



Industry Workforce Educational Needs Assessment

**Report of the Seafood-Fisheries Summit
Rasmuson Foundation Office, Anchorage**

16 December, 2011



Executive Summary

The December 16, 2011 Seafood Summit meeting convened by the Governor of Alaska, the Chair of the Rasmuson Foundation and the President of the University of Alaska marked an historic step in workforce development for the Alaskan seafood industry and related maritime sectors. The Summit provided an unprecedented opportunity for industry to inform the University, Government of Alaska and the Rasmuson Foundation about their workforce development challenges and needs. It was clear that current education and training systems do not adequately support industry requirements and that it is timely to reassess how those needs can best be met to sustain one of Alaska's leading industries.

Those concerns were embraced in the proposed action steps outlined by University President Gamble. Over the next year, the University shall:

- oversee an inventory of fisheries and maritime occupations
- complete an education and training gap analysis and establish priorities
- identify constraints and opportunities for education and training delivery
- develop an integrated and comprehensive action plan

Industry, Government and Foundation participants in the Summit endorsed this approach and have committed to work with President Gamble to to promote a more structured and aligned approach to workforce development.

Industry leaders agreed to identify senior staff to work with the University and committed to providing further information, as needed, to assist the work of the University.

The Rasmuson Foundation will continue to work directly with the University, the State of Alaska, with industry and with fishing communities to support the development of a capable and well trained workforce.

The Governor of Alaska offered assistance, through the Departments of Labor and Workforce Development and Fish and Game, with needs assessment and integration of statewide industry training programs; the Labor and Workforce Development Commissioner offered the resources of his department to support this work.

Overview

In October, 2011, Alaska Governor Sean Parnell, Ed Rasmuson, Chair of the Rasmuson Foundation Board, and Patrick Gamble, President of the University of Alaska, invited leading seafood industry executives to convene with senior government and university officials at the Rasmuson Foundation office in Anchorage to initiate a dialogue on workforce development. The Seafood-Fisheries Summit represented an historic gathering of industry, government and academic leaders and was the culmination of a significant investment in the fisheries sector by the Foundation and the University.

The Summit was intended to assist in the development of comprehensive educational opportunities for a responsive workforce that enables the fishing and seafood industries in Alaska to remain vibrant. Alaska's seafood industry workforce development requirements and University-based education programs are not yet in sync.

The major outcome envisaged from the Summit was to secure the commitment of major seafood employers to engage in a detailed industry workforce/education needs assessment.

Summit Preparations

In 2008, the Rasmuson Foundation initiated a five year, \$5 million partnership with the University of Alaska Fairbanks, School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences, to invigorate undergraduate fisheries education programs within the UA system. The initiative has been overseen by a Fisheries Excellence Committee comprised of representatives of the University, government, industry and the Rasmuson Foundation.

During the process of evaluating industry structure and directions, the Committee recognized that there are a diverse range of needs for education and workforce development, some of which overlap with the undergraduate fisheries initiative, but many that extend well beyond the current initiative. The Committee recommended a reassessment of strategic directions for workforce development to the University, to the Foundation and to industry and government partners.

In the lead up to the Summit, in June, 2011, University President Patrick Gamble appointed an 18 member Allied Fisheries Working Group. Allied Fisheries is a cross-campus University of Alaska collaborative initiative to assess and enhance the development and delivery of programs, courses, research and information that meet the employment needs of the fisheries, seafood and maritime industries.

The goals of the University of Alaska's Allied Fisheries initiative are:

- *To sustain and enhance the economy and the communities of Alaska by developing education and training that supports a responsive workforce enabling the fishing, seafood and maritime industries to stay vibrant and substantial contributors to the state.*
- *To support Alaskans, particularly young Alaskans, in discovering and preparing for the wide range of employment opportunities in the fishing, seafood and maritime industries.*

One of the first charges to the group by President Gamble was to *"identify and inventory existing UA institutional capacity for training and education that supports all aspects of the fishing business industries, fisheries support and fisheries development in Alaska."*

The Allied Fisheries Working Group broadened the inventory to include also the institutional capacity for training and education in support of the seafood and maritime industries. A copy of the inventory was distributed at the Summit and is available online at <http://seagrant.uaf.edu/map/initiatives/marinescience/workforceplan/docs/alliedfishsum.pdf>.

Summit Participation

The Summit was attended by nine top employer executives in the Alaska seafood and fisheries sectors, as well as the Governor of Alaska and commissioners from the Alaska State Department of Fish & Game and Labor & Workforce Development, and the President and two Chancellors from the University of Alaska (UAF and UAS). Participants are listed in Appendix A and represent a broad cross section of industry interests from both different regions of Alaska and different industry sectors.

Opening Discussion

During his welcoming remarks, Ed Rasmuson emphasized the importance of the seafood industry and maritime sector generally to Alaska. He noted that Alaska's fisheries industries are the State's largest private employer, providing more than 70,000 jobs in 2009. He observed that Alaska's fisheries cover a vast geographic area and demand a diverse range of skills – from technical to managerial, and that current training and education programs do not adequately address these needs – hence the need for this Summit and a greater engagement with industry. He noted that he and his father Elmer had a long history of engagement with Alaska's fisheries, including service on the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council. He reiterated that the Foundation wishes to continue to support a strong and sustainable fisheries sector.

Governor Parnell noted the local, national and increasingly global significance of Alaska's fisheries. During a recent visit to Europe he saw how valued our fisheries products are and heard how other nations view our fisheries management as a more sustainable approach. He noted that, in order to continue to reap the many benefits of this industry, there has to be excellent integration between communities, industry, government and academic interests. That integration can be achieved through better alignment of all training and workforce development activities.

