates. What can we do about those fisheries that contribute substantively to overall global supply, but take place in waters that don't have this wealth/stability? Q. 2. New technology will be important to make improvements, and this requires investment - where do see this coming from, who should provide funding - foundations/eNGOs, industry, government? - I see this as a key barrier to be addressed.**
A. Sustainable finance is crucial. We need good investment (partly Government/partly business) to help implement in less well-developed countries. There also need to be a focus on how investable a fishery- improving the governance will make it more investable.

Further information

- Contact [WWF](https://www.wwf.org.uk), Helen McLachlan: hmclachlan@wwf.org.uk, Clarus Chu: cchu@wwf.org.uk