

KEY NOTE ADDRESS



Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for giving me the honour of addressing you here in Washington.

Seafood is the world's most traded commodity which makes Seafood a truly global business.

A global business, however, comes with global issues. Today I'd like to discuss and explore some of these issues with you and pose a few questions which some of you might find controversial, but which I hope all of you will find thought-provoking.

So, what are the issues facing the modern seafood industry? Well, we are not short of them. Illegal fishing, sustainability, discarding, safety, reform of the European Common Fisheries Policy, food security, health issues..... However, in recent years, the industry has made great steps forward in tackling some of these problems.

Let's start with illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing - IUU. In January 2010, the European Union imposed regulations to prevent illegally-caught fish entering the European marketplace. These regulations hoped to solve a problem that was estimated to cost anywhere between \$15 billion to \$36 billion across the world each year. In the

EU, a whopping 16% of total imports used to come from IUU sources so it was no easy task to tackle.

Despite early concerns about their complexity, the IUU regulations have been hailed by the vast majority a success in their first year. I would like to think that Seafish played a part in helping the UK seafood industry adjust to the new regulations. We worked closely with UK Government in the run up to the implementation of the regulations to ensure that businesses had clear information on what was required. We ran workshops across the UK, created an IUU section on our website to host all the latest information and answer questions, and issued frequent communication to industry to make the process as pain free as possible. And I think we did a good job.

Whilst the new regulations have unquestionably reduced the amount of IUU fish entering the EU market, there is still much work to be done to tackle the problem worldwide, and in developing countries in particular. EU Commissioner Maria Damanaki is well aware of this and is pushing for a worldwide certification system to eradicate IUU fish once and for all. Solving this complex problem will not be easy, but we should be encouraged by the success of the EU regulations.

Sustainability is another global issue facing our industry. It's big word, oft used, but what does it actually mean? The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'sustainable' as 'conserving an ecological balance by avoiding depletion of natural resources'.

But what does 'sustainability' mean to us, to the seafood industry? Well, some may think that it means 'headache and problems'. For some it may mean just ticking a box, for others it means looking at the science. What it certainly means for us all is that we need to continue to work hard to strike the balance between having a profitable industry and ensuring that stocks are maintained and that fishers continue to be the custodians of the sea.

To the average consumer, however, 'sustainable' means "I can't eat cod because there's none left" or even worse, "I shouldn't eat any fish at all because I heard the oceans will be empty by 2048".

The role the media and the various NGOs play in swaying the consumer must not be underestimated. How many times have you seen the 2048 myth repeated in newspapers, in magazines, online, on the radio and on the television? And this is despite the fact that Boris Worm himself, lead author of the original paper citing the date 2048, has not only rescinded his views but co-authored a further paper expressing hope for the future management of global fish stocks... But many people believe what they read in the newspapers and the more often they see it, the more they believe it as 'fact'.

Add to this that celebrities are throwing their weight behind certain campaigns and it soon becomes clear that the seafood industry is facing a formidable opponent in the battle to speak to consumers.

Seafish has done some top line research and has discovered that around \$40 million per annum is directed to marine campaigning in Northern Europe by the various NGOs. A fair proportion of this originates from North America where conflict between industry and campaigners has been quite common. In order for Seafish and industry to compete with these enormous sums, we must use our limited resources to best effect. This involves developing a level of trust between us all and a willingness to work together. Our task is to come to agreement on how this goal can be achieved.

Over recent years, Seafish and the UK seafood industry have worked hard to engage with NGOs in the marine debate to try to find common ground and demonstrate that industry is a crucial stakeholder in preserving the marine environment.

This collaborative approach has had some success and groups set up by Seafish such as the Common Language Group and the Discards Action Group, where NGOs discuss issues affecting the seafood industry around the same table as industry bodies, are testament to this.

So perhaps it is now becoming more difficult to present the seafood industry to the consumer as 'the bad guys'. Indeed, the poor consumer has been hit with so many food issues to feel guilty and outraged about that they are feeling the strain and in many cases are switching off. What do they worry about first; seafood, battery chickens, intensive veal, organic, fair trade, food miles?

