TRIP REPORT

Fourth World Fisheries Congress

May 2 - 6, 2004
Vancouver, BC Canada

Alex McCallum
World Fisheries Trust

World Fisheries Congress, Vancouver
May 2 - 6, 2004

Wednesday, May 5
Pacific Ballroom, Hotel Vancouver
Forum on the Sustainable Seafood Movement

14:00 - Panel 3: Business/Environment Partnerships

First Lecture:
Dierk Peters, Unilever Corporation
(missed)

Second Lecture:
Heather Tausig, New England Aquarium

Ms. Tausig described a current partnership between the New England Aquarium, based in Boston, MA and Ahold USA, a major supermarket company based in the Netherlands. The partnership is called the "Eco-Sound Project". Ahold USA manages six food store chains: Peapod, BiLo, Stop n'Shop, Giant, Tops, and Bruno's Supermarkets Inc.

- The mutual objective of the Eco-Sound Project is to increase the "sustainability and traceability" of seafood sold by Ahold USA subsidiaries.
- The unique objective of Ahold USA is to anticipate customer concerns around seafood acquisition and be able to respond to those concerns.
- The New England Aquarium's unique objective is to influence a large seafood buyer towards sustainability.

The Eco-Sound Sourcing Strategy differs for wild and cultured seafood:
Wild Harvest

- evaluated on a resource-by-resource basis
- i.e. New England Aquarium identifies the health of the resource and directs buying by Ahold USA accordingly

Aquaculture harvest

- evaluated on a customer-by-customer basis
- i.e. New England Aquarium evaluates practices of each aquaculture operation; goal is to create industry standards

Slides presented listing Wild Stock Report Criteria and Aquaculture Report Criteria

In future, New England Aquarium hopes to progress from directing Ahold USA to buy only from boats that use gear modification to decrease by-catch, to encouraging Ahold USA to give financial support (sponsorship) to boats that would like to switch gear.

Some examples of campaigns involving wild seafood stocks:

Snow Crab
- significant decrease in Bering Sea stock
- E. coast of Canada stock is stable
- therefor, Ahold USA to buy from New Brunswick and Newfoundland

Chilean Sea Bass
- all stocks significantly threatened
- therefor, Ahold USA will not advertise, promote, or display this fish
- store employees will be provided with education on why this fish is not sold by Ahold USA, and be able to offer alternatives to customers

Some examples of campaigns involving cultured seafood stocks:
Catfish
- no issues, acceptable product to market and sell

Salmon
- consumer demand cannot be met by wild stocks
- New England Aquarium promoting development of EurepGap aquaculture

Eco Sound Project Future
- Expand research
- Build formal accountability
- Connect vendors to research (educate fishmongers)

In this case, the New England Aquarium is contracted by Ahold to consult them on the negative factors of certain fisheries. As such, I had the impression that they are more likely to be influenced by the company holding the "purse strings" than in the next example.

Third Lecture:
"Swimming with Sharks" by Gwen Ruta, Environmental Defense

The first thing Ms. Ruta said is that Environmental Defense (ED) receives no corporate funding. They are funded by benefactors, foundations and members only. She described later in her talk why this is an important component of their operation.

As an introduction, Ms. Ruta described Environmental Defense's mandate of combining science, economics and law to solve urgent environmental problems.

Environmental Defense's Corporate Partnership Program
Success depends on -

Results: to environment and business
Commitment: must secure senior management buy-in early, project will not be effective if only the head of corporate sustainability, for example, within the corporation is involved
Trust: written agreements are signed before a project starts; ED agrees not to divulge sensitive financial or other information, company agrees to follow through on project
Credibility: ED independently funded

Accountability: results of project made public
Replicability: create new industry standards (i.e. ED makes it clear from beginning that once project successfully completed, ED will be approaching competitors to achieve same success)

Some examples of successes claimed by Environmental Defense are:

- The reduction of solid waste at McDonalds fast food chains by eliminating the styrofoam clamshell packaging for hamburgers
- The elimination of white paper towel products by McDonalds fast food restaurants, thereby reducing the use of bleach and chemicals
- Launch by FedEx in California of a fleet of diesel/electric hybrid trucks for delivering packages without compromising reputation for service. Photo of governor of California (Arnold Schwarzeneger) with FedEx execs. Gwen quoted Mr. Schwarzeneger, "Today, I am a happy governor." Highlight of her career.
- Citigroup switched from virgin paper to recycled content paper, and decreased overall paper use by 12%; goal is to create good forestry practices through corporate purchasing policy
- McDonalds (again), eliminated use of antibiotics as growth promoters in meat production, and decreased overall antibiotic use. McDonalds describes the press this campaign received as the greatest single marketing program ever done (no cost to McDonalds)

Can it work for seafood? Gwen tactfully commented that she doesn't think American consumers are as "enlightened" to the issues around seafood as they are of other environmental concerns.

Why Partner on Seafood?

Market Clout - large buyers can pressure suppliers
Relationships - businesses already working with suppliers, may be more effective to work within these existing relationships than if Environmental Defense were to attempt to contact suppliers directly, for example
Timing - get ahead of the curve, set trends rather than react to bad press
Expertise - in place already

Business Benefits

- Differentiate product (ours better/different)
- Risk Management (avoid protestors picketing stores, extremely bad publicity)
  * Gwen said this is the strongest motivating factor for companies to undertake change
- Strengthen reputation as responsible corporate citizen
- Improve relations

Bottom line benefits exist only in certain cases. Usually, businesses can realize some savings, or spend the same amount. It is important that the program does not cost the company more money. If so, they would have to pass costs on to customers, and attempt to capture a "green market". Most businesses are not interested in this type of image shift or marketing strategy.

