

## The Conch-PeerLearningNetwork II FINAL.mp3

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:00:05] Welcome to The Conch Podcast. I'm your host, Julie Kuchepatov. We're trying something a little different than our usual one on one interviews. In these two episodes, I am joined in conversation with my peers from other organizations who participate in a Peer Learning Network. The PLN was founded in 2018 with the support of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation to bring together the communications professionals of small like-minded organizations where we can bounce ideas off of each other, think through communication strategies, and increase our impact through collective communication efforts. These two podcasts represent our shared commitment to the ocean and are a result of this close collaboration. Thanks to my peers for joining me in conversation on this special edition of The Conch podcast. So, what's your name and your organization? And what do you do?

**Laura Miller** [00:00:54] Hi, so I'm Laura Miller, I'm the communications manager at the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions. There I run all things comms, all things community engagement as we are a collective action organization. So, we're working with tons of folks all around the world that are working to make the production and trade and consumption of seafood more responsible, both environmentally and socially. We do a lot of work with a group of folks that we're working with, so that's kind of my area of expertise. Basically, the idea here at the Alliance is we're working to foster a learning community that is based in respect for one another and that truly desires to work together towards shared goals. Folks that really have this belief that we can go further if we're working together. Our whole thing is we gather the community together. We have tough conversations with the goal of better understanding different viewpoints so that we can come together, work towards agreement on the things that actually really matter. And then from there we can create guidance and recommendations for the seafood movement just to help make sure that we're all moving in the same direction together.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:02:11] How many members do you have at the Alliance?

**Laura Miller** [00:02:14] We're like pushing 140 now, which is a huge change. For many years we had a smaller group. We were hovering around 40 a couple of years ago, and then over the last couple of years, we've more than tripled that number. So pretty exciting.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:02:29] Did you triple the number because you opened the membership up to a different sector group or international or what was the change?

**Laura Miller** [00:02:37] Mhm Yeah. So along with the new strategy at the top of 2020, part of that strategy was to broaden the participation of groups that were members in the Alliance. So, the idea there was just based on a recognition that for a huge number of years, a lot of the work going on in this movement was sort of revolving around sort of a lot of the same suspects. And as we got along here into the work at that point, about ten years in as an organization, we're really beginning to recognize that our work is limited. Our success, our ability to have impact is limited by the voices that we have in the room and at the table. So, at the top of 2020, we made this shift to really try and broaden the group of folks that we were bringing to the table. So, we're hearing more perspectives and talking to more people. So, what you see now, if you look at our membership base, is that the list is a lot longer, but it's a lot more diverse and varied, which makes it you know, if you know that we're we're working toward alignment and having people on the same page that makes that work, like, immensely more challenging. But we also think it's just the only way forward really, is to be including a more diverse swath of voices.

**Cristina Callegari** [00:04:03] My name is Christina Callegari. I wear a couple of hats. I work for an environmental nonprofit based in Nova Scotia, Canada, called the Ecology Action Center. I'm the senior coordinator on the marine team, and I help to lead our fisheries and seafood sustainability programs. I'm also a member of the SeaChoice Team, which is a seafood sustainability partnership made up of three Canadian NGOs: the Ecology Action Center, the David Suzuki Foundation, and Living Ocean Society. SeaChoice is a really unique partnership that works to improve the entire seafood supply chain. We have roots in Canada, but our impact spreads globally through our work, and we do things like advise on fisheries management that's led by the expertise that we have from the three organizations. We work to improve supply chain transparency and traceability. We assess eco-certifications and hold them accountable and to the high standard that we would like to see them hold. And we also push for improvement for retailers and brands, and we do that through our platform called Seafood Progress. This is where we assess their seafood sustainability commitments, and we publish our results on our website and also provide yearly recommendations for continual improvement. In my position, specifically at SeaChoice, I lead our traceability and labeling campaign primarily, but I also manage our social media and communications and provide general support to the team.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:05:39] So you're based in Toronto?

**Cristina Callegari** [00:05:41] I am, yes, but our organizations span from coast to coast.

**Corbett Nash** [00:05:47] My name is Corbett Nash, and I work with the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch Program, and I'm their outreach manager.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:05:55] And what does the Seafood Watch program at Monterey Bay Aquarium do?