The NGO's have recognised this and have started to change their campaign tactics. They have started to use the ever increasing celebrity culture to re-engage the man in the street or have even stopped bothering with Joe Public and are instead going down the route of corporate engagement.

In the UK, the most recent example of a celebrity-led campaign has been the work of TV chef, Hugh Fearnely-Whittingstall. His Fish Fight campaigned against discards and tried to encourage the UK population to increase the variety of fish it eats rather than sticking to the old favourites of cod and haddock – something which was heartily endorsed by the seafood industry.

Hugh's campaign did at least engage with the seafood industry, unlike many others, and he enjoyed the co-operation of all sectors of industry. He managed to build quite a head of steam for his campaign and this momentum for change is very welcome.

The Fish Fight campaign against discards did manage to resonate with the exhausted

consumer and even provoke them into action. The programmes were produced by HFW's own production company who engaged and consulted extensively with industry in the pre production stages. We started to work with his team months ahead of the screening of a week of TV programmes run in January this year. HFW, as a keen fisherman himself, also had a greater understanding of issues facing industry.

The result of this was an intelligent, fair and balanced campaign with clear aims and objectives which industry was able to support whole-heartedly. A far cry from what it might have been without our engagement! Perhaps this balance is also the reason for the campaign's success with the public – maybe they are not as daft as we think.

His research found out why so many of the solutions to the problem of discarding fish proposed by other campaigners have been unrealistic and how hard the industry itself has been working, especially over the last few years, to get itself on a sustainable footing.

He understood that many of the problems facing the fishing industry are outside the direct control of our fishers – regulations, environmental conditions, markets and marine environmental management – so it's pointless, and wrong, to demonise them.

Such was the power of his campaign that he managed to speak directly to Commissioner Damanaki and he took the credit for many of the suggested reforms to the EU Common Fisheries Policy which will hopefully help reduce discards.

The main conclusion of his campaign is what we could have told him from the start - that there isn't any single simple solution to discards - if there were, it would have been done long ago. What's needed varies between fisheries and, in each case, requires attention to several areas, such as fishing gear design, quota management, seasonality, logistics and processing infrastructure, and not least, consumer demand.

We look forward to working further with Hugh and his team to find sensible, practical solutions to the conservation and effective management of our fish stocks. 'Fishing better, fishing smarter' needs friends who can help make management smarter too.

We accept that not all aspects of fishing and fisheries management are perfect, but we do hope that the progress the industry has made over the last 10 years or so in achieving stability of catches, and improving sustainability is recognised. We believe that this is verified by the growing number of stocks certified as being sustainable by organisations like the Marine Stewardship Council.

The final big question I would pose about this word 'sustainability' is this: who is the arbiter of sustainability? Is it the regulators, is it the fishers, is it the scientists, is it the NGOs, is it the consumer, or the media? And perhaps someone should tell the fish – they don't respect boundaries and this can cause major problems as we have seen

recently in the North East Atlantic. One day a mackerel is British, the next it could be Norwegian, Spanish or even Icelandic.

Deciding who has the last word on sustainability is a thorny issue which I'm sure will be debated long and hard for years to come.

Now let's think about another conundrum facing the industry– the problem of balancing increased consumption, with all its health benefits whilst maintaining sustainable fish stocks.

The health benefits of eating seafood are many and well-documented. Consumers know that seafood is a healthy, low-fat protein yet still they don't include enough of it in their diets. The UK Food Standards Agency recommends that consumers should eat at least two portions of seafood a week, one of which should be oil-rich. Our research shows us that a mere 28% of UK consumers are actually achieving this target.

So the challenge is to encourage people to eat more seafood, not just to boost the profits of the seafood industry, but to improve the health of the nation. But it has to be sustainably-sourced seafood and the challenge for the seafood consumer in 21st century Britain is to learn to love less familiar sustainable species, particularly the oil rich pelagic species.

And the way of communicating with consumers is changing every day. New media has taken over this space with social forums such as Facebook, Twitter and blogging becoming people's preferred way of communicating. Crucially these are also the arenas that people go to for advice. They are far more likely to be swayed by what their trusted peers or friends are saying online than by government advice about how eating fish is good for their health. We now have to tap in to this communication stream, listen to consumers concerns and questions about seafood and respond to them in an engaging way via these new channels.

