Harvesters Welcomes New Member

Harvesters is thrilled to welcome the Fishermen’s Marketing Association (FMA) as our newest member. FMA is composed of trawl vessel owners, skippers, and deckhands delivering groundfish and shrimp to buyers and processors from San Pedro, CA to Bellingham, WA. FMA marks the 17th fishing organization to join Harvesters.

FMA is a great addition to Harvesters’ diverse and influential membership. FMA advocates at the state and federal level to ensure that U.S. fisheries policies and regulations promote sustainable resources and businesses. FMA is also actively engaged in promoting seafood markets and educating local communities and consumers about sustainable seafood.

Travis Hunter is FMA’s Board President and Brad Pettinger serves as their representative to Harvesters.
Board Member Bob Dooley Testifies on the Hill

Harvesters’ board member and longtime commercial fisherman, Bob Dooley, was invited to testify about the reauthorization of the Magnuson Stevens Act at a House Natural Resources oversight hearing this past spring. The hearing, entitled “The State of Fisheries”, was presided over by HNR’s Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife Chairman Jared Huffman (D-CA).

Bob’s extensive history as a fisherman, captain, and vessel owner allows him to speak from a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing the commercial fishing industry. During his testimony, Bob discussed the many successes of the MSA and emphasized the need to protect its core conservation tenants. He also touched on the rising costs of the observer program, the impacts of climate change on fisheries, and the need for robust NOAA funding.

“The core conservation tenants of the MSA are proven,” Bob emphasized in his remarks. “MSA is working as we intended it to work...I hope that if you take away one thing from my testimony today, it’s that we’re seeing results. As we improve data collection through innovative technologies and methods, as we improve accountability in all sectors, and as we continue to base our fisheries management on science, we will continue to see positive results.”

Read Bob’s full written testimony by clicking here, and view the hearing by clicking on the image to the right.
Harvesters Gathers in Galveston for Annual Meeting

Harvesters gathered in Galveston, TX in October for our annual membership meeting to enjoy camaraderie and chart a course for our work next year. We intentionally overlapped with the Gulf Council meeting for one day, allowing us to meet with local fishermen and regional NOAA and council staff.

Over the course of two days, members and fishermen enjoyed time together to gather, catch up, and discuss experiences and challenges in their regions. Members heard from our Executive Director Leigh Habegger as she provided legislative updates from D.C., discussed her time with member organizations around the country, and shared what she learned from attending council meetings over the last year. We also managed to find time for Galveston’s world class fishing. Board member Buddy Guindon and Captain Scott Hickman put us on some red and black drum, new species for many of these seasoned fishermen.

A big thank you to Buddy and his team for his superb hosting in Galveston and many delicious meals at his newest venture - Katie’s Seafood House!

TOP: Board member Edward Poulsen of Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers showing off his first red drum.

BOTTOM: Captain Nick Muto of the Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen’s Alliance notched his first black drum in Galveston Bay.
Executive Director Attends MREP in Oregon

This fall, our Executive Director Leigh Habegger, attended the West Coast Marine Resources Education Program (MREP) in early October. This program was designed and created by fishermen for fishermen to provide tools to better understand the science behind management decisions and to meaningfully engage in the fishery management process.

In addition to presentations and discussions, there were several hands-on experiences designed to help participants understand the practical skills necessary in fisheries science work. This included a tour of the Bell Shimada, a NOAA research trawl vessel ported in Newport, OR where the group learned about sonar and trawl surveys, and age structure modeling. Attendees also toured Foulweather Trawl, a net shop in Newport that works to innovate and design nets to minimize bycatch and interactions with non-target species. We ended the program with a visit to Pacific Seafood’s nearby processing plant to gain an understanding of what happens to the fish after they are landed and offloaded.

"MREP was an extremely valuable experience that not only pulled the curtain back on fisheries science, but provided opportunity to participate in the science in a very hands-on way. I connected with fishermen, NOAA officials, and industry representatives in an informal setting, had the chance to ask questions, and gain new perspectives. I can’t speak highly enough of this program and encourage all of our members to take advantage of it." -- Leigh Habegger

ABOVE: Leigh Habegger with members Brad Pettinger (L) and Bob Dooley (R) in Newport, OR.
Executive Director 2019 Travel

Leigh spent many weeks on the road this year, traveling from Alaska to New Hampshire meeting with 14 of our 17 member organizations and attending four different council meetings. As the voice for our members at the national level, Leigh understands the importance of seeing firsthand the challenges facing fishermen across regions.

“Prioritizing time with member organizations in their regions and home ports has allowed me to gain a much better understanding of the challenges they face on the ground. It’s also helped me to contextualize issues discussed at hill meetings and in conversations at the national level,” remarked Leigh.

During her travels, Leigh also had the opportunity to meet with many of the fishermen that our member organizations represent. Leigh shared Harvesters’ policy successes, answered D.C.-related questions, and reminded fishermen that they have someone on the ground keeping an eye on national policy. These meetings provided an incredible opportunity for relationship and trust building.