**Corbett Nash** [00:06:00] Well, I guess almost about 25 years ago now, the aquarium noticed that there was an interest from consumers, from patrons that go to the aquarium in sustainable seafood and how they can find sustainable seafood. And so, they started off with a little tent cards on tables at an event that talked about where people could get certain sustainable fish and seafood. And they were so popular that they, the aquarium, decided to invest in a much deeper and broader effort to understand sustainability in the seafood industry and sort of take it to the next steps. So, they decided to start gathering scientists. And it's grown and grown and grown from just an idea to a place where we're fundamentally assessing fisheries and aquaculture or fish farms or seafood farms across the world based on what the U.S. market consumes. And what we do is we assess these fisheries and aquaculture operations against our standards, which are very rigorous scientific standards and look at you know the policies in place. Everything from the feed to stock status to bycatch, things like that. We sort of run it through our standards mill. Look at these individual, usually regional fisheries and aquaculture operations, and we assess them based on their environmental sustainability performance. And we use those assessments to make recommendations which we provide to consumers and businesses about whether or not a particular seafood is sustainable in our view, or if there are issues or if it's something that we suggest consumers and businesses avoid. That's the backbone of our program, but it really is much more than that. We also work in social responsibility and we're looking at lots of other issues in the seafood world.

**Jenny Barker** [00:07:57] My name is Jenny Barker, and I work for an organization called FishWise, and I just assumed leadership of the organization and we work at the intersection of industry and governance and collaboration with NGOs to try and create solutions for sustainable seafood, looking at it more holistically so making sure we're focused on not just legality and the sort of economic side of things and the environmental side of things for the particular really focusing on the people who are impacted in supply chains as well.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:08:36] So you said you just assumed leadership of the organization. How long have you been in this role?

**Jenny Barker** [00:08:41] I started as executive director in February of 2023 at the end of the month, actually.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:08:48] Wow, congratulations. So, Boston, as we know, Boston Seafood Show takes place mid-March. So you were very new to the role when Boston was going on. Yeah?

**Jenny Barker** [00:08:57] I was. I was thrust back into the belly of the beast with a different role. So, I was already, prior to accepting the position, planning to support our team and facilitating a retailer workshop. And then in addition to that, that was just before the start of Boston. And then, you know, was on the floor doing, you know, ten meetings a day or whatever you do. We counted our team, did 90 meetings while we were there. So, lots of crazy work. But it was really exciting actually. I was surprisingly invigorated and then tired after the event.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:09:32] Of course. Well, congratulations on your new role and I look forward to seeing how you steer the organization into the future. So, are you in Santa Cruz?

**Jenny Barker** [00:09:42] I am not. I'm actually based in the Washington, D.C. area, in a little place on the Chesapeake Bay called North Beach, Maryland. But that's about 45 minutes outside of D.C.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:09:55] Gotcha. So, I imagine, you know, living in Maryland and, you know, there's a lot of seafood out there. I'm curious if you could share with us a personal favorite seafood memory, either from your childhood or it could be yesterday. I don't know. What would you like to share with us?

**Jenny Barker** [00:10:11] Yeah, it's a great point. I actually grew up in the Midwest, so my fish memories from childhood are limited to more fresh fish sources. And part of what I love now, being here in Maryland, I mean, we can go down to a local shop and get all of our own oysters fresh off the truck. We shuck them ourselves now. We've done a few crab boils, and it's awesome because I didn't have it growing up. And now we have this great food culture for my children to sort of get to experience, which I'm really excited about. It's one of the things I love about being in Maryland the most, so we were hacking away on some crabs on Sunday, frankly, and going to town. So it's something we really love to do.

