

The Conch Podcast Season 2 - Sam GrimleyFINAL_01.mp3

Julie Kuchepatov [00:00:05] Hello. My name is Julie Kuchepatov and I'm the host of this podcast, The Conch. We are chugging 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 mixing it up a bit and welcoming a dear friend to join us in conversation. Sam Grimley! Sam is the Executive Director of Sea Pact, a collaboration of ten seafood distributors collectively making a difference in global seafood production. Welcome and thank you, Sam, for joining me today on The Conch. Let's get down to business.

Sam Grimley [00:00:46] Thanks, Julie. Thanks for having me.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:00:48] Yeah. So, you know, this podcast is to uplift and amplify some incredible women, and you're the first dude we've had on the show, so I'm really excited to have you here, and I'm really grateful that you agreed to join me.

Sam Grimley [00:01:00] Thanks, Julie. I'm honored to be here. And I'm also honored that you referred to me as your friend, too. It's nice that we're more than just colleagues because I consider you a true friend, so I appreciate that.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:01:09] Well, of course. I mean, you and I have spent time together traveling the world. For a little context, you and I were in a fellowship together, which was, remind me, was it a six month fellowship? I can't even remember. But we were in a fellowship together, so we've had some good times traveling and getting to know each other really well. And of course, you're a friend.

Sam Grimley [00:01:28] Well, thanks. I appreciate that. And that was one of the more memorable experiences that I had in my career was that fellowship and traveling, spending time with you and the others in that group.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:01:36] Yeah, me too. I really hope that that fellowship gets reincarnated because it was super helpful. And to be honest, I credit that time spent with you and with the other people in the cohort as a really important point in my career, honestly.

Sam Grimley [00:01:51] Same. Exactly.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:01:52] So this season of The Conch is really for some reason Sea Pact-heavy, which we just recently had Stacy Schultz, who's one of the advisory council members of Sea Pact. And you're going to tell us all about Sea Pact, so I want to know more about that, of course. And prior to that, though, you were the deputy division director/markets program director for North America at Sustainable Fisheries Partnership, which is SFP for short. And I'll just refer to it as SFP from now on. So you were there for nine years and during your tenure you oversaw the implementation of SFP's five year industry leadership strategy, which included strengthening industry engagement within SFP supply chain roundtables, which is another thing I want to talk about and other precompetitive efforts. So can you give us a little bit of your background and how you ended up where you are today?

Sam Grimley [00:02:45] Sure, it's a good question. So I have to probably start at the very beginning. I live in Rhode Island. I grew up in Rhode Island. Rhode Island, if you're not familiar, is the Ocean State. And I grew up in a commercial fishing family. My grandmother owned a fish market here in the town I grew up in. My grandfather was a commercial fisherman. My uncle still fishes commercially from time to time out of Point Judith, Rhode Island. So I grew up around seafood and it always got very interested and passionate about it. I fished commercially a little bit in high school and college. And then eventually found myself at the University of Rhode Island where I was specifically went there to be involved in fisheries. And as I was there and started to learn more around how market tactics can play a role in driving sustainability, whether through market, through consumer demand or consumer preferences and things like that, I started to pay more attention to sustainability and how to address sustainability issues using kind of market pressures and leverage. I left URI and I ended up my first job out of grad school was at the Gulf Marine Research Institute working on their sustainable seafood team there. I spent a couple of years there heavily focused on promoting local seafood, local responsible seafood caught within New England or farm raised within New England. And after that, I left to go to Sustainable Fisheries Partnership and spent the nine years there. And I think the common theme for me through kind of all my career stops, which there haven't been that many since grad school, GMRI which I loved my time there and then SFP, I absolutely loved my time there and now I'm at Sea Pact, was this idea that working with industry to address these issues as opposed to just comes down to the fix versus avoid philosophy. And I'm in the fix camp where, you know, if there's a problem, I truly believe that you should try to find a solution to it and address that problem. And the only way to do that within seafood is working through the industry. And that I had always said that it would take the absolute perfect job to get me to leave SFP and that happened to be Sea Pact, which is where I am now.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:04:45] That's great. And you know, I have to clarify or maybe mention again that SAGE, Seafood and Gender Equality, did receive a grant from Sea Pact. So I'm very thankful, you know, that you are there now to kind of steward this grant program that they have here and that you have there, rather. And I think we're going to hear a little bit more about it as we get more into our conversation. So that was really great. And do people that live in Rhode Island, are you called "Rhoadies?"

Sam Grimley [00:05:12] Yes, we're called lots of things. But some people do refer to us as "Rhoadies" from time to time. It is often called Little Rhody, being the smallest state in the country.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:05:22] Okay, so you're a little Rhoadie then, that's what we're going to go with. And I didn't know it was the Ocean State either. How many miles the coastline is there?

