

The Conch- Lisa GocheFINAL_1.mp3

Julie Kuchepatov [00:00:04] Hello. My name is Julie Kuchepatov and I'm the host of this podcast, The Conch. We are trucking along on our journey with this podcast, talking about seafood and the ocean. And most importantly, we're uplifting some of the incredible women working in the seafood sector, sharing their journeys, the challenges they face, and the triumphs they've achieved. Today, we are really excited to have an amazing guest join us, Lisa Goche. Lisa has 40 years of experience in the seafood industry and is currently the vice president of Grobest Seafood Global, GSG for short - a worldwide supplier of high quality seafood comprising a group of companies with both seafood and aquatic feed operations throughout multiple Asian countries and is headquartered in Taiwan. Welcome and thank you, Lisa, for joining me today on The Conch. Let's get to it.

Lisa Goche [00:00:55] Hey, Julie, we've been talking about this for a while, so I'm so happy that we're able to do it. And I have to say, I'm really honored to be a guest on your show today. I think what you're doing is amazing, lifting up the voices not only of women and others in the seafood industry, but really just promoting seafood in general, which I think is just critically important. So thank you so much for this opportunity.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:01:22] Well, thank you. I mean, the honor is all mine. And, you know, we have been talking about this for a while. And it's so funny because I was reflecting on the last time I saw you, which was actually the first time I saw you in person. And the last time, which was we were both on a plane and we were in the same row coming back from the Boston Seafood Show to Seattle, I think. Yeah, I flew through Seattle. And you're based in Seattle, correct?

Lisa Goche [00:01:45] Yes, that's right.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:01:46] That's right. So we had a guy sitting in between us so we couldn't really chat and we also had masks on, of course. So it's good to be able to finally get you on the show and we can kind of start and continue our conversation. So you are what I refer to as a tenured leader in the seafood industry and I mentioned you have 40 years experience, which is incredible. And I can't wait to hear, you know, some of the things that you've done. And I'd love to hear a little bit about how you found yourself in this business in the beginning of your career, because, again, you are one who has been in this business for a long time, and I'm just so interested. So how did you get your start?

Lisa Goche [00:02:23] Well, first, you know, that's a great question. I think first, I would like to say very quickly that in the past 15 or 20 years, I've probably become more known for the aquaculture and feed sector of the seafood industry. But the first half or so of my career was actually all related to wild fisheries. So I have sort of equal amount of experience in all of that. And working in mostly remote parts of Alaska and processing plants and locations from Surefish around the world and working on vessels in Alaska and the Russian Bering Sea, so on, you know, cod, pollock, salmon, crab, all sorts of things. So I do want to give a shout out to the wild fisheries sector, which is also close to my heart. Back to the question on how I got into it. Well, like a lot of people, it was completely unplanned. I was an unsuspecting 18 year old right out of high school who like so many people who were born and raised in Alaska. So, yes, I am a native of Alaska, but we all, as a common practice, made money for college working in the plants, especially in the salmon season. So I did that. I went into the plants to make money. I started out as a salmon slimer, which is every bit as glamorous as the term sounds like it is, is standing there cleaning the bellies of fish all day long. My first shift was 17 hours, which had the