**Cristina Callegari** [00:10:58] Yeah, that's a great question. I think many of my fond memories are actually when I've had the opportunity to visit and learn from the producers and harvesters. So, I did spend about five years in Nova Scotia, and I had some pretty cool opportunities to go visit. So, one of them was when I worked at a fishmonger, we had

the chance to visit an oyster farm, and I'm already a huge fan of oysters, but it was just so cool to see the whole process from beginning to end. We got to see the really tiny baby oysters that are like smaller than your fingernail and see how they get put into the water, how they're grown, and then see the harvesting process all the way up to, you know, packaging and processing. And so that was a really cool memory. I also had the opportunity. I guess this is another memory, but I also had the opportunity to visit a weir, which, if you don't know, it's a very rare fishing method that only a few fishers use today. It's actually a long net that's set up vertically and it's held up by these wooden poles. It's kind of like semi-circle shaped, and it uses the power of the really incredible tides that we have in Nova Scotia to trap species as the tide comes in. And then once the tide falls out, fishers will come twice a day and sort the fish and be able to safely release any unwanted fish through this little pond that they create. And again, it was just such a cool experience to see this method of fishing, to see the diversity of species that come through the tide. There is everything from like mackerel to shad, flounders, squid. Sometimes they even catch Atlantic sturgeon, which is really cool. And I think for me, what makes these memories so special is just having that connection to the place and to the food that you're eating and seeing the care that these producers put into the food has always been something that's really inspired me, and I think has helped with other people having appreciation for the resource, which I think is really important for sustainability overall.

**Laura Miller** [00:13:05] Yeah, I was thinking about this, and I've been really privileged to have done quite a bit of traveling and all of these different, like, sweet little moments sort of popped up for me kind of over the years and something that came up for me as I was reflecting on this was the memories, I think is most of the time more about like the people that are there in that moment than what was the tasty delicious bite that was in my mouth at the time. So that kind of really got me able to gravitate towards this one particular memory that felt kind of special to me. This is from just last year I was in northeastern Brazil and friends of friends actually lived there and so I was getting this like very local experience, which was wonderful. We're in this tiny little beach town called Tibau Do Sul and they took us on this little boat ride. We went down the river. It was like all very idyllic and beautiful, like sunset. And we came up to the shore in this tiny little village and there is this woman who I learned after was sort of like the matriarch of the entire village. And she started like years ago, setting up this little stand every day for like a few hours kind of around sunset and selling these fresh oysters that were coming right from there in the village. And it started to catch on. People from like other villages started coming and then I think it started to become a little bit more of a tourist thing, although there's not many tourists in the area, but tourists do go. And I just thought, wow, this is so amazing. It was just the sweetest moment. The sun was so golden and sparkly and she's shucking, you know, her order, just endless, really amazing oysters, the freshest you've ever tasted with a squirt of lime juice, because that's how they do it in Brazil, which I had never had before. And it's so obvious. It's so good. It's so delicious with lime. And she's just like chatting with people and it's so lovely. She's like just by taking on this activity, just breathing so much possibility and life into the community there because, you know, people come and they get off the boat, they buy beers, walk around or whatever, and it's just sort of like single-handedly started like this extremely, this great entrepreneurial activity there is this tiny little community. So, I was thinking about that and feeling like, now what a cool moment not to just have this really amazing little sunset snack, but to just sort of witness what this woman was able to kind of bring and provide for her community. And she was just such a cool person. And it was cool to, like, hear a little bit about her story via my friends who were with me who spoke Portuguese, so I wanted to share that one today.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:16:02] Yeah, thanks for sharing it and oh my god it sounds so good.

