In the Belly of the Big Green Beast
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When I was invited to be a participant in a panel discussion on fisheries at the Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) annual meeting in Miami Beach in October, I had serious misgivings. Those misgivings mostly focused on what the likely reception of a representative of commercial fishing and fishermen would be by a roomful of granola munching, Birkenstock wearing, tie-died zealots who either never got their heads out of the 60s or were frustrated because they missed them completely. Up front I have to admit how off-target I was. There was very little tie-die in evidence.

Still operating under the naive belief that the people who arranged conferences for professions like journalism were as much committed to objectivity as I used to assume scientists were, I certainly wasn't concerned about being a participant in a hatchet job, particularly with being on the wrong side of the hatchet.

I thought "the organizers are professional journalists and therefore committed to balance," so I accepted.

So what had I bought into? As an augury, I had been listed in the program posted on the SEJ website as a commercial fisherman. I was asked to provide a short biography, which I did. Needless to say, I did not claim in it that I was or had ever been a commercial fishermen, primarily because I'm not and have never been one. The biog was linked to my name on the website, but apparently no one responsible for organizing the SEJ conference or the session in it that I was to participate in thought it was particularly important to check on the accuracy or the consistency of their information. So I remained a commercial fisherman on the program page and what I really was on the page linked to it.

Jeff Burnside from NBC Miami was the co-chairman of the conference. Mr. Burnside has taught Aldo Leopold Leadership Program fellows (see the following paragraph) for 10 years. This is a program started by my co-panelist Jane Lubchenco that is designed to provide *"academic researchers with the skills and connections needed to be effective leaders and communicators."* Mr. Burnside has also served on the Advisory Council for the Pew Institute for Ocean Science.

The conference was hosted by the University of Miami, which has received over $13 million dollars from the Pew Charitable Trusts for fisheries and fisheries-related research.

The first panel discussion on Friday, **Communicating Science: Reporters Go Head to Head with Top Ocean Scientists**, was moderated by Nancy Baron. Ms. Baron is the Ocean Science Outreach Director for the Communication Partnership for Science and the Sea (COMPASS - $3.5 million from the Pew Charitable Trusts, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation). She is also the lead communications trainer for the Aldo Leopold Leadership Program (funded in part by a $32.5 million grant from Packard). Her book was published by Pew/Moore grantee Island Press (*Escape from the Ivory Tower: A Guide to Making Your Science Matter*), which also published my co-panelist Daniel Pauly's book, *5 Easy Pieces: the impact of fisheries on marine ecosystems.*

The scientists on this panel were:

- Dee Boersma - Faculty of University of Washington, She is a Pew Marine Conservation Fellow.
- Rebecca Goldburg - Director, Ocean Science Division, Pew Environment Group.

- Jane Lubchenco - As below.
- Marcia McNutt, Director of the U.S. Geological Survey, former president and chief executive officer of the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute (funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation).

Need I mention that Ms. Baron's book deals, as does COMPASS and the Aldo Leopold program, with showing researchers how to manipulate - or perhaps "handle" is a more gentle term - the media, politicians and policy makers?

When I checked in with the moderator of the panel I was on, environmental reporter Juliet Eilperin of the Washington Post, I had to explain to her that I wasn't and had never been a fisherman. Apparently she had failed to familiarize herself with any of the particulars of at least one of her panelists. A quick glance at the biography I had submitted, which was only a mouse click away, would have told her all she needed to know about me. I've organized a number of conferences and workshops in the past, and from that perspective I found her failure to do this to be somewhat puzzling.

And then to the panel discussion itself. First off, it was titled **"Fish Fight,"** and I and my two fishing colleagues were to sit on one side of the moderator, Ms. Eilperin, and the three scientists were to sit on her other. Jerry Springer, here we come?