bizarre effect of making me feel, yes, exhausted, but also strangely invigorated. So I don't know did that make me tough or did that make me stupid? I'm still not sure to this day, but in any event, I was really struck immediately as an 18 year old by just kind of the sheer diversity of it, even back then. And there are so many people from so many countries. I had really good friends from Africa, Czechoslovakia, just all over the place. And it's just amazing multicultural thing. So I really threw myself into it. I mean, the whole thing was about making money. So, you know, 12, 16, 20 hour days, that's what you had to do because, you know, I think we're making like \$5 an hour or something. And so I volunteered for every position in the plant. I learned everything about the operations. I even would do things like wash the gloves and scrub the toilets and all of these kinds of things when no one else was there. So I started to be promoted and I ended up sticking with it throughout my college time, It's just ever changing. Endlessly complex. So exciting. To this day, I still characterize it as a barely controlled state of chaos. So once I got my degree, frankly speaking, it was just too late because I was already a bit by the seafood bug. It was so dynamic, it was so exciting and it really strengthened me and taught me a lot and taught me how to think on my feet, how to trust my instincts, how to learn that if I was wrong, that was okay. If I made mistakes, that was okay. We'd just go ahead and work on fixing it. So I worked in remote villages and plants. Then I moved to Seattle where I split my time between the office and vessels with another company as director of QA in Alaska and the Russian Bering Sea. Then I became president of Surefish. I was with them for about 14 years, which is a seafood inspection, consulting, auditing, you name it, just like experts in seafood. And that was mostly wild, but that's what began the transition to aquaculture because I'm going to be honest here, and some people might have a different view, but back in this time and we're talking about the 80s and the 90s, aquaculture was really or farming was kind of a dirty word in the state of Alaska, most especially surrounding the salmon industry, where wild and Chilean imported farmed fish were viewed as a competitive to one another. There were accusations of dumping farmed salmon on the market, driving the price down and so forth. So as a native of Alaska, you know, I thought farming was bad also. But when I started working at Sure Fish, I started to be asked by the Aquaculture Certification Council, which is now Best Aquaculture Practices with Global Aquaculture Alliance, to go around and help them teach courses and best practices and seafood safety. And that's where my eyes started to get opened. I mean, I remember standing in on some farms in Nicaragua and just marveling at how amazing farm operations are, how complex, but the biggest thing is that the standards that they were trying to promote were not just the typical things about food safety or quality or these kinds of things, but there were these very strong components about environmental responsibility, mitigating environmental impacts, repairing environmental impacts. And then there was the social piece which also mandated community support, social responsibility. And those are the pieces that really resonated with me. And I started to learn that actually farming is critically important to feeding the world and the world's growing population. And so I could get on board with helping to be part of the solution and advancing best practices. Or I could be part of obstructing that. So I wanted to be part of the solution instead of the problem. And interestingly, going back to the salmon industry in Alaska, it actually ended up where farmed salmon actually helped to drive increased consumption of salmon in general as people began to be introduced to salmon that had no access to it, wild salmon. And so in overall, the consumption of salmon began to go up, which I think eventually was beneficial to the state of Alaska, who also has the wild mystique to add to it. So I feel like I was super, super fortunate that I'd been pretty much all parts of the seafood industry from a producer, as you said, now I'm in sales and procurement, so I buy and sell. I've also worked for a third party standard when I was vice president of the BAP, which is a nonprofit as well, and then all the global impacts of Surefish. So so that was a bit of a long answer on how I got into it.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:09:15] No, that was amazing. And I knew it was going to be incredible to hear, you know, a really short kind of recap of your journey, of course, but really the breadth and depth of your experience and knowledge, like you said, across wild, across aquaculture, you know, farmed fish, you know, from various links in the chain, from, you know, harvest to production to sales. And it's just really great to hear all of this. Again, I'm going to thank you for coming on the show, because I think you're someone out of all the guests that we've had, you have seriously the most experience and I'm really thrilled to have you on here and to dig deeper into your brain full of knowledge. So I have a quick question about when you were working on the line, on the slime line and when you were in college, you mentioned about the diversity of people, which I think is great. And I think that still happens to this day, maybe to a lesser extent, like people come from other countries to work in Alaska. Did you find there were a lot of women there or were you kind of unique in that situation?

Lisa Goche [00:10:11] There were probably more men than women, but there were a lot of women also, especially ones that were college bound. There were a lot of women, actually, older women, that were just trying to find ways to supplement their income. It was definitely less than 50% women. But right now, I guess I should clarify that this is a city that I started out in the city of Anchorage. So you're going to get more gender diversity and diversity, period, because literally people will just walk in the door to say, I want to work today, they'll be given a job, and then sometimes they disappear and we never see them again. This is entirely different than my experience in the remote parts of Alaska, where then you end up with a majority men. And in fact, a lot of the women that were in these remote parts of Alaska were given certain jobs, and that's it. So like the slime line or candling to remove parasites from fish, all these boring jobs, or sometimes they would be in the egg room, you know, dealing with the salmon roe. But for the most part, it was mostly men. And absolutely everybody in any sort of supervisory capacity were men.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:11:28] Yeah, actually, I wrote about this experience once I went to a processor in China in Qingdao, and I did see a candling room. We went into that candling room and that's kind of like a dark room with, is it fluorescent lights or incandescent lights? I'm not sure. But like a light that shines on the fish and you pick kind of these parasites out that show up because of this light, right?

Lisa Goche [00:11:53] Right. And that's for white fish, not for salmon. So it'd be like cod or pollock, those sorts of things.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:11:59] Yeah, it was just incredible. And it was just two women standing across from each other, plucking out these parasites that are pretty much invisible to the eye. Right. You can only see it under the light of these special lights. It was incredible.

