

# SLOW FISH NORTH AMERICA 2021

## Themes + Synthesis

*This is an updated draft of the closing synthesis of key themes from the Slow Fish 2021 Deep Dives, Seascape World Cafe, and other discussions. These ideas sprang from storytellers, thought leaders, facilitators, note takers, and Slow Fish attendees during both larger sessions and smaller breakout rooms. (See a list with follow-up links below). Tasha Sutcliffe and Kevin Scribner wrote this thematic synopsis with input and editing from Brett Tolley and Colles Stowell. Tasha and Kevin presented this information during the final day's closing session. Please note that we plan to create a more comprehensive report of the entire gathering with recording links, next steps for staying connected, and more. Coming soon.*

We had a number of objectives for this [Slow Fish](#) event, many of which were centered around how we can grow our community through broadening our reach to like-minded individuals, organizations, and the public so we can increase our impact. One objective in particular however, was focused on how we can empower our membership and thought leaders to uplift our shared values and create pathways for individual and collective action. With that in mind, we synthesized the conversations over the last two weeks, and highlighted those common themes/threads/values that rose to the surface.

These common threads weave together to form and reinforce the fabric of Slow Fish. They further illuminate our collectively held values; help define and elevate our collective voice; and shape our calls to action paving the way we move forward as individual activists, as allied organizations, and as a strong and powerful network. We have come together due to a common sense of purpose, and in that way may be preaching to the “choir”. But we are not just a choir. We are a ground force building a chorus that can change the world.

Some—by no means all—of these common threads:

### Our deep connection to marine and freshwater resources

We have a deep and timeless connection to marine and freshwater resources, and this is a relationship we must value and honour. Our wellbeing is necessarily tied to the wellbeing of the natural system. This was beautifully expressed in many ways throughout the deep dives. A few examples:

- In the **Indigenous Access to Food Sources** deep dive, we were reminded that we are a part of the environment – we cannot take ourselves out of it, and that if we take care of our resources, they will take care of us. This was woven throughout the discussion. We learned about harvesting mindfulness and the need to acknowledge our source of sustenance, appreciate it, and take only what we need. Our actions have an impact.
- The **Blue Commons** deep dive highlighted how our long-standing relationship to these common resources is fundamental to our ability to both steward them and benefit from them. Some of the most compelling examples of fisheries commoning demonstrate how

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generational knowledge gathered by those intimately connected to nearby resources enables a mutually beneficial and sustainable relationship between seafood resources and humans.

- In the **Rivers Connect the World** session, we heard different stories of communities acknowledging the substantial and sometimes devastating impact we have had on our river systems over time, and how these communities are working to protect those estuarine habitats. Resiliency is the backbone of re-establishing those crucial relationships

### We need intergenerational revitalization

The need to address the increasing loss of relationship between the next generation and our seafood resources and the need to revitalize this connection arose in almost every conversation. Concerns ranged from an increasingly serious succession issue in small boat fishing fleets, to loss of traditional knowledge, to decreasing capacity in rural communities to steward, manage, and harvest resources. This is the result of many factors: from deteriorating incomes and job security dissuading new, young fisheries entrants to the dispossession of local people from their environment, severing historical ties to the resource.

- The graying of the fleet was a prominent topic in the **Seafood Supply Chain** deep dive. We heard about the need to find ways to attract and retain youth in community fisheries, including developing policies and programs that can benefit youth as new entrants.
- One attendee in the **Aquaculture** deep dive offered the term “intergenerational revitalization” as a vital part of the path forward – the need for ongoing education and the passing on of knowledge to maintain and build our understanding of the marine ecosystems and how we make use of it including fishing and aquaculture for livelihoods, food, etc.
- In the **Indigenous Access** deep dive, several storytellers referred to the need for intergenerational knowledge transmission. They spoke of the role of family mentorship and leading by example:
  - “We take our babes with us.”
  - “We model our practices with our youth.”
  - “Live the knowledge.”
  - “Act as a people, not just as individuals.”
  - “Be thankful and humble for your harvest.”
- We learned in the **Blue Commons** session that the profit-driven ocean commodification and privatization schemes of the Blue Economy create steep barriers to entry for young would-be fish harvesters. High capital needs and limited access to fisheries often dissuade potential new entrants. However, we heard examples of communities improving access for young fish harvesters

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through collaborative management, training, and creative loans, among other community-oriented avenues.

- In our **Young Fish Harvesters Seascape World Cafe** session, we heard about some of the policy barriers that make fisheries access unaffordable to new entrants. Young fish harvesters called upon the Slow Fish network to lend its voice to combat some of these policies.

### Fish is a critical part of our food system

Fish and seafood are critical to our food security. They are a necessary part of ensuring access to good, clean, fair food for all. This came up across all sessions as a uniting theme. Our collective reliance on and respect for fish and seafood as a safe, sustainable, healthy, and delicious local food source is one of the ties that binds us together so strongly. And indeed, as Carlo Petrini says, in our commitment to doing the hard work to build a world in which ALL have access to good, clean, fair food, as a community we unite around not just the struggle of the work, but also the pleasure and the celebration of food.