The lineup to Ms. Eilperin's right:

- Steven Gaines - Organizations and institutions he has been or is associated with have received well over $30 million from the Pew Charitable Trusts, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation. He is a Pew Marine Conservation Fellow and is a Managing Principal of COMPASS.
- Daniel Pauly - Organizations and institutions he has been or is associated with have received over $17 million from the Pew Charitable Trusts. He is a Science Advisor for COMPASS.
- Jane Lubchenco - Organizations and institutions she has been associated with have received over tens of millions of dollars from the Pew Charitable Trusts, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. These include COMPASS and the Aldo Leopold Leadership Program. She is a Pew Marine Conservation Fellow and was a Board Member of the Monterey Bay Research Institute (funded by Packard).

And then there is Ms. Eilperin herself, who while not in the Gaines/Pauly/Lubchenco/Baron tier of "connectedness" to the Pew/Packard/Moore/Walton multi-million dollar gravy train, has managed a few dribs and drabs herself. She writes in the acknowledgements section of her recently published book on sharks *"more than any other single group, the Pew Marine Fellows have helped educate me about the ocean.... I would like to single out* (among others) *Jane Lubchenco, Daniel Pauly... Nancy Baron deserves the credit for introducing me to these scientists."* Ms. Eilperin also acknowledges the American Littoral Society as one of the two sources of "travel grants" for the book. The American Littoral Society has received almost $6 million from the Pew Charitable Trusts. Ms. Eilperin has also been a participant in COMPASS media/scientist confabs.

As far as the discussion and the accompanying Q&A session was concerned, Ms. Eilperin did a good job of moderating. All six panelists were give about equal time and equal treatment.

Not too surprisingly, I took exception to some of the comments made, particularly by the scientists on the panel.

Panel member Jim Donofrio (whose remarks I took no exception to), the Executive Director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance, was voicing the RFA's objections to NOAA/NMFS forcing catch shares management on fisheries. This is an objection that is shared by many other recreational, party/charter and commercial fishermen and organizations.

Ms. Lubchenco responded that NOAA/NMFS doesn't implement catch shares programs, the regional fisheries management councils do. While this might be the way it works "on paper," it's not the way it actually works in the real world. As Jim brought out, if you aren't a strong supporter of catch shares, your chances of getting appointed or reappointed to a regional management council seat are remote at best. Additionally, NOAA/NMFS is and has been offering substantial monetary incentives to regional councils to invest in catch shares management. While the NOAA/NMFS push for catch shares might not be a "forcing" de jure, de facto it surely is. (For more on this issue, see **Who needs research? We're going to have catch shares** at http://www.fishnet-usa.com/All Stolpe Columns.htm#Catch shares choo choo and **Is this the future of fishing**? at http://www.fishnet-usa.com/All Stolpe Columns.htm#Future of fishing).

Ms. Lubchenco also stated that catch shares end "the race to fish," a situation also called "derby fishing" in which the annual harvest in a particular fishery is taken in a minimum amount of time, leading to potentially dangerous conditions for the fishermen and less than optimal marketing opportunities for the fish. While it's true that catch shares tend to eliminate such derby fisheries, so do other management mechanisms that are far less disruptive to the fisheries. It seemed that Ms. Lubchenco was strongly implying that the only way to avoid derbies was with catch shares. This is far from the truth.

Finally, in "explaining" catch shares, she used the trivial example of children and slurpees, likening traditionally managed fisheries to two children fighting over a single slurpee and catch shares management as two children, each with his or her own slurpee. While I certainly hope it isn't the case, perhaps Ms. Lubchenco can most easily grasp fisheries management when it's reduced to such an absurdly simplistic level. If that's the case, then I guess it's worth me writing that there are fisheries management systems in which the fishermen - her "children" - can successfully, peacefully and equitably share the fish - her "slurpee." In fact, the vast majority of the U.S. fisheries are currently being successfully managed without any fisheries equivalent of the slurpee brain freeze induced by her catch-shares revolution.

(And I'll reiterate here that I'm neither for nor against catch shares in particular fisheries if, as Congress intended, the participants in that fishery give their informed assent to catch shares management by a convincing majority. What I oppose is the arbitrary imposition of catch shares on fisheries by the bureaucratic sleight of hand, administrative strong arm tactics or intellectually repugnant PR techniques that are presently being employed by NOAA/NMFS and a small handful of ENGOs to do so.)