Sam Grimley [00:05:30] You know, if you looked at the state you went directly across, I think it's something like, you know, I don't know, like maybe 20 miles wide, which doesn't sound like a lot. But there's a giant, giant bay that splits Rhode Island and half called Narragansett Bay. And so and I have no idea what the total shoreline is, but it's pretty massive when you start to go up into the bay and there's islands in the bay and things like that. So ends up being pretty significant even though it is such a tiny little state.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:05:55] I'm just actually joking because I remember I was at a meeting somewhere, I think it was I want to say Connecticut or something, but it was like

so tiny. The shoreline was tiny, tiny. It wasn't even I don't even know, like not even 20 miles probably, right?

Sam Grimley [00:06:08] Yeah. We don't talk about Connecticut.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:06:10] Okay. So let's move on then. I just am fascinated because actually I've never been to Rhode Island, so I'd love to come and visit you sometime and go fishing with you because I know you're out there.

Sam Grimley [00:06:20] Yeah, we have to get you out here. It would be awesome.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:06:22] Yeah, I would love to. I plan on it. So I had mentioned that we recently had Stacy Schulz from Fortune Fish and Gourmet and, you know, as a council member of Sea Pact on the show. And so some of our listeners might already be familiar with Sea Pact, but I'd love to hear a little bit more. As I mentioned, I received a grant from Sea Pact. So could you tell us a little bit more about your programs? And, you know, now that you're new there, I mean, new ish, right? What's your vision for the organization and your efforts, these collaborative efforts that you guys have going on there?

Sam Grimley [00:06:51] Yeah, thanks. Yeah. So Sea Pact is made up of, you mentioned at the top, but it's made up of ten leading North American seafood companies that are dedicated to driving stewardship and continuous improvement of seafood sustainability across global seafood supply chains. So they're largely representative of the middle of the supply chain. We don't have any, you know, retailer members or anything like that. And the organization was formed about nine years ago. And just a bit more background about myself. I ended up when I was with Sustainable Fisheries Partnership, I served as an environmental advisor to Sea Pact since it was formed. So even though I've only been in the executive director role since the first part of this year, I've been working with the organization for roughly nine years. And it was formed because these individual middle of the supply chain companies were really trying to tackle sustainability on their own, and they realized that even though they might be competitors in certain parts of the markets, they all had the same challenges in front of them. And they realized that these challenges were pretty big and they couldn't solve these issues alone. So it made more sense to collaborate with a potential competitor and to try to tackle these major issues together. Sea Pact really stands on two legs or has two programs, that being its grant funding program. And then the other is the collective action. So Sea Pact gives out annual grants to different projects and initiatives that are aligned with their own strategic priorities. So in your case, they did fund SAGE at the end of last year, and that was because for them, in their view, social responsibility is incredibly important and they really admired the work that you were doing and felt like it was a good initiative to support. So we've funded everything from fishing gear research to aquaculture projects and things like that across the board. And you can go on our website and see kind of a list of all the projects that we funded over the years. The other piece that Sea Pact engages on is this collective action piece. So it's one thing to fund individual projects and grants to create initiative, but you have these ten companies that are engaged and want to collaborate on different initiatives. So in addition to that grant funding, they have developed work plans around their strategic priorities. We actually have an in-person meeting next week where we will be taking a look at those work plans, rolling them out, firming them up a bit. And it's really around our key strategic priority areas. Those areas are responsible aquaculture and aquaculture education, sector-based approaches to sustainability, including supporting initiatives like Target 75 led by SFP, addressing social responsibility, and then having aligned sustainable sourcing requirements, and then also helping support the Sea Pact model itself. And when I say

that, I don't mean necessarily seeing, you know, a Sea Pact Europe pop up or a Sea Pact Latin America pop up. But really looking at how can the middle of the supply chain collaborate together and address some of these issues and can Sea Pact help share some of the lessons learned that we've had over the nine years of existence with these other industry stakeholders that are looking to collaborate. So we're having some discussions with some groups down in Mexico. We're having discussions with Wakao at Seafood Legacy in Japan around how we can share information. And eventually that the idea being that, you know, these precompetitive collaborations that are emerging in these other markets can collaborate together to address some of these issues around the world.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:10:10] So it's not necessarily that you're going to export Sea Pact's model to Japan or Latin America. They're just looking for kind of your experiences, your best practices, your expertise, what you can share with them about how they can implement their own analogous model in their own region. Right?