Lisa Goche [00:12:11] Not glamorous. No.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:12:15] I find probably there's very little glamor in anything that you described. I don't know. I mean, travel, it sounds like you've had a lot of travel in your career, so we might get into that in a second. But before I bring someone on the podcast, I do a bunch of research about them and see if there's anything online. And I read about Grobest, which is where you work now and your responsibilities there, which are really broad in scope and you know, some of the things you do. You mentioned sales and procurement and business development and execution and oversight, hiring and team

development. You provide technical support to worldwide operations regarding production quality, food safety, CSR, which stands for Corporate Social Responsibility, regulatory and certification programs and compliance, among other things. So this sounds like a lot. So I would love to know what a typical day looks like for you.

Lisa Goche [00:13:08] Well, probably similar to a lot of people. I mean, I think that days are gone a long time ago where a lot of us had the luxury of, well, it's not a luxury for me. I like to multitask, but, you know, kind of focusing on one or two things at a time. So it's sort of the same pattern repeated every single day where I, you know, write down all the things I want to accomplish today. And then it gets thrown out the window pretty much every single time because it still continues to be just this unpredictable. I mean, one minute I might be getting questions or, you know, help that staff needs then a customer is contacting me to quote something and then a nonprofit or a foundation wants to talk to me about some sort of CSR type thing. And so it's just this constant juggling, balancing act of priorities. And I think most people are experiencing that same thing. So but you know, I don't like boring I'm not a fan of boring, so it's never boring. I can say that.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:14:14] I can imagine. So I had someone on the podcast recently and I asked her because she's also really insanely busy. She's in school. It was Imani Black actually. She's the CEO and founder of Minorities in Aquaculture, and she is a student. She's, you know, launched this new nonprofit. She's very active in, you know, doing a lot of interviews and promoting her business. But I asked her, you know, about her priority, like, how do you prioritize your day? And, you know, she had a tip around calendars and stuff like that. So how do you prioritize these things? Because, like, I know how I do things and I actually physically write down lists. That's the way I do it. But I'm curious, do you have any tips, maybe?

Lisa Goche [00:14:51] I don't think anyone wants to take tips from me? Oh, okay. I'm kind of the queen of post-it notes and have been for decades because I need to have stuff right in front of my face and I use plenty of calendar alerts and this and that. So it's sort of a combination and I'm not very good at prioritizing sometimes. I fall into the trap like a lot of people do and say, you know, I really need to get to this, that, oh, I'll just quickly answer these few emails and then next thing you know two hours goes by. So, you know, email is a great tool and it's also the bane of existence in terms of over communication and trying to manage all of that. So I guess I'm still learning how to manage all of those things properly. And yeah, I heard that podcast. I thought, Wow, you're doing all these things and going to graduate school?

Julie Kuchepatov [00:15:40] Yeah, I know, I know I said in that podcast that I remember, you know, listen to it again and I said in there, gosh, you're so busy. I said that probably like seven times. I was like, okay, you can stop saying that now. I think it's funny too, because, you know, I think you're right about emails. But I remember back when, you know, you could fly on a plane and you didn't have access to wifi and, you know, maybe even it didn't even exist at that point. But once wifi was widely available on planes and people were starting to work on planes, instead of sitting and relaxing and watching a movie with a glass of wine, I adamantly, you know, made that a rule for my life that I will not work on a plane, not a plane. It's time for me to relax and watch a movie because I just don't have time to do that at home. So that's the way I kind of cope with things like that.

Lisa Goche [00:16:24] Generally I have the same rule. I mean, I'll do a little work on the plane if I absolutely have to, but for the most part, that's my downtime.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:16:33] Totally agree. I think that's a good tip. And we're going to just cement that.

Lisa Goche [00:16:38] I do have a tip! Thanks, Julie, for the help!

Julie Kuchepatov [00:16:41] You got a tip. You got a tip that I also appreciate it. So, you know, and speaking of travel, you know, we talked about that a little bit, but you're overseas and you oversee and support global operations. So, you know, clearly, we're still in the midst of a global pandemic and I'm curious how this has affected your work. You know, I'm assuming there's less travel for sure, but how did you and your team at Grobest adjust to the pandemic realities? And I'd love to hear about that.

