

# Speaking at FCC Annual Conference: A Hot Topic!

Someone asked me, "what was it like to be a keynote speaker at the Fisheries Council of Canada Conference?"

My topic was, "Seafood should not be the *Mystery Food*, while keeping in mind the theme of the conference, ' *Promoting a Prosperous Sector and Healthy Resource*'.

Both are loaded for great conversation; an even grander opportunity to challenge the industry that sat before me.

The room was filled with Canadian fisherman from Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, British Columbia, Ontario, and Prince Edward Island, as well as many industry members who were all very engaging. I felt like a kid in a candy shop as I digested the colorful stories I could document for my next television series,

*Put Your Best Fish Forward*. There is no doubt Canada has an amazing seafood culture to explore!

"We ALL need to promote our valued, world-class Canadian seafood. Not just the companies with a label on a product... and we ALL need to understand that consumers are the bottomline!"

I tend to get wound up at the very idea of promoting seafood because from my vantage point of educating consumers about seafood,

the entire North American seafood industry needs to get behind seafood in a way they have never thought about before; seafood education commercials; dynamic messaging about an industry doing good for their communities; presenting our seafood and aquaculture on a higher level and, let's have fun with seafood! A new narrative needs to happen.

There are many creative ways to get behind seafood and aquaculture, verses just 'selling fish'. Connecting children to seafood is a hugely untapped market.

When we can finally cut through the industry noise and put into action, '*promoting a prosperous sector and healthy resource*', seafood will no longer be the mystery food that it is.

The words promoting seafood is rather odd to a centuries-old industry. But I wanted to make it clear, its time to get with the program and figure out that changing times equals a changing industry. Its happening right before our eyes at a rapid pace.

Just 'selling fish' is not where its at. Consumers are the drivers and the bottomline. They will buy products associated with companies that are sustainable, giving back to communities and caring for the environment. We certainly have these stories. I think its time to start promoting it this way.

Our true sustainable message and educating the health of seafood are key factors to getting consumers to eat more seafood.

Linda Cornish, the president of *Seafood Nutrition Partnership* (SNP), also attended the conference and talked about Seafood Nutrition Partnership's mission; '*building awareness of the health and nutritional benefits of seafood*' and asking American's to take a pledge to eat seafood at least two times a week. This kind of organization would be an opportunity for Canadian Fisheries to connect with local communities about the many reasons to eat seafood. I am proud to be an ambassador for SNP to encourage everyone to eat sustainable seafood, for brain health and health health, and beyond that, supporting fisheries in North America- what I call our precious local seafood.

As I was preparing my presentation, I took a leap and searched, '*consumers and the bottomline*' and found one of a few articles, *Purpose Deepens Consumer Relationships, Drives Bottom Line*.

The study explains that consumers are more likely to make purchases from companies that show CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility). Their purchasing decisions are based on this.

So rather than promoting the sale of seafood, let's connect to what consumer's want; real information about a product and connecting to CSR companies selling the seafood. This is the way into their hands and ultimately into their mouths. Red Lobster went all-out this past year with a Super Bowl ad that speaks to this study, verses a 'pitchy' commercial for their shrimp, crab and lobster.

We need many more like this! Story boards that are educational, whimsical, story-telling, outrageous and fun!

The questions I get in my seafood cooking classes are a real testament to the article above.

Canadian's are known to be really nice, in fact, rather shy when it comes to sticking their necks out about what they represent. While that might seem humbling and attractive, Canadian Fisheries is not an industry to be complacent when its feeding the world amazing sustainable, reliable seafood.

After living in New York for many years there is great lack of knowledge with American's understanding where their seafood comes from. Why is that when the United States is Canada's largest export market? Many still think all North American lobster comes from Maine. That is obvious when I teach *Lobster 101*.

So what gives when it comes to promoting a prosperous sector and healthy resource? How can we erase *the Mystery Food*?

While there has been some good efforts to show transparency (MSC and BAP certifications) and telling stories, our messaging around seafood health, and an all-out Canadian Fisheries promotion needs to be taken up 10 notches!

I have challenged Canadian Fisheries to add *promoting seafood* to the budget. An industry this wealthy (sales reaching \$6.9 billion) can erase *the Mystery Food* narrative and take heed in *promoting a prosperous sector and healthy resource*.

Overall the conference was very interactive with like-minded members, starting with judging a seafood cook-off between three local chefs; Chef Emeric Beccaris, Chef at Play Food & Wine; Chef Phoebe Blacksmith-Hester, former owner of Sweetgrass Bistro; and Chef Matt Hall, Executive Chef at NeXt. The cook-off was to use *Ocean Choice* yellowtail and/or redfish in their dishes. Chef Matt Hall won the bragging rights prize but they were all winners.

I watched a few presentations the next morning; one that seem to resonate with many members, on many levels, was the Reconciliation Panel; a healthy discussion that has paved the way for more friendly and open conversations.

When Sean Casey (MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans) was speaking I asked the looming question, where is the marketing funding that was to show up in the Atlantic Canada Fish Fund?

There was no answer. Fair enough since he's playing catch-up with significant changes within DFO. I hope to have an answer as was promised. And speaking about this amongst others later, many are baffled as to when it will be offered.

So what is your purpose for selling fish day in, day out? Are giving what consumers want; corporate social responsibility, stories, a personal connection to our precious, sustainable, Canadian seafood?

If we all take part in a *promoting a prosperous sector and healthy resource*, seafood will no longer be the *Mystery Food* and we can sustain it for generations to come.

It was an honor to be a keynote speaker at the Canadian Fisheries Council of Canada Conference!

Feel free to contact me if you would like more information about my next television series, *Put Your Best Fish Forward*, my personal and professional seafood education mission.



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