(Strong) Success Factors

- Well documented problem
- Very large purchasers

- Consolidated suppliers for certain products (ex. farmed salmon dominated by a few large suppliers)

(Weak) Success Factors

- Complicated supply chain (lots of middle-people)
- Consumer demand low as yet (can change suddenly, in response to an event or media coverage)
- Information sources limited (this point described in further detail below)

From a corporate point of view, information sources are limited. When Gwen surveyed people selling seafood in supermarkets about how they learn about issues in harvest/supply, most responded that they ask the person who delivers the fish to the store. To learn about issues, the people in charge of selling seafood need to have access to better information from a variety of sources and perspectives so that they can make informed decisions.

Q. and A. period

Q. Unidentified member of audience.
Science follows fisheries, so how good are science-based decisions of stock health?

A. Heather Tausig, New England Aquarium
Some stocks are known to be better able to withstand pressure from humans (ex. fishing) because they are fast-growing, mature early, and reproduce often. Other species inhabit deep-sea areas, are slow growing and have low fecundity. It is hoped that with vigilant monitoring, the first type can withstand the fisheries management scheme put in place by humans.

Q. Wally Ferrerra, of Seattle, in pollock business, both research and selling.
Looking at the different wallet-cards that are being distributed at the conference, one lists pollock as "red" (don't eat), another says pollock is "yellow" (be cautious when purchasing), and a third card doesn't mention pollock at all. Meanwhile, his product is in the process of being certified and should get green light next week. If he's confused, what are consumers thinking?

A. Dierk Peteres, Unilever Corporation
NGO's contributions are valuable, but they need to communicate better with the people actually doing the fishing. In this case, the pollock fishery in Alaska is fine, but that may not be true elsewhere.
A. Gwen Ruta, Environmental Defense
In addition, the confusion can result from oversimplification of the information. It would be better to educate the store buyer than the person pushing the shopping cart.

Panel 4: Aquaculture - Threat or Solution?

First Lecture:
Shellfish Aquaculture by Sandra Shumway, U of Connecticut

Benefits:

- Demands clean water

- Vacuum cleaners of sea
- Decrease sediment load of excess nutrients
- Rafts provide protection for larval and juvenile fish and inverts
- Shellfish aquaculture provides jobs, esp. in otherwise depressed areas
  Ex. Japan subsidized scallop farm in Tasmania, has since pulled out

Issues:

- Carrying capacity (i.e. number of units/water body)
- Depuration
- Harvesting techniques
- Disease interactions
- Multi-use conflicts
  (however, multi-use is possible, showed picture of Penn Bay Shellfish in Washington, adjacent to marina)

"Aquaculture without Frontiers" michael_new@compuserve.com

Second Lecture:
John Volpe, University of Alberta Salmon Aquaculture

Introduction:

- Many ecological issues with finfish aquaculture of Atlantic salmon
- Potential to move offshore
- US salmon markets targeted by BC NGOs

Science is in its infancy on this topic.

Escapees

- showed picture of bear-killed Atlantic salmon, proof that escaped adults are colonizing streams, may be competing with native salmon
- Issue of escapes is contentious, varied opinions
- # of escapes recorded based on Atlantic Salmon Watch program (people voluntarily phone 1-800 number if Atlantic salmon caught/seen. Being voluntary, there is no "ground truthing".
- Numbers seem to reflect fishing effort because they fluctuate wildly.
- By comparison, Alexandra Morton surveyed fisherman via VHF radio in the Broughton archipelago after a fishing opening followed by a major escape. This active survey recorded 10 826 Atlantic salmon in 15 days. The DFO passive survey (1-800 number) records on average 7833 Atlantic salmon /year.
- John Volpe has documented three populations of feral salmon in different rivers on Vancouver Island.

Sea Lice

- Salmon farms are sea lice incubators. Other places in the world (ex. Europe) have experience with this phenomenon, but BC unwilling to learn from experience. In some ways, this is positive because we have unique ecosystem, 5 species of native salmonids. Need to ask, how are each affected?

- Research has shown louse footprint 15-56 km away. (Kroesk et.al., in review)
- Spatial distribution of farms - highly concentrated, exacerbates problem
- Possible solution to move them offshore, but then problems just out of sight, not solved.

Economic Impact of farming Atlantic salmon

- value of fish on market drops because of glut of farmed fish, supply is not capped by natural phenomenon (Naylor et.al., 2003)
- the result is a negative impact on communities dependant on wild stocks; this issue is not often raised, when economics are discussed salmon farms are promoted as economic boon
- economics of aquaculture need to be put into context

Canadian NGO's making US markets aware of negative impacts

- C.A.R. Coalition for Aquaculture Reform, Farmed and Dangerous Campaign
- Showed example of Oct 31, 2002 New York Times ad, picture of Atlantic salmon and text about synthetic colourants that are added to salmon food pellets to dye flesh pink, "Bon Apetit"

Third Lecture

Barbara Knuth, Cornell University

Reading from her article in Science, v.303:226-229 "Contaminants in Seafood"

(did not attend rest of forum)