

# Rhode Island Commercial Fisheries Blueprint for Resilience Launch Event

---

May 7, 2018

## *Notes from the Innovative Seafood Marketing Breakout Group*

Moderator: Taylor Witkin

Notes: Gemma Gorham

Participants: Sarah Bernstein (Farm Fresh RI), Matthew Conti (Snug Harbor Marina), Tom LaFazia (Narragansett Bay Lobsters), Adam Hadley (RIDEM), Sue Anderbois (Food Strategy / Governor's Office), Key Ayars (RIDEM), Dan Orchard (Fishing Partnership Support Services), Gemma Gorham (consultant), Tom Hoxie (Tom Hoxsie Fish Trap Co.), Chris Morris (Tom Hoxsie Fish Trap Co.), Maureen Pothier (JWU Culinary), Diane Lynch (Social Enterprise Greenhouse / RI Food Policy Council), Josh Daly (RI Small Business Development Center), Taylor Witkin (URI), Dawn McAlister (Ocean Sate Community Seafood)

Goal: Enable and support marketing innovations

The purpose of this breakout discussion is to come away with a clear understanding of:

- What do we need to do? (the key issues, barriers, next steps)
- How are we going to do it?
- Who needs to be involved?

Summary: This breakout group included representatives from the seafood industry, nonprofits, government, and business development. The group agreed that the best way to improve the appeal of local seafood is to sell a "story" along with it; this will help customers get over the habit of making purchasing decisions based on price point alone (and therefore opting for lower quality seafood). Fishermen also noted as problematic the regulations that currently prohibit fishermen from selling direct to the public from their vessels (with the exception of lobster and crab, which are allowed) – reaffirming the Blueprint for Resilience's observation that enabling creative seafood marketing means finding ways for fishermen to sell to the public. The group emphasized a need for a two-pronged approach, with a strong (and well-funded) top-down effort led by the state complemented by a strong grassroots effort coordinated by fishermen.

## NOTES:

### 1. Current efforts: What are breakout participants already doing to advance this goal?

- Tell the story: We can increase value by telling their story through daily flyers, information on seafood origin, and play up local seafood.
- Price-point: people look for cheapest option. We need to translate what is happening in agriculture to seafood, convince local customers why it is important to pay more.
- Rhode Island needs to emphasize the "education piece" that goes beyond the story
- One idea is to start a "Fish Fresh RI" organization
- They will buy it with a foreign name
- There is no local pick-up
- Farmed salmon is not as good as local fish (but it has a strong market)
- Can't donate fish
- To sell seafood, fishermen need a processing plant
- There used to be a co-op in Point Judith, but it went out of business
- It's hard to get a dealers' license
- Underutilized fish
- Fish bucket challenge
- Cooperative
- Less than \$20,000 is dedicated annually to seafood marketing by the state
- We need to advocate for resources to be allocated to seafood marketing - state funding
- Some fishermen are doing a grass-roots, bottom-up approach

### 2. Next steps: What do we need to do to keep the momentum going?

- Sell directly to consumers (new immigrants, urban populations)
- Address regulatory issues
- Work in partnership with Farm Fresh RI
- Include a ground-up approach
- Central processing and education
- Open-air fish market
- Cooperative for sales and processing
- RI Seafood Marketing Collaborative: state, branding
- Need for a bottom-up approach – e.g., fishermen's organization