



Seafood Marketing Program Steering Committee Meeting Summary

Thursday, October 10, 2019

Massachusetts State House

In attendance

Steering committee members: Representative Susan Gifford, Commissioner Ron Amidon, Director David Pierce, Bonita Oelkhe (proxy for MDAR Commissioner Lebeaux), Frank Mirarchi, Beth Casoni, Laura Foley, Tory Bramante, Bob Colbert, Bill Doyle

Division of Marine Fisheries: Wendy Mainardi, Story Reed, Jared Silva, Kevin Creighton, Dan McKernan

Members of the public: Scott Soares, Mike Pierdnock, Mike Carroll, Seth Rolbine, Karen Spiller, Nicola Williams, Megan Delaney, Kim Starbuck

Meeting summary

Director Pierce: Welcome to the Seafood Marketing Program steering committee meeting at Seafood Day at the State House. We thought that combining events would be beneficial to both gatherings, and to those attending so that you would only have to make one trip. We know that this is going to be a long day, and we thank you for coming here this morning.

DMF is the state agency co-sponsoring Seafood Day. It is organized by the Fishing Partner Support Services. This is the 2nd annual Seafood Day, and it has already expanded greatly to having 19 organizations representing the industry, so we look forward to seeing you downstairs in the Hall of Flags after this meeting. It is of note that the event today came in part from a push from THIS steering committee. We want you to know that we take your suggestions very seriously.

We want to thank Representative Susan Gifford for suggesting and reserving this room for us, and we are lucky to have her here today as the storm canceled a conflicting cranberry event.

We first met in this room three and half years ago. We are very grateful to those people who were at that meeting and who are still with us today - we are encouraged that the group has remained so consistent. Since then, the Seafood Marketing Program has figured out some reliable projects and

continues to develop new ones. Today we will devote some time to hearing about and weighing in on a new initiative.

For those of you who don't know, this will be my last steering committee meeting as chair, because I am stepping down as director on November 1st after 48 years of service. I started as a young boy and now I end an old man. I have nothing but great respect for the Division and the good people of the industry. As dictated by the legislation that created this Seafood Marketing Program, "the director of marine fisheries (or a designee)... shall serve as chair." There will be a new Director and Commissioner Amidon will make that recommendation, resulting in a new chair.

Seafood Day starts at 11:00. This is our shortest meeting to date, so please introduce yourself and your organization, and we will get started.

*Introductions made.

Wendy Mainardi: Here is what the program legislation says: increase the public's knowledge; educate the public and build confidence; create name recognition and increase demand; stabilize market when prices are low; create promotional and educational tools; program outreach and funding sources. I found it helpful to look at and to frame this meeting.

Here is a pie chart of the average of the way we have spent money over the past three years. Part of this steering committee's duty is to help us spend these funds. Administration is about equal to the grant program and then sponsorships/partnerships a little less, then marketing material is a little less than that.

Here is a summary of our grant program until this point. We are thinking about opening up the new cycle in early November. We want to encourage new applicants. We want to have the support of this steering committee. We did research last cycle and I think we will keep it general this year again.

Beth Casoni: Is the funding for the grants based upon what is left over or is there a set amount each year?

Wendy: It's not set, we figure it out each year.

Tory: I didn't realize grants was part of what we were trying to accomplish. I don't know what these grants are accomplishing. I was under the assumption that we were going to be doing more marketing and when I look at that funding pie, there is a small sliver, very small dedicated to marketing. My opinion is that I don't know what these grants are doing and how they are getting awarded. I would like to see a lot more of that go towards marketing. I like to market our local seafood ie: billboard, radio. Is money the problem? Is it too expensive to advertise in magazines, etc.?

Wendy: We can increase the transparency in terms of our grant process. I can put together a document of all the projects we have funded. It does help us spread across the state and do different things that we couldn't do. I hear you about the advertising and we can do more of that. There are less expensive

options such as state billboards and *Edible Boston*, but we can do more advertising. I want to say one third of the budget is dedicated to this (in the form of education).

Tory: Let's look into radio again.

Wendy: I can investigate print as well and do an advertising push.

Laura: What about public relations too? Pitching the food editors so it doesn't cost us anything? An event that we invite all the writers to. Alerting the right people.

Wendy: Seafood Day had its own PR firm working on it. And then there is the Expo coming up and other events.