- Several folks in the **Aquaculture** deep dive expressed deep concern that food insecurity is being co-opted by corporate interests to build investment opportunities such as GMO food to solve hunger. This begged several questions: How can we empower people to feed their own communities? How can we ensure a values-based approach to aquaculture that is restorative rather than enabling destructive practices?
- The **Rivers Connect the World** discussion sparked a call to action to collaborate and plan on how communities can change their relationship with food sources including restoration efforts to improve fish populations and supporting infrastructure that will diversify food use and preservation methods. We also heard about an exciting effort to adopt an 'Indigenous Bill of Rights' around kelp production in Alaska and beyond.
- Many key aspects of our relationship to fish as food were raised in the **Seafood Supply Chain** session. Some of these include the need to share the story of where our seafood comes from; to demystify fish, the whole fish, especially for children; and the need to eat with the ecosystem e.g. eat locally, eat all of the fish, eat seasonally.
- Several storytellers in the **Indigenous Access** session shared the many threats to traditional foods from loss of access to homewaters (which threaten their way of life itself) to the mounting threats from climate change, globalization, monoculture, water scarcity, urbanization, and more.

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### Equity and social justice are priorities

Perhaps one of the most ominous and threatening challenges we face is the lack of focus on social equity and justice. The focus by those in power is consistently on the big “E” for *economic growth/investment opportunity*, and secondarily the big “C” for *conservation*. Local, state, federal, and international agencies give a nod to equity in terms of human and community wellbeing, social justice and fairness, and social and cultural objectives. But there is little if any concrete movement to address these issues meaningfully. Too often we see big ENGOs and big corporations compete to produce an outcome that prioritizes spaces saved and profits earned at the expense of rural communities and those who live with, and rely on, the resources being grabbed or saved.

- Storytellers and thought leaders in the **Seafood Supply Chain** session highlighted the lack of equity in the supply chain. Often big corporations control the whole chain from boat to market forcing harvesters to be price takers bearing all of the costs and risk with the least reward. And where the cost of entry has been inflated due to unregulated markets and speculation, the next generation cannot compete with deep-pocketed companies for fishing access, ultimately eradicating independent small boat fleets.
- In the **Blue Commons** session, we heard about financial industry encroachment in our oceans aimed at driving economic growth and investment opportunity. The ocean is the new investment frontier and privatization of fisheries is just the tip of the iceberg. Privatization and commodification of resources equals a form of enclosure of our previously shared wealth, e.g. land-grabbing by global investors. The commons reframes the conversation. We heard about the power of commoning as an antidote to privatization of our resources. We heard inspiring examples that showcased the success of collaborative governance and community-based management models centered on a shared set of values.
- The ongoing struggle faced by indigenous people to regain access to and authority over their own territories and resources arose in many stories from the **Indigenous Access** deep dive. Cultural boundaries are as—or more—important than political boundaries. But we also heard of the determined resilience of cultural and traditional ways in the face of persistent new legal, political, and economic systems that continue to try to oppress tribal rights and practices.
- During the **Aquaculture** deep dive, we heard a story about racism and discrimination against black fishermen who are blocked from accessing public docks and dockside resources simply because of the color of their skin. We heard the need to level the playing field through equitable law enforcement. And there was a collective agreement to continue uplifting these stories, shed light more on how racism is showing up in our seafood system, and actively work to remove it.

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### *Relationships are the foundation of and for change*

Relationships are foundational to realizing the change we seek. This theme ran through every session at Slow Fish 2021. We identified the need to build relationships in every direction: with elders, with youth, with the public, between harvesters and eaters, between agencies and tribes, amongst allies, and amongst ourselves. Relationships are at the heart of everything we do. Building transparent, inclusive collaborative, respectful, relationships is the foundation for our path forward.

- We learned that collaborative work across boundaries, tribes and communities is essential to building resilience against ecosystem degradation in the **Rivers Connect the World** session.
- We were asked to do the hard work of making and maintaining connections in the **Indigenous Access** deep dive.
- The **Blue Commons** discussion highlighted the foundational power of communities working collectively to manage, steward, and use resources across interests sharing science and knowledge and creating a space for shared decision making, shared solution building, and shared benefits.
- Relationships certainly matter to every link in the **Seafood Supply Chain**. During that session, we talked about how sharing our perspectives is essential to broadening the collective understanding of our perspectives and challenges. We are now more connected than ever, thanks to networks like Slow Fish.

### *Closing thoughts*

Again, these are some of the most salient common threads from the many engaging conversations during Slow Fish 2021. These ideas interlock with our shared values to provide a strong foundation for Slow Fish. These values flow from the idea of good, clean, and fair and what that means to us. To follow are the Local Catch Core Values, which reinforce the overall Slow Fish mission. These are:

- Community-Based Fisheries that enhance the social, ecological, and cultural fabric of communities;
- Fair and equitable Access to the ocean commons;
- Fair pricing supporting good livelihoods and community access to seafood;
- Eating with the ecosystem;
- Traceable, simple supply chains that promote trust and direct relationships;
- Catch and Handle with honor and heart;
- Community and Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management-- bottom-up, ecosystem-based, and collaborative;
- Honoring the Ocean -- care for marine ecosystems; and,
- Creativity and Collaboration for building a better seafood system built on shared values.