Lisa Goche [00:17:07] Yeah, that's a really great question. I mean, for one thing, so Grobest is a group of companies, as you mentioned earlier, all over Asia, but then we have this division in the US, sells not only Grobest products but also other products. And so we are used to working from home because we're spread across different states so that part wasn't a big deal when everybody had to go into lockdown. But I think that now the travel is starting to come back, but, you know, I do want to paint a picture of supply chain chaos because I know that people have seen bits and pieces of some of that and, you know, social media and other media outlets. But actually, it's so many things all at once. Of course, in the beginning we had a lot of fear and uncertainty like everyone else. What's going to be the impact on US ops? What's going to be the impact on our Asian ops? What's going to happen to demand our customer base is split between retail, food service and various value added reproprocessors. So what was going to happen to all of those segments? I also had an overarching, deep worry and concern about what was going to happen to the health and safety of all of our staff as well as suppliers that I was working with outside of the Grobest group as group in countries like Vietnam and China and Indonesia and India. Just deeply worried about their well-being. And then so to recap a little bit of how things evolved. So in 2020, it ended up that retail demand was way up. There were a lot of people that ended up, of course, having to cook from home. And I mean, I was one of those that was getting, I mean, I always cook from home a lot, but I was getting really tired of the same old boring menu. I mean, I eat tons of seafood, but this had the impact of a lot of people who maybe would have seafood only at their favorite restaurant saying, hey, I can't get that so let me try to figure out maybe I can make it at home. And it wasn't as hard as people thought. So that was a big plus. The food service side, restaurants, etc., you know, hospitals or schools, I should say, just disappeared. And then later on in 2021, food service began to recover. Retail demand did not drop. So then everything was up sort of all at once. And then we had to scramble to try to keep everybody happy. Everyone's wanting more and more product. And so just juggling all of that. And then we start with the huge supply chain shocks. The biggest impact of that, which I'm going to say was around the middle of last year with ocean freight just beginning to skyrocket with no end in sight. And then all of these delays, there's no space on the vessels to ship. Everybody was competing for the space. Then if you got space, there weren't any empty containers. Customers were really, really fearful for a long time about not wanting to raise prices. I mean, people might think it's simple for retailers. All they got to do or supermarkets or whatever, restaurants just pass the cost on to the consumer. Well, no, it's not that simple. They want to keep their customers. And, you know, customers understandably don't react well to price hikes. So they tried not to do that. And so that was a big challenge for them and for us. And so just to give you an idea, towards the end of 2021, ocean freight from China to the west coast of the US went from around, now this is variable of course, but it went from around \$4,000 for one container of fish. So let's say 40,000 lbs up to \$16-25,000 for one container. So there's all of that going on. And

then as if that wasn't bad enough, we finally managed to get the product to the US port after all of these delays and it might be weeks or months late. Then at the port it's all snarled up. You know, the vessels can't offload, the warehouses are full, there aren't any trucks or there aren't any truck drivers. So all of those costs went up. So in 2022, it's really no better. There continue to be this outrageous ocean freight, warehouses full, problems getting trucks. Now we have rising cost of feed for the farms. Of course, everybody knows about rising fuel prices. Packaging is skyrocketing. And then, believe it or not, the labor shortages we're having here in the U.S., that's happening everywhere. So our operations in Malaysia, Thailand, China are having trouble getting enough labor also. So that's not just a US or western phenomenon. And then now we've got record inflation. So I think the hiring pool is limited. Our customers went from freaking out about price increases to freaking out about running out of product. So, you know, it's just a perfect storm. But, you know, in all of that, just nonstop communications with customers and suppliers and partnering with them, I think has been the key. And, you know, if I'm going to talk about a glass half full point of view, it was pretty amazing how well everybody came together. The customers have been really supportive of us. We've been really supportive of them. I want to give a shout out to some of our wonderful people in China because here in the US when we didn't have any masks, which was really, really awful, I mean, they literally shipped us cases and cases of masks to try to distribute to not just ourselves but friends and family, community. So, you know, I do want to mention that.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:23:07] Yeah, that's awesome. That's a really great description of, you know, what happened, how you kind of reacted, how you proacted, and then what's happening today. And the challenges just keep kind of seemingly piling on to each other. A question just occurred to me. You might know the answer to this or there might not be an answer. I don't know. But is the war in Ukraine and the kind of wheat production or grain production that usually happens from there, is that affecting the feed market at all or will it? Do you know?

Lisa Goche [00:23:37] You know, that's a good question. I think that because it isn't just the wheat issue in Ukraine, they're also the biggest supplier, if I'm not wrong of what is it, sunflower oil or something like that. And so yeah, I think that depends on the feed formulation. You know, different species need different formulations. So certainly if there's any wheat component which for our feeds, that's not common to have a wheat component. But you know, there probably are feeds, maybe not in aquaculture, maybe and other feeds that would definitely be impacted by some of that. So clearly we're seeing what's going on in Ukraine having a cascading effect all around the world.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:24:21] Yeah, it just kind of occurred to me that you might know that because I was thinking about that the other day, and I think it's still to be seen, right? And so as Crystal and I say on this podcast, you might have heard, that's a topic for another podcast.