Sam Grimley [00:10:29] Exactly. No markets are identical, right? So you have to account for market differences, the cultural differences. And so we're not trying to push replication of Sea Pact, but we are sitting on some pretty good knowledge from nine years of experience on what works. And we've also, I mean, we've made mistakes too, and we can say, hey, that might not work. We learned that the hard way. So yeah, that's the idea. And then eventually, you know, helping those groups become established and then identify alignment in areas that we want to work on and issues that we want to address.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:11:01] Yeah. So my next question is more of a general question about the success and the interesting precompetitive collaborations in the seafood industry. But before I ask that, I want to understand like how do you track and measure the success of Sea Pact in your own efforts there? I mean, is that through, I guess, the grant piece I get because you're getting grant reports from people that you give grants to. But the collective impact piece and this is a new question, so it might be difficult to answer right off the top of your head. I'm just curious, like, how do you measure some of these things or kind of account for some of these metrics and impacts that you're making? Does that make sense, that question?

Sam Grimley [00:11:40] Yeah, that does and it's a really good question. And I also think that's the million dollar question. Everybody wants to demonstrate their progress. And, you know, I think for Sea Pact, it's been an evolution for the organization. When Sea Pact started out nine years ago, they were exclusively just funding, funding projects. And those projects, you know, there were criteria around what they had to be and it was largely around like addressing sustainability in a very broad overall sense. But the project didn't always align with the sustainability priorities of the Sea Pact members. So as time went on, they tightened up that project selection process a bit more to make sure that we were getting proposals that are much more aligned with the sustainability priorities of the members themselves. And as they're going through that and they started thinking a bit more, the member companies started thinking a bit more about what the strategic priorities were that they wanted to focus on. They spent a good amount of time coming up with that list that I run through of what those priorities are. And now we're at the point where we are starting to build out work plans around each of those strategic priorities beyond just funding a grant that aligns with the strategic priorities. And in those work plans, we are aiming to have milestones and targets that we want to hit. And I think that's the best way that you can demonstrate progress over time, is you need to have a robust work plan with the targets and goals that you want to hit. And we're right there, and that's what we'll be talking about next week in our meeting for about two days and then making those work

plans public and then reporting out progress against those work plans. It's not rocket science, but it is challenging because you do have to get, you know, you have ten companies, you have to get them on the same page and have them see. And I feel very fortunate with the Sea Pact members. They're very forward thinking. They understand the value and the benefit of this approach. And so that's where we're headed.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:13:23] Yeah, that's a great answer. And I think one of the things that I've kind of experienced or noticed throughout my career is in the seafood industry specifically, is that there's a lot of issues around confidentiality and trade secrets, but the seafood industry itself is really, really rife with precompetitive collaborations. So clearly these companies have all gotten together at some point and made these decisions to share information that they might not normally share and be open to exploring solutions that might require them to open some trade secrets. I'm not really sure. So I'm curious. You know, I can think of like three off the top of my head. Other precompetitive collaborations in the seafood space like SeaBOS and the Global Tuna Alliance is another one that comes to mind. So why do you think these are so popular in the seafood sector, these precompetitive collaborations? And I mean clearly they're working like, but what does the industry see in them and what do they get out of them? I guess what's the one thing in your mind and maybe you can speak specifically to Sea Pact or just kind of a general trend, but what makes a successful precompetitive collaboration in your mind?

Sam Grimley [00:14:29] Yeah, that's a good question. And precompetitive collaborations, I think, have evolved over the years in the sustainable seafood. So you think about the same way fishery improvement projects have evolved too, you know, from largely fishery improvement projects or FIPs were largely run by NGOs. They've transitioned more to being industry led now. And one of the reasons why I really enjoyed working with Sustainable Fisheries Partnership previously was they developed the idea of this, you know, supply chain roundtable model, which is bringing together the big middle the supply chain players that are focused on a specific sector. So whether it's, you know, global squid or whether it's, you know, fresh tuna or Indonesian snapper grouper. And they said basically, look, you're all dependent on all the fish in this sector as your raw material, not necessarily, you know, the individual fishery. Yes. You're responsible for or dependent on your own sourcing. But if you improve the sector and you lift all the fisheries in that sector to a higher level of sustainability, it's going to benefit everyone. And so I think that made a lot of sense. And that's really where I started to see the value in precompetitive collaborations. At the same time, working with Sea Pact, you know, I mentioned it before and why those initial six founding companies came together was they were being pulled in a lot of different directions. They were being asked to participate in a lot of different initiatives and individually they couldn't do it all on their own. And so the benefit of being involved in a precompetitive collaboration is allows for resource sharing across the companies, allows for greater capacity for tackling these issues. It unifies the industry and which is, I mean, let's be honest, it's a fairly fragmented industry if you think about it. And so it allows the unification of the industry to address major issues. I think the keys to a successful precompetitive collaboration come down to having a solid work plan with targets that the participating companies can agree upon. And, you know, making sure that you're moving with that work plan year after year and the work plan is continuously improving.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:16:25] Yeah, that's a great tip. And I'm saying that as someone who's trying to organize a precompetitive collaboration around gender equality so I can use all the insights and all the tips I can get. And by the way, you are a really great advisor to me on an informal level, so I'm really, really thankful for that. That insight is really great