**Laura Miller** [00:16:04] It was so amazing. It was so special.

**Corbett Nash** [00:16:07] I'm going to share one from, oh jeez, almost 20 years ago on a beach in the south Kona coast of the island of Hawaii. We lived out there for quite a long time, and one day we went camping at my favorite little beach park. And at that campsite, I had my newborn baby and my wife and friends there with us. And we're just having a great time. And I didn't think I was going to catch any fish that day. But I brought along a pole and some squid, as one does in Hawaii, and I cast in. And toward the evening, I thought, well, you know, I'd better go check that pole. And so, my little boy and I went out and we checked the pole and there was something on it. And we were surprised. So, we reeled it in. And we saw a beautiful silver fish that we'd just never seen before and didn't know what it was because we were fairly new to the island at the time. And somebody came up to us and said, Well, you're in luck! That's a moi. And we thought great! Okay, well, let's give it a try. And so, we put into a cooler, but because it was already almost bedtime, we put it into a cooler. And the next morning we got up to try to make that fish to see what we could do. But we didn't have matches. We didn't have firewood. We didn't have seasonings. We didn't have salt. We managed to find another camper and we went over and asked them for a piece of foil. And we managed to scrounge up some sticks and things like that. And we made a little fire. And we grilled that fish, but we didn't have any seasoning for it. So, we reached into our cooler to find out what we did have, and all we had was raspberry yogurt. And Cheetos. So, we crushed up the Cheetos and we slather the yogurt across the fish. And I don't know if it was the fish or the odd combination of seasonings, but that was one of the most delicious fish I've ever had in my life. It turns out, so the moi is a Pacific threadfin, that was a fish that was reserved in older times for the chiefs and the royal families, particularly the men actually, in that circumstance. And later it was also farmed. They would probably catch juveniles and put them into fish farms in Hawaii. So, it was reserved for the royalty. And we feel blessed to have been able to eat it on the beach that day.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:18:36] That's a really vivid and incredible memory, and especially raspberry yogurt and Cheetos. I'm sure it's a combination that literally no one would ever have thought of, ever.

**Corbett Nash** [00:18:47] You do with what you have, I guess.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:18:49] You make do, right? What is something that we, the seafood sector or the sustainable seafood community should be doing or paying more attention to that we're, you know, in your opinion, not paying attention to enough or at all. What's the word on the street?

**Laura Miller** [00:19:05] Yeah, my like top line item here for sure is just the need for more collaboration, more working together. And as I was saying before about our work in the last couple of years to diversify the voices that we're hearing from. That's like for me, a super critical part of that idea. So it's like working together, but not necessarily pulling together groups that already think similarly because that's easier and having them work together and see how far they can get but really like rolling up your sleeves and doing that really tough work of bringing together people who have very broad range of perspectives, but understanding that it's important for them to hear one another and learn from one another and respect those differing opinions to try and come to a more harmonious place on a path forward. So yeah, really just that need for working together, but broadly with that big group, and that's not easy work, but it feels really mission-critical for us over here at the Alliance.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:20:11] Yeah, it's not easy. And nothing really is in this in this sphere.

**Laura Miller** [00:20:17] I mean, the problems are enormous. Yeah, absolutely. It's big work, it's hard work. It feels very uphill and messy and just very challenging. That's, I think, where we landed on this philosophy, that there's strength in numbers, that we can be more, we can be more effective, we can have more impact if we're partnering up with folks and learning to sort of work toward, the word harmony and is coming up for me again, right? Because we're never going to get to a place where everyone totally agrees and that's okay. But it's getting to a place where we can respectfully disagree when that's needed and really work to try and understand each other, to try and find a place of harmony to move from.

**Cristina Callegari** [00:21:02] Yeah, I think something that's an issue that, you know, there's some attention on it, but I think perhaps not enough is greenwashing within the seafood industry. So SeaChoice actually back in 2020 we released a report, the first of its kind in Canada, that assessed environmental claims on seafood products because we were noticing as we were doing so much work on labeling and traceability over the years that actually it's kind of like the wild west out there with a lot of different claims, you know, sustainable, responsibly sourced, but, unlike eco-certifications like the MSC or ASC, where there's a third party to back up that claim, you do see a lot of self-claims out there that consumers can rightfully be very confused about. And so in our report, we actually found 65% of them were unverified, so they lacked some kind of evidence to substantiate them. And even ones that we found some information, I think it was about 9% that we found were actually unsustainable, yet they were saying they were sustainable. And the reason I think it's an issue is because I don't see the community discussing it as much compared to the amount of like increasing media attention I'm seeing it's getting and we're now seeing the EU, the European Union, crack down on some of their regulations and enforcement around this and with the advancement of marketing and the pressure for businesses to sort of prove sustainability somehow, I only see this issue gaining traction. And so that's one that I would like the community, I think maybe to watchdog a little bit more and to talk about solutions for.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:22:40] Yeah, that's a really great comment. And I'm wondering, I mean, what can we do about that? Like how do you monitor claims that people are making unless you actually have a distinct effort like you guys do? How do you do that?