As an example of successful cooperative research, I mentioned an ongoing program that I have been involved in with an industry group, the Monkfish Defense Fund, and NOAA/NMFS and academic researchers. Dr. Pauly followed this up - and also derailed what could have been a significant discussion on the current "catch shares revolution" mandated changes to the NOAA/NMFS research budget - with his "ugly fish" theory of commercial fishing. His theory, if I can grasp its complexities, is that fishermen have reduced the abundance of all of the "not ugly" fish in the seas to such an extent that they're now being forced to catch the remainder - which are ugly. To whit, monkfish are one of his "ugly fish" that are being caught because, as a result of too much fishing, there are no longer enough pretty (beautiful? attractive? comely? buff?) fish to be caught.

Perhaps that actually is the case in Dr. Pauly's home waters of the Pacific Northwest. Perhaps all of the finny denizens of the deep out there are either gone due to rapacious fishing or are preternaturally ugly. However, that isn't nor has it been the case with monkfish - which I will freely admit are of an appearance that even a mother monkfish might have trouble loving.

Monkfish have long been a bycatch species in the Northeastern/Mid-Atlantic sea scallop fishery. They were a prized component of the "shack," that part of the catch that rather than being sold was given to the crew. Then in 1979 the first celebrity chef, Julia Child, featured a quite large - and Dr. Pauly got at least one point right - quite ugly monkfish on a segment of her classic cooking show "Julia Child and Company (http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/read/popdy/monkfish/). At least outside the halls of the University of British Columbia, it's generally agreed that its TV debut costarring with Julia Child and some helpful "tastes like lobster" word-of-mouth marketing is what got the monkfish culinary ball rolling in the U.S., not anything that

was going on in other fisheries. And as far as I've been able to discover, monkfish (*lotte* in French, a requirement for an authentic *Bouillabaisse*) has been a staple in Mediterranean and Asian cuisine for as long as there have been fishermen plying coastal waters, and long before "overfishing" was turned into an eco-disaster by seemingly unlimited dollars from billion dollar foundations.

And then we have sea cucumbers (*bêche-de-mer* in French, *trepang* in Indonesian). While it's difficult to conjure up a less appealing looking critter, they have been a popular seafood product in Asian and Mediterranean countries since way before Dr. Pauly's amusing but somewhat less than compelling theory. Eels? Wolffish? Oysters? Conchs? Palolol worms? Geoducks? For centuries and across all of the cultures with any access to the seas, we've been eating and enjoying finfish and shellfish that it's hard to imagine would meet anyone's conception of attractiveness - except, of course, for Dr. Pauly.

But one has to give credit where credit is due, and coming up with something as entertaining as an "ugly fish" index to prove a questionable theory, even if it sounds about as unscientific as a prominent scientist can make it sound, should be recognized as such. It's ideal "arm-chair" science for all of those researchers out there that have such an aversion to actually getting on boats and going offshore. All that you need is an active imagination, a fish market and a calibrated ugly meter. The environmental journalists in attendance at the SEJ conference seemed most appreciative of this grossly unscientific theory.

As far as consistency is concerned, at least Dr. Pauly's "ugly fish" theory is right in line with his controversial "Fishing Down the Food Web" concept, another of his constructs developed to demonstrate the fishing-induced decline in the health of the world's ocean's ecosystems (see http://blog.nature.org/2011/03/mean-trophic-level-trevor-branch-daniel-pauly-fish-catch-fisheries/).

As we saw in Miami, hitching fish beauty to overfishing definitely makes a riveting story for those who have little or no understanding of fish, fishing or objective science. Is it going to sell in any market where the readers have anything approaching a meaningful grasp of our commercial fisheries and how they've developed? I doubt it.

Finally, we had Steven Gaines once again flogging the idea that there were nowhere nearly enough Marine Protected Areas (MPAs - where, not so incidentally, the primary thing that anything is protected from is fishing) by comparing the percentage of the total area of the oceans composed of MPAs to the percentage of similarly protected areas on land - ranging from ten to fifteen percent, if I'm not mistaken.

