



## Leadership in Difficult Times

By John Pappalardo

The Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance, then called the Hook Fishermen's Association, formed in 1991 at a crisis moment. A group of independent, forward-thinking fishermen created a united front to make sure that when major regulatory changes hit the industry, the small-boat fleet wouldn't lose everything to bigger boats off Cape.

Those bright, committed fishermen, some of whom still fish today, spent a lot of time, and shed their equivalent of blood, sweat, and tears, plotting their survival as fabled groundfish stocks like cod and haddock diminished.

Being fishermen, and Cape Codders, they diversified and improvised. Still fishing, still on the water, many switched to more abundant species and fought hard to protect what they had left. They rebuilt their business plans and lives on the water, enduring culture shock on land as well. They had to give up days at sea to spend time in meeting rooms arguing not only for their livelihoods, but the culture and economy of the Cape. Too often political winds blew against them, and too often, they felt the deck was stacked.

They lost a lot but hung tough, remaining committed to a life on the ocean, protecting the Cape's original Blue Economy. Still, the losses were keen, painful enough for many to say, "It

hasn't always been this way. It shouldn't always be this way."

I have been thinking about that lately because the tide is turning. I was reminded of this the other day talking to Captain Ronnie Braun, who helped start this organization. Braun, a skilled, successful hook fisherman, stopped catching fish with hooks about two decades ago. Braun switched to conch and sea bass fishing with pots, which he does to this day.

He still has his groundfish permit though, and maybe one of these years he will supplement the groundfish quota he owns with quota from the Fisheries Trust, an entity created by the Fishermen's Alliance to buy and hold quota and lease it back to fishermen at reduced rates, offering opportunity to stay on the water. Others have done that over the past decade, and recently more and more fishermen are calling to see if it makes sense. More and more are noticing that groundfish are coming back, although it is a slow process.


Young fishermen are buying boats, older fishermen are renovating. There is a positive vibe in the air. People want to get into the fisheries and we are starting a young fishermen's training program, taught by captains who have much to show, and need more knowledgeable crew. There is federal legislation which aims to accomplish the same coast to coast, and we have doggedly supported that here and in Washington.

Fishermen have done much, made many sacrifices to get to this point. The Fishermen's Alliance has changed and grown as well. We rely increasingly on our science to drive smart fish-

eries policy, proving to regulators that certain species have recovered. When we can't do that we push for better science and accountability that will ensure a sustainable groundfishery. We believe electronic monitoring, cameras recording what is caught at sea, will fix many problems that still plague the industry. We worked for a decade to succeed in protecting our vital herring stocks from industrial-sized boats, and so I am optimistic that better monitoring will come as well.

There is work to make sure more people buy local fish. We have invested in the A.R.C. Hatchery in Dennis, which supplies most of the baby shellfish to local growers and towns. We developed a public school curriculum to educate third graders about how important shellfish is to our economy and history. We believe in the concept of a Blue Economy.

As was reinforced at our recent successful Hookers Ball, we have always taken the lead from our fishermen. Adopting their work ethic, ingenuity and stubbornness day in and day out, year in and year out, has helped protect a resource, a tradition and a way of life on Cape Cod.

But our success also has depended on our friends and neighbors. We are effective because the broader community supports our mission. They, like us, want to see an active fishing fleet on Cape Cod. 

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