**Cristina Callegari** [00:22:51] Yeah, I think one of them is definitely, you know, getting more groups out there and monitoring what's happening in the marketplace. We also, I think as a community, we have great connections. Some NGOs partner directly with retailers and companies, like I said, with SeaChoice, we assess them, but we do provide recommendations and over the years we have provided the recommendation to any companies that are putting these self-claims on products to either get rid of them or provide more evidence and we have seen that there's been some change. Some companies have actually removed their self-claims, which is really great. I think there's other things we can do, like work with government to strengthen requirements for how we use the certain terms like sustainable or responsible and look to some international best practices to follow in that regard.

**Corbett Nash** [00:23:44] Well, I think we need to focus on normalizing seafood sustainability. And by that, I mean, it's just not at the top of minds of most people in the world, let alone in the U.S. A lot of the people we talk to and probably a lot of the people

that listen to this podcast, they might group in this high propensity sort of adopters of sustainability or climate change or gender inequality issues, things like that, they'd be more willing to listen. And these folks are very important catalysts for positive change, but there just aren't very many of us. And I think a lot of what we've done in the past is focus on these people that are willing to listen. Like I said, these people are great, and I want to keep talking with them but if you look at it as a global population, the U.S. is only about 4% of the world's population and we're talking to a tiny fraction of that 4%. And so if we really want to shift the needle and make positive change toward seafood sustainability and people's choices they make both in the U.S. and across the world, we need to expand our audiences and expand our reach. And I think you do that by normalizing seafood sustainability. So, you know how can we make going to the grocery store and choosing sustainable seafood just not a special thing to do, but the normal thing to do? And so it's working toward that goal is something that I think is sort of the next very large goal as a movement that we should be looking toward.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:25:16] Yeah, thanks for sharing that. And I think that's something that when we regroup the Peer Learning Network next time, we can bring that up, right, and talk about it, like, okay, maybe we could, you know, together or create some sort of strategy and test, test some messaging or something like that, Right?

**Corbett Nash** [00:25:31] Yeah. And look for other avenues, look beyond the choir to not just test messaging, but test and find distribution channels for some of these great messages around seafood sustainability.

**Jenny Barker** [00:25:44] Yeah, I think that there is a lot of good thinking going on overall in the seafood movement, and I think sometimes a lot of what we end up seeing are a lot of really good ideas and sort of well-intentioned efforts, but maybe it is coming together on those more and finding alignment on them. I'm thinking in particular, you know, FishWise started doing some work in the social responsibility space in as early as 2016 and kind of developing some of that guidance that work continues to get more momentum overall. It was a topic we heard consistently at Boston, a lot around different due diligence frameworks and different approaches for continuous improvement. And what is it? How can you tackle some of the human and labor rights issues in seafood supply chains? And I think there are a lot of good ideas. I think it's coalescing around a few and helping to prioritize so we can all, pardon the pun, row in the same direction is really what I see as that need and hope. So, I think we're talking a lot about the right things. I mean, I do think there's a question of how much emphasis we put on workers at the center of some of those social responsibility approaches and what worker contributions or driven social responsibility looks like. But really, I think it's a lot about coming together and aligning on some of those solutions that we think would be most effective in prioritizing those which would serve us well. And I think people are trying to do that. But that's, you know, I feel like there's just always a lot of work, good ideas, things we should be doing as a community. But there's just so much of it that it's always finding that clarity, alignment and then prioritizing those things so we can make some true impact as a group.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:27:44] Thank you for tuning into The Conch podcast. It would be amazing if you could take just two seconds to leave a review and share this podcast with your ocean-loving friends. Thank you.

**Crystal Sanders-Alvarado** [00:27:58] The Conch podcast is a program of Seafood and Gender Equality or SAGE. Audio production, engineering, editing, mixing, and sound design by Crystal Sanders-Alvarado for Seaworthy. The theme song "Dilation" is written

and performed by Satan's Pilgrims. Funding for The Conch podcast is generously provided by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and Builders Initiative.