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These values are shared across fishing communities all over the world, but they are not the language of those who are driving the dominant trends we are seeing in fisheries and ocean management. Trends such as the increasing push toward automation and technical innovation, increasing financialization of all resources, the constant push for growth and efficiency and global consolidation, are all defining our future relationship to fisheries resources. In most cases, these trends present the antithesis of Slow Fish values. These dominant forces show themselves in government policies, agreements, and strategies such as the Blue Economy. Yet it is the values we share as Slow Fish that can build the resilience of our resources, our communities, and our ability to respond and adapt to change.

The pandemic has only further highlighted the instability of the current system. Yet the current system is hardwired into so many minds as synonymous with the path to personal success, freedom, and happiness.

That narrative must change. For the anthem of Slow Fish to catch on, the broader public needs to hear it, feel it, see themselves in it, and see their children's future in it. Many of us are so busy reacting to daily crises, we are unable to take the necessary step back to organize a movement. We need to find those steps we can take, collectively and individually, to keep our community strong and grow it. It is in our solidarity, our collective voice, and the truth and power of our stories that we can inspire ourselves and others while growing our strength in numbers. It is also in our community that we find ways to support each other in whatever capacity, to build the momentum around these common threads and shared values, and put them into action.

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### STORYTELLERS

Buck Jones | OR | Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission | [web](#)

Jim Embry | Ky | Sustainable Communities Network | [web](#)

Kayla Cox | ME | New England Fishmongers | [web](#)

Jordyn Kastlunger | CA | Tuna Harbor Dockside Market | [web](#)

Ana Shellem | NC | Shell'em Seafood | [video](#)

Jenny DeVivo | MA | Lunch lady with a cause | @upisland\_lunch\_lady

Cailyn Siider | BC | Young Fishermen's Network | [web](#)

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Marsh Skeele | AK | Sitka Salmon Shares | [web](#)

Jason Jarvis | RI | Commercial Fisherman | [video](#)

Ryan Benson | Okanagan Nation | Okanagan Nation Alliance | [web](#)

Linda Behnken | AK | Alaska Longline Fishermen's Assoc. | [web](#)

Stephen Rhodes | AK | Seafood Producers Cooperative | [web](#)

Severine von Tscherner Fleming | ME | Greenhorns | [web](#)

Brian Rosseger | FL | Lost Coast Oysters | [web](#)

Charlie Abner | SC | Commercial fisherman

Ryan Bradley | MS | Mississippi Commercial Fisheries United | [web](#)

Tiberiu Cazacioc | Romania | Slow Food Convivium Leader | [web](#)

Dune Lankard | AK | Copper River Wild Salmon Co. | [web](#)

Sally Barnes | Ireland | Woodcock Smokery | [web](#)

Tammy Greer, Ph.D. | MS | University of Southern Mississippi | [web](#)

Eugenio Berra | Serbia | ViaggieMiraggi | [web](#)

Blaise Pezold | LA | Arlene and Joseph Meraux Charitable Foundation | [web](#)

Hillary Renick | CA | Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians | [web](#)

Johnathan Perry | MA | Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) | [web](#)

Melanie Brown | AK | Yup'ik, SalmonState | [web](#)

Marva Sii~xuutesna Jones | CA | Nii~lii~chvndvn|Yurok|Karuk|Wintu

Suntayea Steinruck | CA | Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation | [web](#)

Elizabeth James Perry | MA | Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) | [web](#)

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### THOUGHT LEADERS

Denisa Livingston | Diné Nation | Diné Community Advocacy Alliance | [web](#)

Steve Kurian | PA | Wild for Salmon | [web](#)

Lance Nacio | LA | Anna Marie Seafood | [web](#)

Andrea Tomlinson | NH | NH Community Seafood | [web](#)

Jared Auerbach | MA | Reds Best | [web](#)

Seth Macinko | RI | University of Rhode Island | [web](#)

Andrea Nightingale | Norway | University of Oslo | [web](#)

David Bollier | MA | Schumacher Center for a New Economics | [book](#)

Paul Molyneaux | ME | [book](#)

Amanda Swinimer | BC | Dakini Tidal Wilds | [web](#)

Rosanna Marie Neil | Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance | [web](#)

### FACILITATORS

Elizabeth Herendeen | AK | SalmonState | [web](#)

Sarah Shoffler | CA | National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration | [web](#)

Noah Wahquahboshkuk | CA | Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation | [web](#)

Hallie Templeton | Washington, DC | Friends of the Earth | [web](#)

Gary Granata, Ph.D. | AL | Rivers Connect the World and Vanishing Foodways | [web](#)

Jes Hathaway | ME | National Fisherman | [web](#)