Laura: Good PR tends to be more impactful because if you position with a news angle for example tie the fisheries management with did you know these species taste great and maybe DMF threw a lunch at the fish pier.

David: Have we received any grant proposals that are like this?

Story: We could make this a focus of the grant program this year.

Wendy: We could say that we are looking for partners in advertising.

Tory: correct me if I'm wrong, but when you award a grant, these people promote on their own product? I think this group wants to market local seafood in general. I think it's hard for someone to get a hold of a grant that is going to benefit all of us. Let's look at the best bang for our buck: grant or marketing.

Bonita: I wonder if – for your awardees – they could use your logo and tagline in signage or on their website to whatever they are doing to support the overall agenda of promoting local seafood? This does allow you to do more then you could do without a grant program.

Frank Mirarchi: A bit of an epiphany to me is that it is very hard to discern MA seafood in large grocery stores. How do we make it easier for consumers to recognize Massachusetts Seafood? Point of Sale would be great. Let's make it obvious where the local seafood is for people who are busy so they can make an informed choice.

Laura: The signs just have to say the country of origin.

Frank: Everything is driven by price, and we are not going to be the cheapest. How do we sell our value to these people?

Laura: GMRI has a brand.

Wendy: We are not a brand. We are an educational program and we say "ask your server or retailer for the local catch." Grocery stores are very hard to penetrate, because some are owned by Europe companies but we can certainly try to reach them at a local level.

Frank: This needs to be done by the retailer or the public needs to demand it.

Tory: Unfortunately, the retailers are not going to give us support to emphasize local seafood because they themselves are getting cheapest product on the counter. We want people to ask at the counter where the seafood is from.

Frank: Price is not the only value.

Bob: We have people who are asking.

Laura: There is plenty of cheap seafood, haddock for example.

Bonita: Some retailers might be interested in participating in a pilot project.

Frank: Our product will sell itself; we need to represent the value better. I think that we are weak on the point of sale stuff.

Laura: I think that people who get a grant should be using our Massachusetts Seafood logo. I was offended that we gave money to a business to give samples for their own business. Everything done should be done for the state.

Wendy: I do work with our grantees about this, but yes, heard.

Mike Carroll: Consumer marketing is much more expensive than b to b marketing.

Ron: There are a lot of locally owned markets here in Massachusetts so if you could do cooperative marketing like 'locally owned markets carry locally owned fish' and then through the ad coop work out the agreement where you're going to put their logo on that marketing campaign but you are asking them to take your logo and put it in their case. That is cheap money, may not cost you anything. Like Roche and Market Basket.

Bonita: There have been recent willingness-to-pay studies done that ask what messages resonate most, is it organic, is it local, and there definitely is a percentage of consumers interested in these topics.

Wendy: This summer we sponsored six farmers markets throughout the Commonwealth with Eating with the Ecosystem. They do demonstrations with local chefs and hand out samples.

Alex: Is there a reason that all the locations were seaside?

Wendy: That's a good question, and I think if I hear what you are saying is that we should do a push to the western and central parts of Massachusetts.

Our summer intern did lots of content creation for Instagram. We featured retailers with the phrase, *"Looking for a seafood retailer? ____ is one of around 916 permitted retailers in Massachusetts. Ask them for the local catch!"*

We can continue to do things like this throughout the year, because it's free and popular. Are there other campaigns that you guys would want to see? Telling stories of fishermen?

Frank: We should tell the story of how much fishing has changed since 2010. It's very difficult to make it work, and the management is very complicated. The public needs to know that the fishing industry is not just a bunch of cowboys going out and catching whatever they want. It's a highly regulated business with high overhead costs, and that cost is not being absorbed in the marketplace because we are surrounded by fish that has lower production costs. We struggle to be competitors. That's hard to convey but you should talk to some fishermen and lobstermen.

Laura: We want people to be knowledgeable that fishermen are not raping the oceans. I also think that the state-run fishing system provides an opportunity to tell people exactly what's going on "black sea bass is open/black sea bass is closed" people might be urged to get it knowing it's closing soon. It's "get it while you can" and newsworthy and you can do Instagram. It's positive. And even a hashtag.

Beth: We give a presentation about the evolution to lobster fishing. You could do the history of grounding in Massachusetts. It doesn't have to be long and detailed. It tells the story of fishing and its importance in the Commonwealth.