and I think, you know, what would be really cool is, hey, you know, now that I think about it, I remember, you know, recently at the Seafood Expo Global in Barcelona, previously for many years that was held in Brussels, you were on a panel with several other precompetitive collaborations, specifically like I mentioned, the Global Tuna Alliance, to discuss a meta collaboration. And I don't know if you want to talk about that now, but I'm interested in is this the trend where we're trending, where we're going forward is to kind of think about larger and larger collaborations, or was this just a think tank exercise?

Sam Grimley [00:17:18] Yeah, it was a little bit of both. I don't think anyone wants to collaborate, just to collaborate. I think I think if you can achieve something. And so what was interesting for me, like I stepped into this role and one of the first things I did was go to Boston and for Seafood Expo North America. I went in to Boston, as in my new Sea Pact position, thinking like, all right, fresh frozen tuna is an important priority sector for Sea Pact members. I need to talk to Tom Pickerell, head of the Global Tuna Alliance, and I need to figure out how we can work better together. You know, I had a whole list of targets that I needed to meet with in Boston, and Tom happened to be the first one that I met with. And I sat down and I said, Yeah, you know, I want to talk Martin Exel with competitive. And there was a whole list of folks that I want to talk to and figure out ways we could work together to achieve common objectives. And Tom was the one that said, Oh, well, these precompetitive collaborations have been having discussions around, you know, we're calling it a meta collaboration or meta coalition, you know, and I think that's about kind of as far as they got because they're all really smart people and they want to make sure that they're not just collaborating to collaborate, but they're trying to find the kind of common goals and targets and objectives that they want to reach and figure out if there is a way to do that. And so right now it's fairly informal, you know, kind of ongoing calls and conversations to figure that out a bit more. And it's going to take a bit of work. But the panel that you referenced in Barcelona, I thought was really interesting because we did have those groups. We also had Helen from the World Benchmarking Alliance on as well too. And, you know, talking about ways that precompetitive collaborations can monitor their progress and things like that. So that's all kind of connected and tied together. And I think it's from my perspective, it's where the industry should be looking at is how to broaden that collaboration.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:19:01] Yeah, I'm going to be watching that closely and maybe someday I'll also be a part of this meta collaboration.

Sam Grimley [00:19:07] We would love to have you.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:19:08] Please, please invite me.

Sam Grimley [00:19:10] Well, that is the funny thing. I had a few people reach out to me afterwards and they're like, How do we get involved? For me, it's such an ad hoc thing. It was kind of put together and still there is no formalization. It's not intended to be the next Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions or anything like that. You know, it's still very loose and ongoing and there is always room for discussion with others.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:19:34] That's great. Yeah, I'll definitely keep my eyes peeled about that. And like I said, you and I talk to each other very often, so I'll also be pestering you for more info, I'm sure, in the future. So you mentioned when you were at GMRI, the Gulf of Maine Research Institute. Your eyes were opened a little bit or a lot a bit, maybe, to the kind of power of the industry in driving sustainability in fisheries. And, you know, I ask this question, a lot of people that kind of straddle the bridge between working with industry and

working at an NGO like yourself. So can you give us some tips, maybe five tips, maybe less, for working with the seafood industry? Like what's something that I should know coming from a nonprofit that wants to engage with the industry and use their leverage to bring change in this sector?