Lisa Goche [00:24:35] There are so many topics we could discuss.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:24:36] So many threads that we could unravel right now. So I really want to get into another aspect of your work at Grobest, which is kind of your representation of Grobest with various global initiatives and sustainability organizations, so really like the nonprofit sector, right? So well, I mean, the Seafood Task Force isn't nonprofit, but so you're representing Grobest with the Seafood Task Force, with the Global Seafood Sustainability Initiative or GSSI for short. You're on, I don't know how many, but you represent Grobest on Sustainable Fisheries Partnership roundtables which are kind of

species specific, pre competitive discussions around species, right. Various species like salmon and shrimp.

Lisa Goche [00:25:16] Yeah. So this is where the wild fisheries component becomes critical to the aquaculture supply chain because SFP is about helping to develop fisheries improvement projects in wild captured fisheries that are used sometimes as a component in aquatic feeds. So wild captured fisheries and aquaculture are interrelated through the wild fisheries.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:25:43] Yep, yeah. So yeah, I want to hear more about that. And then so this is kind of a question I'm leading into a question that I like to ask those with experience working, you know, with nonprofits in the sustainable seafood movement. And you know, I've said this before, this is kind of where I came up in working really on the nonprofit side. I've never worked at a corporation or a corporate entity or a business, but really just working on the nonprofit side to assist and support businesses through, you know, their sourcing decisions or provide access to you know, I mentioned Russian salmon fisheries in the past. That's where I worked. So I am interested in hearing about your experience in these efforts and why do you think businesses partner with nonprofits to address some of the kind of issues that we see around production and, you know, be they environmental or social or human rights issues. And so what are some of the drivers behind businesses and collaborating with nonprofits?

Lisa Goche [00:26:35] Yeah, well, that's a good question. You know, you mentioned some of the nonprofits we work with Seafood Task Force and GSSI, SFP, they're all nonprofits, also the GSA Global Seafood Alliance. So, you know, I'm going to say something that's like so tired and cliché, but it's kind of true and that's the whole thing about it takes a village. So I'm going to lump the nonprofit sector into the term NGO, perfect just for non-government organization just to keep it simple. But, you know, long story short, they fill gaps. You know, they raise awareness. They provide focus on key topics that need to be addressed. And again, I'm speaking largely from the developing world, and my experience in the farm sector is been in Latin America and Asia. So there's a lot of needs in those areas and a lot of these initiatives, third party standards, foundations really help focus on those things, bring resources to bear, subject matter experts to provide different kinds of perspectives. And so I think, you know, industry and government, especially in the developing world, have a real lack of resources, a lack of education. So a lot of these entities help to fill those kinds of gaps. In some cases, they even help to fund some of these initiatives. And they just really help drive change and educate. And sometimes they, I believe this was mentioned in one of your other podcasts, that sometimes they are following the directives of, I use the term buyers because there is retailers or supermarkets, there's restaurants, there's service distributors, importers so I just say buyers, and sometimes these initiatives are following the directives of them in order to make a positive difference in the world, but practically speaking, for brand and reputation protection. And so some of these NGOs also tend to focus on maybe one or two topics. Others are broader. So the collaboration across industry, governments, NGOs is critically important to driving progress. So, you know, I think that NGOs or nonprofits are essential to making a difference.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:29:01] Yeah, that's great. Because again, like I said, I come from that kind of the nonprofit NGO space and so I like to hear that there's a value there and filling these gaps is really critical. And I agree with you, it does, albeit a cliché. It is true. It does take a village to kind of address some of these issues that we're facing. And, you know, I asked this question also of people that have kind of experience working with

nonprofits and in business, it's the nonprofits. They fill these gaps. But we also, you know, kind of make some demands and put some kind of calls to action, I guess you could call them, to business. You know that you need to do this because this is important or for whatever the reason is, right? And, you know, these asks of businesses can get really tedious. And I hear, you know, a lot it's like this is really difficult for us to do. We can't do it for this reason or yes, we're going to do this. But I'm curious, what would be your advice to nonprofit people like myself about, you know, what should we know when dealing with seafood businesses particularly when making requests around environmental and social responsibility?