And that is exactly what we are doing in the UK – this very week in fact. We are launching a campaign called "Fish is the Dish" which we intend to build into a virtual community.

We will use Facebook, Twitter and a group of mummy-bloggers to provide hints and tips. Not detailed, complicated recipes but hints and tips for mums by mums. Our research shows that parents are desperately keen to ensure their children eat seafood – they know the benefits. But so many of them don't know where to start. They don't know how to do it. Many are scared of seafood. They are scared to use shellfish because of allergies, they are scared to use whitefish because they think there's no cod left, and in times of economic pressure, they are scared to spend money trying something new in case no-one eats it.

What we have learnt is that these online communities – where information is shared peer to peer – are incredibly powerful. This is modern marketing in action. We think it's exciting and we hope you agree.

But how do we balance getting people to eat more seafood with maintaining stocks that in some cases are already in trouble? World stocks of wild seafood species are under increasing pressure. Globally, the total consumption of fish has increased, doubling from 45m tonnes to 90m tonnes between 1973 and 1997. Consumption is expected to continue increasing because there are more and more of us in the world even though individual consumption is flat or falling.

World population is expanding and is expected to increase to 7.6 billion by 2020 and 9 billion by 2050. This brings us to the issue of food security – a growing global concern.

Seafood is an essential protein and makes a vital contribution to food security in the UK and across the world. It is therefore important for the UK and other countries to safeguard their seafood industries that have provided nutrition, employment and economic activity for centuries.

We must ensure that wild fish stocks are managed to provide for future demand and it is our view at Seafish that fishers must be part of the solution for a sustainable future.

We also believe that science and not politics must play a much bigger role in the sustainability game. The accuracy and relevance of scientific data needs to improve along with the way that it's interpreted and used. Each fishing boat is a potential platform for gathering data and the fleet could make a huge contribution to our science base and gaining a better understanding in a time of environmental change.

Seafish is working with the UK catching sector on new methods of data gathering that can be carried out with minimal disruption to fishing activity but which still provides meaningful and accurate scientific data.

One of the final thoughts I would like to leave with you is about safety. Not food safety but the safety of our people

We all know that commercial fishing is the most dangerous occupation in the world. The FAO estimates that over 24,000 fishers die every year. In the UK alone over the last ten years we have lost on average one fisher every month. I believe that this is too high a price to pay for supplying the country with healthy food. And it is especially galling when the fishers themselves are then blamed for the demise of the oceans and painted as the villains of the sustainability piece.

I would argue that safety is the biggest global problem facing the modern seafood industry and it is one that we must work together to solve. Ethical sourcing and corporate social responsibility must encompass the safety of fishers. Ratification of the ILO Work in Fishing Convention 2007 may ensure that fishers have decent conditions of work on board fishing vessels, but we can and must do more. Seafish has recently commissioned a research project to examine the safety record of North Atlantic fishing nations and identify the most effective measures that have improved safety. Whether it be encouraging fishers to wear personal flotation devices on deck or undertake regular refresher training, we can all find ways of helping to improve fishers' safety.

Which is the greater issue facing us— sustainability or this unacceptable cost in human life? I'll leave you to ponder that sobering thought.

'Interesting times' as we know are challenging times. We at Seafish are proud to have helped all sectors of our industry, rise to those challenges and make their contribution to change. The world is still far from perfect, there's plenty more to do, but the UK industry, from our fishers to our retailers and restaurateurs, and all stages in between, is now a world leader. We've defined best practice and we've demonstrated, in many instances, how to deliver that standard. We lead the world in MSC-certified fisheries; our fishers are recognised in Europe for their innovative approaches to conservation and their contribution to improved science; and our supply chains work to some of the highest sustainability standards in the world.

I am optimistic, Yes, we still have much to do, but we have much to be proud of and much more that we can contribute to the improvement of global fisheries, and I'm expecting to hear a lot more success stories as our industry itself takes on more and more responsibility for the stewardship of our precious marine environment.

Thank you for listening, I hope that I have provoked some thoughts and I will be pleased to engage in discussion with you later.

I wish you every success with the next 2 days of the congress and the visits later, and hope that we might welcome you to Grimsby in 4 years time.

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