Sam Grimley [00:20:20] Yeah, it's a good question. And, you know, obviously no industry person is the like, but there are some, you know, my own internal approach to working with industry stakeholders. I, you know, kind of over the years I have that list of five things that I try to adhere to and I think it's been helpful. So I think first off, need to listen. Don't just wait to talk. And I see that all the time where a stakeholder is trying to make a point to industry and they're not actually hearing what industry is saying because they're so eager to make their important point, which is understandable. But you really need to listen. And the only way you're going to be successful working with someone or collaborating with them is if you understand their perspective and their point of view, you know, and when it is your time to talk, be direct and be honest. Don't hold back. Be honest and be direct. And that's, you know, the advice there. I think you also need to consider what motivates industry and what are the incentives if you're trying to bring them along or trying to encourage them to do something, you know, is it a short supply of raw material? Is it minimizing brand risk? Is it they want to position themselves as being better at sustainability than one of their competitors. Think about what are those motivating factors and what are those incentives? And that's going to help you be able to work closer with them. You have to try to at least try, it might not always be possible, but to move at the speed of business. A Lot of times, you know, and I'm guilty of this where, you know, I overanalyze things and I let perfection pull back being good enough and, you know, business move so fast and so quick that if you're coming up with solutions, they need to be applicable to the industry. It might be a perfect solution to something, but it's not something that the industry can grab onto and run with because it doesn't fit with how their operation works. So you move at the speed of business and make sure your solutions are industry orientated. The sustainable seafood movement is a challenging world to live in and we are hit with bad news on a daily basis.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:22:20] Yes.

Sam Grimley [00:22:21] And it can beat you down hearing negative stories day in and day out. It's okay to celebrate some wins. You know, it's okay to say, Hey, we did a good job with it. It's like, you know, you can celebrate the small wins and that's okay. You know, I think there needs to be more of that, especially, you know, in celebrating some of the good things that industry does. And then finally, I would say that industry has more resources than just funding. Industry members have loads of institutional knowledge about how supply chains and markets work. You think about their understanding of their own sourcing, thinking about their networks and their contacts and the relationships they have. Use those when you're working with industry. Don't just say like, okay, well, we need to come up with money so we can do this initiative. Think about the other tangible things that industry can bring to the table when you're collaborating with them or working with them. Those are kind of be my five that have helped me work closely with industry over the years.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:23:17] That's really awesome and I thank you so much for sharing that really hard earned wisdom because for me, the one I've never heard before, I think, is the moving at the speed of business. And I totally get that kind of when I think about it because they are moving on different timeframes and especially when you think about they're working with a product that could be perishable, you know, I mean, essentially they are literally working so fast and so furious. And I'm sure now that we've had, you know, this

kind of two years of global supply chain disruption, it's gotten even more intense. So you definitely have to be ready, willing and able to kind of pivot and be really, really flexible, right?

Sam Grimley [00:23:58] Yeah, absolutely.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:23:59] So you just mentioned the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions, and we haven't actually talked about the Alliance on this podcast yet. And I will definitely have Mariah Boyle, who is the Executive Director of the Conservation Alliance, on the show probably next season, because I think this is the last recording for season two, if you can believe that. It's crazy. And you're on the Advisory Council for the Conservation Alliance, and I don't want to talk about that right now, but I do want to ask you about another board position that you have at an organization called Eating with the Ecosystem, and that's a small nonprofit with a unique mission. I'm reading this from the website. So a small nonprofit with a unique mission to promote a place-based approach to sustaining New England's wild seafood. So tell me a bit about this Eating with the Ecosystem because it's a new one for me.

Sam Grimley [00:24:49] Yeah. So for me personally, I'm very passionate about local foods and specifically local seafood, but also recognizing that, you know, seafood is a global commodity and it's essentially a global market. And so, you know, and the industry is dependent on sourcing globally, but Eating with the Ecosystem is a small nonprofit here in New England. It's led by a woman named Kate Masury. And what she's done is really focused on promoting locally caught fish, as well as some of the lesser known or underutilized species that we harvest here in New England throughout the mid-Atlantic off the Eastern Seaboard of the U.S. Really cool things working with some of the top chefs and looking at ways to prepare, so doing kind of in-home classes, even during covid, they were working with some chefs that they were doing these Zoom meetings where the chef was teaching people how to prepare the fish that they might not be familiar with. But then also they've done things like they've worked with the local food policy group here in Rhode Island and have set up seafood donations to serve underserved communities to help them get access to fresh fish that's caught locally. So I just have a tremendous amount of respect for the organization, and it's essentially a one woman show there. She's a staff of one. And so I completely understand, given Sea Pact has one employee and it's myself. So I have a ton of respect for her and the work she's done, and she's done a really great job kind of elevating consumer awareness of locally caught products here in the northeast U.S. So I'm really happy to be involved in the organization.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:26:17] Well, that's an amazing shout out and it sounds like a really amazing organization. I also am a staff of one. And so I'm going to put the proposal on the floor that we start a precompetitive collaboration with organizations with only one employee. How does that sound?

Sam Grimley [00:26:32] Yes, I love it. Do you know how to fix your website?

Julie Kuchepatov [00:26:35] Yeah. How do you?