Lisa Goche [00:30:01] Well, that's a huge topic, which has many, many perspectives and feelings about. But I think I kind of described earlier the benefits and the resources and drive towards change that a lot of the nonprofits and NGOs bring to the table. Again, I'm speaking more from the developing world perspective but I have the same message, I think same experiences for NGOs, whether they're foundations or third party standards, which I work for a nonprofit third party standard before, global initiatives and also buyers. The same message for all of them. Too complicated. Too much overlap, too much duplication. I mean, it's all for admirable purposes, but, you know, as you said, there is just this relentless pressure. Do more, do more, do more from NGOs, buyers. But then sometimes at the same time, I mean, I heard one of your other guest mentioned this before. At the same time, a large percentage of the time, the producers are the ones bearing the costs. And so then what's really aggravating is when you get beat over the head constantly to add complexity, add, you know, extra. I'm not saying these are bad things, but to some extent it's gotten out of balance because, you know, it's like generate more paperwork and be more transparent and do more things through third party verification, more audits, more, more, more, more, more. But by the way, don't increase your price and actually we want you to lower your price. You know, and I think that I mean, yes, there are NGOs, foundations, retailers, supermarket chains, restaurants that do help contribute to the cost, but more often than not, it's in the marketplace is characterized as this is just a cost of doing business. And if you want to keep doing business with us, this is what you have to do and, on the one hand, okay, that's fine. On the other hand, it's actually leaving tremendous sectors of the industry out. So what they're trying to accomplish in terms of raising the bar and improving working conditions and diversity and equality and raising production and this and that is very often undermined by over complex rising costs in the supply chain that are there is not enough by any means help with. I will say that sometimes I participate in RFPs or RFIs, Requests for Information or Requests for Pricing. I'm really insulted when I read some of those that just repeat over and over again throughout that they want to partner with suppliers to strip costs out of the supply chain. So there is this automatic assumption that there is all of these extra costs and inefficiencies and producers are making big fat margins. And, you know, for the most part, nothing could be further from the truth. On the flip side, I do want to mention that not all buyers, not all retailers, supermarkets have high margins. I think that the notion that they're getting huge margins is definitely not always true. And I think that maybe some of their profits rose during the pandemic, but at the same time, they also had to absorb extra costs. And I think that you actually have to look at individual items that they're carrying. And I think the margin, for example, on alcohol is huge. But, you know, the margin on different types of seafood can be very thin break even or even a loss. So it's not really that simple that all of these buyers are making tons of money. And it's the same thing with third party standards and global initiatives. It's just more and more complex all the time. Sometimes the NGOs, there's a lot of negative publicity about wild capture or aquaculture, which, you know, maybe they think helps drive change, especially with naming and shaming. But in a lot of ways, it just causes people in the developed world to want to be distrusting and not

transparent because things get used against them. The thing that I object to the most probably is the amount of duplication, the number of initiatives, organizations, task force, standards. I can go on and on about traceability, animal welfare, environmental impacts, human rights. Again, all important topics. But do we have to have numerous, numerous, numerous organizations all trying to work on the same thing that in some respects are duplicating and in other respects are competing with one another? So how do you add all these costs to the supply chain and all of this complexity and then wonder why is progress not very fast? Why are most of the people that are able to comply are the ones that are the largest and the most resourced, leaving in some cases as much as 80% of the sector out. So I think it's really hard to achieve change and progress when sometimes the bar is set way too high just straight out of the gate and you are just constantly increasing and then you've got competing agendas, competing interests, demonizing retailers, buyers, industry. Like I said, the naming and shaming. It's like, yeah, there's is a place for that. You know, on the other hand, sometimes that can backfire in terms of cooperation. I think, you know, industry is stuck in the middle of a lot of this. It's not that a lot of them don't want to do the right thing, but they're just kind of overwhelmed and they're afraid to speak up. I mean, there is a real lack of understanding. I think that there is NGOs out there and there's buyers out there that think all they got to do is put together like a perfect world or very high bar standard, mandate it, and then, you know, everybody just does it. But the fact is that it's so incredibly complex and you can't take a model in the developed world and force it onto the developing world and think that there aren't going to be problems there. You also can't expect the same thing for out of one country versus another. And there's cultural differences, there's gaps in education. So I understand that a lot of global standards, I mean, I have worked for one so I get this part that if you're making a standard, you know, they look at it as a level playing field where, you know, we're not going to make different standards for different parts of the world, you know? That just kind of causes confusion. So, you know, everybody has to meet the same standard. And I'm all right with that, but I guess what I'm not all right with is the lack of entry points at a much easier level for those that want to engage and simply can't. You know, like step one, just simplifying it. Let's get a path. And you know, that's where FIPs, Fisheries Improvement Programs, and those kinds of things are intended to do but even a lot of those have gotten very complex. So yeah, I think to really make a difference, we have to pay some attention to economic sustainability. Also, what is achievable to start with, let's start simple and then gradually ramp it up from there. And if we're keeping so much complexity and cost on everything to where it's not economically sustainable, then it's really a barrier to progress. And you know, we have to remember that in the developed and the developing world, both, all of them, you know, ultimately we're talking about families and communities and food insecurity and jobs and, you know, all of these kinds of things. So sorry. That was a bit of a long answer.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:38:20] No, that was a great answer. And I completely agree with you. I think things have gotten very complicated, as you mentioned. I think there are duplicative efforts, which I think a lot of people recognize. But sometimes, you know, people are like, well, we're going to do it anyway. And again, it's like not only are the companies that are the best resourced and, you know, either financially or with knowledge and power. The same thing with nonprofits, right? There's nonprofits that are better resourced than others that can come in and say, hey, we're going to do this, and it doesn't matter that you're already doing this, you know what I mean? So I think that advice is really great. Like keep it simple. Don't duplicate efforts. And then keep in mind the context of where you're trying to work, right?