Wendy: Yes, we could tell the micro (fishermen) and the macro (history) stories.

David: That idea could also be folded into our Division newsletter. Our newsletter gets distributed hard copy but social allows us to reach more people quicker.

Beth: You can do it in series.

Wendy: We are thinking about the Expo, March 15-17, 2020. Mass. Ave. was successful last year and we want to increase traffic and grow the aisle. Ideally would have a hanging banner and also a social party. We are working hard with Bonita on this.

Beth: Who is invited, and who can participate? It seems to be port-centric, and there are a lot of other in-betweens. Can anyone participate?

Wendy: Yes, as long as all product is local.

Bonita: Local means from the US. We had a business that had a full range, but they were only displaying the local product on Mass. Ave. and the invitation goes to everyone on Story's wholesale list.

Wendy: We learned that that email address is not always who we want to reach however.

Story: We can resend an email soon.

Tory: Are there any banners or anything highlighting what is landed in MA? Maybe x amount of groundfish is landed, x amount of this species each year, because a lot of people have no idea what goes on at the Boston Fish Pier. They don't know that fish is landed. Massport just did a whole thing to

market the Fish Pier and it's going to be in some of the airports around the country. You might want to look into that. Let's highlight the general MA seafood at the show.

David: The port profile project might open up a door for those kind of distinctions about what's going on around the state.

Wendy: Here are some ongoing and future projects: Farm to School, new media: video shorts, comic book, recipes, seafood availability in print media, new events: Plymouth 400th, Pan-Mass Challenge (Laura: they have a big tent after the first day, and it would be a great place to be), digital billboard, Ambassador Program, winter campaign: seafood or clam chowder (ski lodges, ice rinks, etc.) (Beth: there are big tree lightings), cooking the catch: recreational fishing guide.

Beth: Can we reach out to the Boston Public Market to do a seasonal talk with chefs?

Wendy: We can do something different from what Jared does.

Bonita: Trustees run the space.

Tory: I would donate the fish.

Wendy: Scup research is being done in Rhode Island by the Commercial Fisheries research fund. However there is a funky taste when it is frozen and unfrozen and they are researching why now. We can still try to get chefs involved.

Port Profile Project update:

Story: Harbormaster and Fishermen surveys completed by Urban Harbors Institute; survey data is being analyzed and individual port profiles drafted. This takes stock of infrastructure, and the second piece is the landing data that we have. We have a lot of information, and we are working on how to display it all. The full report will include needs of different ports. The data is from 2018, and data auditing is always happening. This is anyone landing in MA even if they are from out of state. The audience runs the gamut. We need to look out for the confidentiality issues. We will send these drafts back out to the harbormasters to ground truth it, now that it's in writing.

David: Would make sense to include some context for folks? We should highlight what is going well. Even catch share management which people are divided on, and GMRI is working on a report that we might want to reference. We are having too much consolidation, so let's give some thought to negative and positives.

Story: Shared infrastructure was included but not as specific as exactly how much. We also have a new retail farmers market permit. We used to include it as a different permit. There is no functional change, except the language should make it easier for industry and municipalities.

Wendy: This summer we put out an RFP for a special promotion that will be in addition to our normal programming. It is for two years and it is for \$50,000. I had an idea for this, but if the group wants to do an advertising campaign then we can discuss this now.

The Williams Agency (Nicola Williams and Karen Spiller): Karen and I have collaborated on many projects, one of the recent projects that we have done lately is promoting Cape Shark – dogfish – at the Jerk Fest and we have had fishermen on sight filleting fish. We have thrown Seafood Throwdowns with NAMA. We are advocates and are pleased to be working on this project. This is an opportunity to increase awareness of diversity of species. We want to get some consensus about this project.

Our takeaway from the RFR includes many things including having MA residents consume seafood. We want to look at some goals. Our approach is to develop a campaign, not just an event, with the following objectives: increase awareness of availability, versatility, health benefits, environmental sustainability, history of local seafood, increase the demand, increase market access and demonstrate use of all parts of the species. We took this from the RFR as the direction to go. We can't do it all, we are very defined in terms of the budget, and we are here to get clarity we just want to frame it.

Frank: Why would we just focus on one species?

Alex: Getting people to understand that seasons open and close does educate people on the whole picture.

Wendy: We don't need focus on one species, just one aspect. We aren't asking them to market Massachusetts Seafood, we want to figure out a hook to bring people in.