Sam Grimley [00:26:36] Do you know how to write a grant proposal? Yes. Do you know how to facilitate a meeting? Yes. All right. Come work with what we're doing now.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:26:42] Yeah, literally. Are you an IT person? Great. You're on. So that's going to be our next thing. So can you quickly, just for my own knowledge. So you

mentioned underutilized species in New England. So like in my mind, the main species and I'm from the West Coast, right? So the main species I think of when I think about New England are lobster, maybe bluefin tuna. And that's I don't know, I feel bad. I don't know any others. I don't think.

Sam Grimley [00:27:09] Cod.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:27:10] Cod. Okay. That's good. Yeah. What are some underutilized ones?

Sam Grimley [00:27:15] So we land a lot of black sea bass, which are just absolutely delicious eating. You know, ten years ago, we didn't see as many up here in New England. But with the rising water temperatures, we've seen that stock shift northward a bit. Scup are another one. They're a fairly small fish, but they have a nice white flaky filet. There's quite a few out there. You know, when I was working at the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, we did a lot of work on things like Atlantic mackerel, promoting redfish, which is a deep water fish that's caught with haddock and cod and some of those are more mainstream popular species. So yeah, so there's quite a few. I mean, you can get, you know, there's been some work done. We have an invasive crab species here that they've been trying to figure out how they can turn that into a culinary trend here as well too. So, yeah, there's a lot of work going on to make sure that, you know, people locally are buying and supporting local producers and harvesters.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:28:06] Yeah. And on that note, I mean, I'll also give a shout out to Jen Levin, who was on season one of this podcast. And you and Jen worked together on the same program at the Gulf of Maine Research Institute. So Jen has gone on to found True Fin Seafood, right. And that's another organization. It sounds like, you know, there are business but they're very similar to Eating with the Ecosystem in terms of promoting local seafood, working with culinary professionals and promoting kind of under-recognized species.

Sam Grimley [00:28:35] Yep, exactly. Yeah. A ton of respect for Jen and have learned so much from her from, you know, the two plus years we worked together and we still to this day remain friends and talk quite often.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:28:45] Wait only two years?

Sam Grimley [00:28:47] Yeah, I was only at GMRI for two years before I went to SFP.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:28:50] Okay, so I've known you since GMRI, but that doesn't sound like a very long time. You quickly abandoned ship. I'm just joking. Oh, I got to get outta here.

Sam Grimley [00:29:01] Not true.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:29:02] I know, I know.

Sam Grimley [00:29:03] Once I find a job, I tend to stick with it. But it was only because SFP came along and I was really impressed with SFP's approach to improvement as opposed to avoiding issues.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:29:14] I'm totally joking, I'm totally joking with you. Yeah. And so we're going to switch gears here. And, you know, you mentioned working with Jen. You learned so much from her in the very short time that you guys were working together. And again, I'm just joking. But again, I mentioned that you and I talk to each other quite often. And you mentioned that after you heard the episode with Adriana Sanchez in season one, I think it was episode four, where she talks about a lack of women mentors in the space. You mentioned to me that you felt really bad about that and that was kind of the impetus for getting you on the show because I want to talk to you about that and because you've had some great women mentors in your life and in your career. And so I want to talk about that. You know, you can just feel free to pepper those experiences in as you feel comfortable. But I wanted to kind of ask you, I collaborated with the Packard Foundation on an article about seafood supply chains and women's roles at each kind of part in these supply chains. And you were brought in to talk a little bit, and you were quoted as saying, I'm going to read the quote, "The seafood industry would benefit with more women in leadership and decision making roles. Sea Pact wants to be involved in issues leading to transformational change and helping to establish a dialog on gender equality and seafood is one clear way we can help strengthen the industry," unquote. So besides building gender equality and getting more women in leadership roles, which is what SAGE is working on, right, with support of Sea Pact and others. What are other examples of transformational change that you think the industry and the sustainable seafood movement need to advance?

Sam Grimley [00:30:43] Yeah, good question. And again, I kind of go back to the evolution of Sea Pact itself, right? So I think they went from being somewhat transactional and they were funding individual projects, which again, I'm not knocking that. I think it was a really good start to being or, and this leads into my first suggestion for ways the industry can be more transformational and to being more proactive. Like industry is constantly responding to requests from NGOs. It's constantly responding to requests from their customers. And I think quite often they're on their heels when they're trying to address issues. So I think one way that the industry can be more transformational is to be more proactive, you know, and that's not to say that that's not happening, but I think there's an opportunity for the broader industry to be more proactive in addressing issues. And then I think the other piece of it there's an opportunity to be more solution orientated. You know, when you're getting those asks to be involved with an initiative or to this NGO over here or to meet this customer's demands over here. There is an opportunity for you to design a solution that fits with your business and aligns with your business, as opposed to letting someone outside of your business design that solution for you. And I think that we need to see more of that in the industry if the industry is going to be more transformational when it comes to addressing sustainability and social responsibility.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:32:06] That's great. I totally agree. And I think I honestly have nothing to add because I totally agree with you. So this is a question that I ask everybody who comes on here. So SAGE - Seafood and Gender Equality is about building gender equality and empowering women in the seafood industry. So can you share, you know, in your experience or what you may have observed 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? So we've talked about what they can do, kind of in general, what they maybe should do to, you know, address other things, but specifically around lessening kind of these inequalities in the sector. I'm interested in your thoughts.