Lisa Goche [00:39:03] I think keep it simple in terms of regions that are not equipped to take on what I'm going to call the full meal deal. You know, so you can have the full meal deal. But, you know, there should also be some sort of entry point just to get started.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:39:19] Yeah, I totally agree. So, you know, we're going to switch gears here a little bit because SAGE is all about building gender equality and empowering women in the seafood industry. And I'm just delighted to have you on the show as a woman in the seafood and as someone who's been around, you know, for such a long time and has seen so much and seen so many changes throughout the sector, you know, throughout this time. So can you share, you know, one or two aspects of the seafood industry and its culture that may contribute to inequality in the sector? And what are some of the things that the industry can do to lessen these inequalities?

Lisa Goche [00:39:54] You know, I think there's lots of angles on that. Something that I want to say is, I mean, for one thing, things have really come a long ways. I also think that I've been empowered and supported by a lot of men in my career. So I really don't want to single out or alienate men too much. But I think that, you know, the facts are that when I started back in the 80s, it was heavily male dominated. And, you know, it was really hard as a woman. And I think, you know, I had to work to some extent, I'm sorry to say it's still true, a lot harder than men to get even just the same level of recognition or pay. Again has gotten way better. But a long time ago there was some really harsh behavior that is no longer tolerated. When I think about the number of times that I was verbally abused, threatened, etc., etc. and I reminded of an interview I did back in 2006 with Intrafish called Room at the Top, which was also about women in senior level, CEO, President, when I was president of Surefish, where I had years ago, men refused to take direction from a woman and refused to shake my hand or even acknowledge my existence. So and it happened in the plants and I had some of those things happen on board a vessel. But I'll tell you what, it makes it tough. I mean, I had to learn really quick when I was like 22 years old how to stand up and show no fear and stand up for myself. So I think there's some benefit to that. But I think that it's still true that you still go to meetings and there's a lot more women in companies and in meetings than there used to be women in senior positions a lot more. But it's still not uncommon to go to a meeting or a conference and be the only woman in the room or there to be one or two. Yes, there's a gender and diversity gap to some degree, and there's still a pay gap for sure. But I want to really talk about the credibility gap, which not a lot of people are focusing on. If you are working as hard or harder, accomplishing as much or more than some of your male colleagues, not only is there still an issue with pay disparities where the man's making more, but there's still this credibility thing where you're in meetings. And I just I still see it all the time where what men say seems to be automatically accepted as factual and credible. But then if a woman gives her opinion, takes a position, disagrees. Happens to me a lot. Suddenly we're playing 20 questions where I'm being asked by multiple men to justify my position or explain what I mean. And I just don't see that happening with men. Women are more frequently interrupted, talked over, what they're saying, dismissed. By no means am I trying to say this is all the time, but you know, it's enough to notice. So another thing I want to say, though, is it's a two way street because, you know, personally, I've never been one to think of my gender is the reason for a lot of these things. And even if it was, I didn't tend to bring it up. I instead would stand up for my position or getting a promotion or something like that by making the business case for my contributions. But I think that we women need to stand up more for ourselves because and speak up more, even if it's uncomfortable. Because, you know, we've been socialized to be worried about offending somebody. We tend to be more insecure. I will say that men are also insecure. They're also fearful that they have been socialized to speak up and assert themselves and we have not. So you