Looking ahead to 2020, Leigh will again be on the road, spending valuable time with members and attending more council meetings. “I hope our members and their fishermen continue to see the great value of this organization,” added Leigh.

A note from our ED

I attended a handful of members’ board meetings this year to provide an update on Harvesters’ activities. I am always happy to call in or attend in person if possible, so please don’t hesitate to ask me to join your board meeting.
Huffman Embarks on National MSA Listening Tour

While it has been a relatively quiet year for MSA, two of Harvesters’ board members were invited to participate in roundtable discussions as part of Rep. Huffman’s national MSA listening tour. As Chair of the Water, Oceans, and Wildlife Subcommittee, Huffman is holding a series of sessions throughout the United States to hear from fishermen and stakeholders what they would like to see in an MSA reauthorization bill.

Since launching his tour in October, Huffman has already held listening sessions in several coastal states including California, Maryland, and Washington, and invited key stakeholders in these regions to provide their perspective on the challenges and opportunities specific to the fishing industry. Board members Bob Dooley and Brent Paine participated as panelists at the San Francisco and Seattle events, respectively. Both Bob and Brent reiterated Harvesters’ position on any MSA reauthorization: the strong science-based conservation mandates in the Act must be preserved. They also discussed the need for robust funding for NMFS and NOAA, the rising costs of the observer program and how EM can serve as a more cost-effective monitoring tool, and the impacts of changing ocean conditions on the industry.

Seafood: Eat More, Eat American

Encouraging the public to make better seafood choices - and to eat more wild American seafood - is an increasingly important issue for Harvesters and our industry. This past summer, Leigh was an invited panelist at the Menus of Change Conference held at the Culinary Institute of America in New York. As the only representative of commercial fishing industry at the event, Leigh advocated for wild, U.S. caught seafood in front of a large crowd of chefs, restaurant owners, food sourcing companies, and suppliers.

After introducing the Harvesters and explaining our mission, Leigh discussed two shoreside challenges facing our industry today: market access for commercial fish, and consumer preference and knowledge.

“When we saw stocks crash in the 80s and 90s, our domestic seafood species lost shelf space,” explained Leigh. “But as they’ve rebounded and catch limits have increased, we’ve struggled to get our fish back on the shelf. Additionally, growing consumer preference and taste has shifted to imported farmed tilapia.”

Leigh challenged the audience to serve more seafood at their restaurants and wherever possible, buy wild-caught, American seafood. “I asked them to go out in their communities and work to find fishermen they could source from and develop a relationship with. Doing so will go a long way to helping educate consumers on the delicious variety of seafood available in their local waters, and across all of our nation’s fisheries.”
Harvesters Makes Strong Showing at CHOW

Capitol Hill Ocean Week (CHOW) was another resounding success this year with a great showing from Harvesters’ members. Board member Brett Veerhusen sat on a panel discussing ways to address the seafood trade deficit and President Chris Brown moderated a panel discussing coastal community resiliency in the face of climate change.

Brett went to bat for the wild harvest industry, making several compelling points throughout the panel, particularly on the success and strength of the MSA in ensuring the sustainability of our fishery resources. He pushed for maximizing the harvest and sale of seafood caught in U.S. waters as one piece of the puzzle to address the seafood trade deficit. “Buying American is buying responsible,” concluded Brett.

To view Brett's panel click here or on the image to the right.

Chris’ panel was tasked with taking a hard look at various ways our coastal communities can adapt and remain resilient in the face of changing ocean conditions. Chris focused on adaptability as key to surviving in an uncertain future and challenged the panelists to tackle difficult questions. Panel members explored issues like how we can better support the adaptability of councils to respond to changing ocean conditions, the role of shellfish aquaculture in helping mitigate the effects of climate change, and how scientists and modelers can help increase adaptability in fisheries management.

The NOAA Fish Fry is a highlight of the week each year. Leigh, working alongside member and OTC representative Brad Pettinger, was on hand to help out the Oregon Trawl Commission as they served up fish tacos to a crowd of hungry seafood lovers.
Sponsor Spotlight: 
Bulletproof Nets - Homer, AK

Bulletproof Nets, a fishermen owned and operated company out of Homer, AK, has been a long-time supporter of the Harvesters. A gear manufacturing and marine retail company, Bulletproof Nets builds and repairs purse seine nets for fisheries from False Pass, AK to California. The team at Bulletproof Nets works hard to provide fishery and vessel specific nets, adapting and innovating their net designs to suit the needs of the fishermen and the fishery. They use cutting-edge materials in their nets and offer a full line of traditional cork line, lead line, and web.

We are honored to work on behalf of our commercial fishing industry that supports businesses like Bulletproof Nets. "Seafood Harvesters of America serves as a united voice for fishermen across the country on federal policies affecting the commercial fishing industry. Our business depends on policies that protect fishermen's ability to harvest sustainably managed seafood. We are proud to support their work in D.C. to ensure we have healthy fisheries and profitable fishing businesses," said founder, Matt Alward.

Member Organizations

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