Sam Grimley [00:32:46] Yeah. I mean, I learned a lot from you. Yeah. And so, you know, I think one of the statistics that immediately jumps to mind is this is one that I've heard you tell, is that, you know, only four of the top 100 companies have women CEOs. And then but the global workforce in the seafood industry is split 50/50. And so I think right there, that shows you one of the challenges that the industry is facing. So things like that, in terms of what's to be done, look to leaders like yourself and work with leaders like SAGE and women in the seafood industry. I think that's the only way forward. You're the ones that are leading the charge on changing things. I think, you know, it's going to come down to collaborating with experts like yourself to address this type of stuff. And again, I think just working with you and talking to you about I've become more self aware kind of in how I'm doing individually, even things like considering like do you have a diverse panel or is it a bunch of like guys on a panel? You know, is there any diversity and equality on the panel. There's small things like that can actually go a long way in helping someone, you know, find their voice and contribute to the work that's being done. I think you can also look to other sectors and see what's happening on this issue in other sectors and how other sectors are addressing equality. And then that would be my what I would suggest for the industry to do to address those kind of inequalities.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:34:08] Yeah, those are really great tips and I think, you know, it's good advice and I think it's important. And that's why I asked you this question earlier about what drives industry to do something because I get a lot of different, and I realize industry is not a monolith, right? I mean, okay, I realize that. But, you know, speaking in monolithic terms, like what drives them to participate in this, that or the other initiative is really interesting. And I don't think, you know, in my mind, I don't have the answer to that. And other than kind of building the trust and making the case. And so that case might be different depending on who you're talking to. And so I mentioned, you know, we've got several things that we're leading up to here at SAGE and I will need you know, industry's, absolutely need industry's participation and guidance and support on these things because that is where they are, the ones that need to lead the change, honestly. So, I mean, you agree with that?

Sam Grimley [00:34:59] Yeah, absolutely. 100%. And again, you know, we've talked a bit about this in terms of Sea Pacts's relationship with SAGE and it's yes, we provided you with a grant to conduct a certain project, but it's bigger than that. It's got to lead to a collaboration. It's got to lead to strong engagement. It's not a "we gave SAGE, you know, an annual grant" at the end of the grant, "okay, the work's all done. We move on."

Julie Kuchepatov [00:35:22] Right.

Sam Grimley [00:35:22] We know that's not the case. We know that it's going to take more than that. So 100% agree with you.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:35:27] Yeah. And that kind of hearkens back to what you said around the industry has more than just money to give, right, and so time and just insights, you know, and that institutional knowledge that you mentioned is also super valuable. And so, you know, you and I have talked about this. I don't know if the other Sea Pact members know about this, but, you know, really just engaging with them above and beyond, just taking the money and doing something in my own office. I mean, that's not what we're here for. We're here for a relationship. And like you said, to build transformational change. So I really appreciate our collaboration.

Sam Grimley [00:36:00] Likewise.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:36:01] So this podcast, as you may know, is to inspire women working or thinking about starting a career in the seafood sector. And so what advice would you give to a woman already in the business or thinking about starting a career in this exciting sector?

Sam Grimley [00:36:15] You touched on it earlier and the idea of finding a mentor, you know, and I think that would be the only advice that I could offer up. And again, everyone's in a different situation, but I personally feel incredibly fortunate to, you know, when I was in grad school, I studied under Dr. Cathy Roheim. She's a well-known natural resource economist, and she was the one who got me thinking about things like consumer preferences and consumer demand and how you can use those to drive sustainability improvements. And then, you know, when I left there, I went to work for Jen Levin, who you mentioned. And again, I only worked with Jen for two years, but Jen and I remain really close friends to this day. And I still learn so much from her. You know, even now, we had dinner in Boston during the Seafood Expo and just hearing everything that she's doing with True Fin and learning a ton from her there. And then finally, you know, at my last job, I worked under Kathryn Novak for nine years. And just, you know, she's an incredible person. She is so sharp, so smart and really just able to get people to move forward with things and a very quiet, calming demeanor to her. And, you know, I was really fortunate to work under these people. And you don't necessarily have to work for someone to have them be their mentor. It's you know, you can actually sit back and observe them, watch them. You can learn a lot from select individuals, just from observation. And then you build that relationship and, you know, no one goes up to someone and says, "Hey, will you mentor me?" For me, it's all about relationships. And I think it's the same thing. You got to start to build those relationships and build out your kind of network leadership approach.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:37:52] Yeah. What's that?