get men, for instance, who, even today, you know who will bark at someone or cut somebody off, maybe be very assertive, very domineering, and that man is admired. If a woman asserts herself, disagrees, you know, she's not admired, she's considered pushy, she's considered abrasive. And I heard one of your other guest mentioned this, too. You know, we don't always get support from other women either. So it's not just an issue with men that women can just be resented for being strong and opinionated and then women continue to be the primary caregivers. So I'm surprised how pervasive that still is. So I think that, you know, we need to start with women asserting themselves more kind of whether people like it or not. But I mean, you know, in a professional way, stand up for yourself. Don't always assume it's because you're a woman and sometimes people just don't get it. When I've gone to people before, like, you know, look at all the things I've accomplished, and it's not being reflected in my salary. Yeah. Thanks for all the praise, but there needs to be a monetary reward too. And sometimes it's been met with shock, you know, like, not, not, not an intentional just, you know, lack of awareness. And I've tried to offer opportunities to women before and I'll say, you know, I was disappointed that a lot of times they did not avail themselves of it, you know, and there might be lots of reasons for that, you know, work life balance. But, you know, sometimes, you know, I think we just need to step up a lot more, too.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:45:38] Yeah, that's a lot of great advice. And I think, you know, a lot of insight and advice for women who are potentially thinking about joining the industry in the future, too. So we kind of checked off two questions right there. So given these challenges that you've experienced throughout your career, have you ever tried to leave? I asked this question of everybody really like, why do you stay in the industry? And I have, you know, my reasons, but I'm curious to hear yours because you've got again, you've been here for a while. And I'm wondering, was there ever a point where you're like, okay, I got to get out of this or no?

Lisa Goche [00:46:10] Never, ever, ever, ever, never. You know, I got a degree in economics and so not even related. But, you know, I'm so not sorry. It's just been an incredible journey where I have an ever pervasive, I'm not even kidding, feeling of gratitude that all of the experiences and different sectors I've been able to work in and the opportunities that, yes, I have made for myself, but I have also been given and rewarded and supported. Traveling to all these different countries. I'm constantly humbled at the kindness of people and the way so many people are just living in such poverty, but they're so kind. I think that I've never stopped learning. I'm never going to stop learning. It's so globally important and globally impactful that I really want to continue to try to help make a positive difference and try to whatever little bit I can do to try to uplift everyone. And I need to take that sense of gratitude that I have and turn it into expressions of that by trying to help and empower. And I think there needs to be more gratitude in the world. I mean, you know, those of us living in the developed world have a lot of things pretty darn good and travel to some of the developing world where there is a lot of poverty and lack of education and women are really held back and you just kind of learn to appreciate those things. And I deeply appreciate my seafood career and I'm going to keep forging ahead, no doubt.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:47:53] Yeah, that's what it sounds like. It sounds like you're in it for life. You're a lifer.

Lisa Goche [00:47:58] You got it.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:47:59] Well, that's good, because I love what you said about gratitude. And I agree with you. I think, you know, I'm also very grateful and have oceans

of gratitude for this career and what this life has given me. And so I completely agree with you. And you mentioned also uplifting people. And that's what this podcast is really about, is of uplifting and amplifying diverse voices in the industry. So I'd like to give you the opportunity as we close out our conversation to uplift someone. So who would you like to uplift and why?

Lisa Goche [00:48:30] I'd like to say some words that I hope will be uplifting to everyone. You know, first of all, I want to give a shout out to my fellow female fishmongers, who've been in this for 20, 30, 40 years, including yourself, Julie, and all of the trials and tribulations we've been through to try to help pave the way because I think it has made a difference. I think things are easier, but they're by no means easy and there's a lot of work to be done. So let's be inclusive of everyone, women, people of color, men. Let's try to mentor everyone. I think that the participants in the seafood industry, as far as I understand, have declined over the years. It's not just women, it's also men. Well, let's face it, working on a farm or in a processing plant or on a boat is not that glamorous. But there is also, you know, you can get into it through other means, working in office, sales, marketing. But a lot of times that requires a lot of travel. So, you know, it's tough. And I think that I'd like to tell anyone, women who are in this industry or thinking about being in this industry, I just want to repeat, you know, that barriers are not always or perceived barriers are not always because you're a woman. Keep that in mind that yes, that very often is the case, but not always. Sometimes we just got to be a squeaker wheel, you know? And I stepped up for myself in so many ways. But one thing I never did is I put up with being underpaid. Please don't let this happen to you. I put up with being underpaid, which I think translated into the way women are socialized sometimes to undervalue ourselves. And so I don't want to see women in the industry are looking at it. It's an awesome, awesome path and please look at it as an actual career option, but speak up. If you don't feel confident, act like you are. Yeah. Really value yourself.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:50:46] Well, I think those are absolutely inspiring words. And I want to thank you, Lisa, for coming on the show and sharing such hard earned insight and really thoughtful and wonderful advice and thoughts. And I really, really appreciate you and your time and, you know, taking the time and effort to come on the show. So thank you so much.

Lisa Goche [00:51:08] Julie, I cannot thank you enough for our conversation. And I just want to say that, you know, it's a labor of love for me to talk about the seafood industry and all of the different aspects of it. The good, bad, and the ugly. And it's really been a pleasure to be able to speak with you today.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:51:29] The pleasure is all mine. Thank you for tuning in to 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.

Speaker 3 [00:51:45] 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.