Like Dr. Pauly's ugly fish index and Ms. Lubchenco's catch shares omissions and slurpees simile, this probably makes sense to the uninitiated. To most of the rest of us, not so much.

First off, fish aren't evenly distributed over the ocean bottom. In fact, most species are generally concentrated in areas where their food is concentrated, where the composition and the configuration of the bottom, the existence of currents and other physical factors are optimal for them. Hence, when a knowledgeable fisherman leaves port at the start of a trip, he doesn't just run in a random direction for a random time, set his gear, catch a bunch of fish and then return to port. In fact, he or she is going to go to a particular spot which is determined by the target species, the presence or absence of other species (a horde of spiny dogfish can easily destroy a net full of fish, and the net itself, and turn what should have been a money trip into a broker), the season, the tide, the wind, the weather and a host of other factors, and based on knowledge gained in a lifetime on the water and handed down by generations of fishermen who worked those waters before.

While I've never seen any serious research on the subject, conversations I've had with fishermen and my own observations lead me to believe that 90% of the fish are caught on 10% of the bottom.

Now here's the question of the day. If MPAs - in actuality no fishing zones - are going to be established, where will they go? The logical answer seems to be "where the fish are," so if you turn 5% of our coastal waters into MPAs, you're closing off half of the fishing grounds. Dr. Gaines' Pew Marine Fellowship was "*to help*

implement California's Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA)." Implementation of the MLPA is resulting in the establishment of a series of no fishing zones from one end of California's coastline to the other as well as in a whole lot of misplaced fishermen. The lobbying campaign to pass the MLPA was, according to the Laguna Independent, funded with $20 million from a handful of foundations, including $8.2 million from Packard, $7.4 million from Moore and $3 million from the Marislaw Foundation (founded by Getty Oil heiress Anne Getty Earhart).

Dr. Gaines is Jane Lubchenco's brother in law.

The pro-MPA argument seems to be that all the fish that are protected from fishing will be reproducing so bountifully that fish will be spilling out of the MPAs to be caught by all of the commercial and recreational fishermen now excluded from their traditional fishing grounds. This is another of those theories that is pretty far from accepted science. Sort of like catch shares being a requirement of sustainable fisheries, fishing down the food web, and they've caught all the attractive fish so now they're catching all the ugly ones.

But who needs accepted science when you've got tens of millions of foundation dollars and the Society of Environmental Journalists in your pocket?

Was I disappointed by the SEJ conference? Definitely not. It lived down to my expectations and then some. It provided a convincing demonstration of how, with the right backing and infrastructure, a handful of researchers can present what is nothing more than an extreme view of what is going on in the oceans and why and how it can be "fixed," and how this can be made to look mainstream. As I'll be discussing on my next installment on the SEJ conference, it also demonstrates how the new journalism - tweets and blogs and such - is being used to further "manage" public perceptions in an effort to continue influencing domestic fishing policies.

Will I be participating next year? Somehow I doubt that I'll be invited back. I also doubt that anyone else will be invited who doesn't share the Pew/Packard/Moore/Walton Foundations' overly pessimistic view of the impacts of fishing on the health of our oceans - and who wasn't a continuing part of their multi-million dollar program to convince anyone who will listen that that's the common view of the scientific establishment.

And why would a society of professional journalists be interested in hearing both sides of any story?

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If you are interested in several other examples of how extreme and overly simplistic views can be made to appear mainstream by getting the right people together, I'd strongly suggest that you look at President Obama's effort to set his Administration's "ocean priorities" (at http://www.fishtruth.net/ObamaPriorities.htm, and follow to the linked table) as well as an reference analysis of a report of the Pew Oceans Commission report that I did after it was released (http://www.fishingnj.org/netusa23.htm). The Pew Oceans Commission - and the people who were on it and the "analyses" that informed it - did have and continue to have a strong influence on our national ocean policies.