Sam Grimley [00:37:56] That's sort of my, well it's not my own individual approach, but the idea that leadership doesn't need to be a top down, heavy handed approach, even if you are the boss. And I think you can get a lot more done by developing strong relationships with people. And then they understand your perspective. They understand what you're trying to do, and they're more willing to work with you and support you and help you move forward with your efforts. And again, you and I were really fortunate enough to have gone through that fellowship under the Conservation Alliance, and that's where that was ingrained in us. And, you know, I know you have taken it forward with everything you're doing now. And for me, it's how I live my professional life. You know, I'm not a top down person. I'm you know, "Hey, we can get through this. Let's figure out a way." and but that comes down to having a strong relationship with someone.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:38:45] Yeah. And strong teams, right? Because, you know, if you have a strong team, you've got strong relationships and then you can get more work done honestly and have a better time doing it, which I think is also

Sam Grimley [00:38:56] Very important.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:38:57] Absolutely critical. So those legends, ladies that you mentioned, they're all amazing ladies. In fact, I do know Dr. Cathy Roheim from some work I did a long time ago at the Wild Salmon Center. So you have been absolutely fortunate to have some incredible women that have shared their wealth of knowledge with you. And so I can only hope that, you know, you continue to do the same, right. Going down the line.

And you did you know, this is essentially you uplifted them. But I'm going to ask you, because I always give this opportunity at the end of our conversation. Again, this podcast is one of the main ways that we uplift and amplify diverse voices in the seafood industry and so is there anyone else that you would like to uplift and who and why?

Sam Grimley [00:39:37] Yeah, again, I'm incredibly fortunate because I've worked alongside some of the really smart, intelligent, powerful women in the seafood industry, whether it's someone like Han Han and all the work she's been doing in China or even my former colleague, Carmen Gonzalez Valles, I mean, she's literally a force to be reckoned with at SFP and all the work she's been doing there. But there's one person I do want to give a shout out to, and that's Erin Taylor with FishWise. She's an incredible critical thinker. She's an excellent listener. And I'm not sure if she knows this or not, but when she talks, I pay very close attention and appreciate all the kind of wisdom and guidance that she shares and in our conversations. She serves as an environmental advisor to Sea Pact in her role FishWise, and Sea Pact wouldn't be where it is today without her voice and guidance over the years. And again, you know, I've only been in this role for a few months now, but I worked next to her as an advisor and we need more people like her leading efforts within the seafood world.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:40:36] Thank you so much for that incredibly amazing shout out to an incredibly amazing woman, Erin Taylor. And I totally agree with you. I just really admire Erin and I will definitely also have her on the show at some point because she, like you said, does have amazing insight and has been part of this movement and really, really driving impact for a really long time. So we're wrapping up here and so I have a question about how can we find Sea Pact online? And then is there a grant procedure and are you accepting grant proposals right now or how does that work? Maybe just give us a little idea about how you submit for a grant.

Sam Grimley [00:41:12] Yeah. So we're on Seapact.org is the website and then we're also on LinkedIn for social media. And so Sea Pact, the way it works is for our grants, we're at a biannual funding cycle. And so next week during our strategic planning working days that we have coming up at that meeting we'll be selecting some proposals to fund, but we are taking letters of interest now for our next funding cycle, which will be in October of this year. So the way it works is you submit a very brief letter of interest and then if we feel that the letter of interest meets the strategic priorities and the Sea Pact members approve it, we ask you to submit a full proposal. Those full proposals are reviewed at our annual meeting, which will be in October, and then we select those and provide grant funding to those once that are selected.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:41:58] That's great. Well, thank you so much, Sam. I think we're at the end of our time here. And I just wanted to say again, thank you so much for your friendship, for your leadership in this space, for coming on and being so open and forthright with your vast knowledge and tips. I mean, you've given us the best tips in this episode, so I really, really appreciate it. And I can't wait until we can hang out again.

Sam Grimley [00:42:19] Thank you, Julie. I really appreciate you having me and thank you for all of your efforts. And again, you know, I feel very fortunate to have you as a friend and a colleague along in this kind of crazy world. So keep up the great work and thanks again.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:42:32] Yeah, you bet. 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 [00:42:47] 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.