The Williams Agency: One aspect will act as a window to the bigger picture, yes.

Frank: I like the whole animal aspect.

Tory: I am hesitant about the use of the word underutilized.

Frank: The word "overfished" appears in federal language. In the context that most people use that it is very deceptive, they mean to use "over harvested" in terms of the allocation, and over fished should be used in that we did use the allocation from the preceding year work. In terms of compliance, we are 100% compliant.

Williams Agency: So are we increasing consumption and eating and serving of seafood? Increasing the consumption of local seafood? Increasing awareness of the seasonality? We just want to touch on some of the priorities of the goals that we stated earlier. It seems that you need some kind of branding to promote local seafood. You could target the eaters, consumers, as well as b2b but ultimately our goal is to consume seafood caught in MA? How do we promote that and get people excited? Just like local food: people are demanding local food. They are asking for it.

Wendy: Branding is not part of this project; we have an educational brand. I was thinking more like an event or an advertising campaign based on the direction of this meeting or we could put this money towards a big sponsorship such as the Pan Mass Challenge.

Alex: I have always been a champion of metrics. Awareness is different form consumption and it doesn't always translate. Where we find a big void of selling large volume of product is not on the other side it's

on the supply side. We have gone through several campaigns to try and generate these sales then not having the supply to sell to the bigger chains who have the capacity to move volume. The chef might use 10 pounds, but another customer would use 600,000 pounds and the supply not matching up with the awareness, not match up with who we are advertising to. I think we should think about metrics. Are we going after the cruise line who can move a million pounds a year? Or are we going after the chefs in Boston who make their Facebook page look great?

Beth: Can we connect with the MRA to Alex's point? Because if we had an event for the restaurant owners, meet the harvesters, this is the seafood they harvest and this is their availability and here is the story behind it.

Alex: Let's get the MRA but also Sysco and US Foods. I know Bonita works with buyers. We need to connect the dots.

Wendy: We could do a B to B event?

Alex: It's all about convenience and consistency.

Tory: We could invite everybody, present product.

Beth: Have the buyers and dealers there to take orders.

Bonita: Maybe there is a follow up plan included to really have more longevity than a long term event.

Laura: I think you could have different harvesters presenting and tasting.

Tory: Could this coincide with the EXPO?

Wendy: Would it be too soon?

Williams Agency: Yes, but we can build from it.

David: We appreciate you coming here and being flexible.

Williams Agency: We are excited to be working with you.

David: Micheal Pierdnock will now speak for a few minutes.

Mike Pierdnock: I am a charterboat captain, board of directors of Stellwagen charterboat association and Massachusetts chairman of recreation fishing alliance. Here to talk about blue fin tuna. We have a large number of bluefin tuna in our waters. Our quota is the largest allocation for the entire coast from June, and there is no shortage. The problem is that we don't have a market. The fish come in, go to Japan, Japan gets flooded and they are not interested. This is the first year that fish were brought to the dock and some were turned away. That had to do with supply and demand and also quality of the fish. The catching is regulated but the market is not and I say that we have to do something about it. I heard about the grant program as a mechanism to try to build a local market for bluefin. I hope that something

can be done. There is an organization that came out a week ago that said the blue fin tuna is in trouble. It isn't. The pacific bluefin tuna fishery is in trouble. We need to get the word out that this isn't the case.

Alex: I'm a dealer of bluefin and I have about 20 fish in house that we are trying to move. This has nothing to do with a consumer issue. We are not tooled correctly across the supply chain. The small fish are easy to sell whole to restaurants, but the 500+ pounds are too big. Education on the supply line to the distributors and now to deal with the stuff and how to deal with a huge loin, they don't know how to portion it.

Laura: The price point too, because to find customers willing to pay for bluefin is hard. It is a completely differentiable product, and it is so much better than yellowfin. I can sell the loin but not the whole fish at that level when the yellow fin is \$10 less.

Alex: The price is there, but the cutters need to know what to do with it. It's a challenge and it has been for 15 years.

Mike: That's consistent with what I've heard.

Beth: This species would be a good candidate to hold an event.

Alex: There were guys sinking fish this year.

Mike: Thank you all.

David: This concludes our meeting. Thank you for your participation and it has been a pleasure serving on this committee. Thanks to you and our staff for keeping us on track.