UA President Patrick Gamble outlined the comprehensive approach being taken within the University of Alaska system to seafood industry education. Describing recent efforts to inventory UA program offerings related to seafood and fisheries/maritime sectors, he noted that many staff within the UA system were surprised by just how many programs UA already has in place. He emphasized his vision of Fisheries/Maritime programs having a "halo effect"¹ for the University overall. Using both the University's existing expertise in fisheries and ocean sciences, and building on its more fundamental education programs, the University of Alaska could become the global center for coldwater fisheries education.

Key Issues

a. UA Working More Effectively with Industry

Participants noted the importance of understanding how industry works and what its needs are when designing and developing training programs. They noted that while the University's array of training programs has "moved in the right direction" in recent years, and there is an emerging model of successful partnership in Bristol Bay, there have been some fundamental concerns about the University's operations. These included:

- high overhead rates
- advocacy against the industry at hearings
- lack of portability of University credits within the UA system
- lack of responsiveness to industry needs.

President Gamble assured participants that the University is determined to overcome these perception issues – this initiative is a manifestation of the University's desire to be more engaged and responsive to industry needs.

b. It's All About the Fish

¹ Halo Effect refers to the ability of a strategy (or leader) to synergize/motivate and market all related programs in a more positive light.

The sustainability of fisheries production in Alaska is fundamental to the future of the industry and therefore the future of the workforce. Various observations were made about factors that determine sustainability – from sound scientific management of stocks to the ability to reduce waste and better utilize resources. Participants appreciated the University’s extensive research capacity and noted how many companies have made significant contributions to building that research over many years. However, they also noted that sustainability depends on a greater emphasis on understanding the businesses and communities that depend on fisheries and making a greater effort to understand their needs. This can range from promoting a more positive image of the fishing industry (promoting greater pride in fisheries as a career) to more fundamental changes in the harvesting and processing of fish to improve efficiency.

c. Youth Employment and Engagement

Participants agreed that one of the key challenges facing most coastal and rural communities is the lack of employment opportunities, particularly for youth. *“The best intervention is to put a kid to work”* was a widely endorsed sentiment. However, there was also considerable discussion about barriers to achieving greater youth employment. These included:

- Lack of youth understanding of opportunities in the seafood industry – it was frequently noted that engagement with youth on workforce opportunities is both limited and begins too late. There was strong support to market fishing and maritime careers more actively to teens and even pre-teens. Participants observed that activities such as the current UA National Ocean Sciences Bowl program held annually in Seward was a good way to promote greater youth engagement
- Seasonal limitations of fisheries
- Perception of fishing industry jobs as being low status and requiring mobility
- Drug and substance abuse among minors – it was observed that in some rural communities, it can be easier to buy drugs than milk. One particularly disturbing observation was that a minor consuming charge is permanent under Alaskan law and therefore limits subsequent lifelong employment in the fishing industry, while a murder citation could be expunged from an offender’s record!

d. Beyond the Slime Line

One often cited issue faced by the fishing industry which acts as a major impediment to workforce recruitment is the lack of understanding of the industry. Many potential entrants to the workforce do not understand (a) the range of jobs available in the industry and/or (b) the potential for career progression beyond fish processing (“the slime line”).

Industry representatives noted that part of this (mis)perception of opportunities derives from the lack of understanding about the stability and predictability of the industry. While catch volumes may vary from year-to-year, long-established operators provide a buffer to that volatility over time and offer increasingly diversified opportunities for career development. There is a dearth of readily-accessible information about the wider career opportunities available in the fisheries and related industries.

e. Beyond Biologists

Industry and government representatives noted that one of the biggest misconceptions in workforce development was the apparent over emphasis on scientific training. While many UA graduates have gone on to successful careers within government, research and academic organizations, these are not where the majority of workforce development needs exist. Participants proposed that greater attention be given to:

- Manufacturing sector jobs – it was observed that fisheries is one of Alaska’s few true manufacturing sectors and that we have only just begun to explore the full range of value-added opportunities. More analysis would likely generate even greater opportunities for allied disciplines such as engineering, architecture, accounting, graphic design, marketing, etc.
- Maritime sector jobs – it was observed that there is much overlap in core skills between various sub-sectors of the seafood-fishing industries. Greater reengagement with the maritime sector would be beneficial in ensuring that industry can access skilled staff and in enabling greater mobility within the industry. Participants noted that this might be achieved through closer integration with AVTEC and the Statewide Career and Technical Education Plan (Dept. Labor)
- Aquaculture skills – while aquaculture forms a relatively small part of the overall sector and employment market currently, there are emerging needs for greater aquaculture skills. Employers noted that the introduction of skills from recent employees who are graduates of aquaculture programs in Chile, Canada and Norway has been beneficial in improving business efficiency
- Career pathways – updating our understanding of current and emerging career pathways and providing a more aligned training structure would be very helpful – we currently have an inadequate map of career options to guide prospective entrants and to communicate about the value of a fisheries/maritime career.

f. Telling our Story Better

Underpinning much of the discussion was a recognition that neither the industry, nor the University has given enough attention to sharing the Alaska fisheries story. While there were some good examples cited of how changes in the fishing industry have made a big difference to coastal communities (e.g. introduction of CDQs) there is a strong sense that more needs to be done. Suggestions ranged from more frequent industry-University interaction to development of career promotion materials to better marketing of safe seafood production and how it underpins the Alaska seafood brand.

Next Steps

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Appendix: Summit Participants

Hosts:

The Honorable Sean Parnell, Governor, State of Alaska

Mr. Patrick Gamble, President, University of Alaska

Mr. Edward Rasmuson, Chairman, Rasmuson Foundation

Participants:

Mr. Ragnar Alstrom, Executive Director, Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association

Mr. Joe Bundrant, Chair, Trident Seafoods Corp.

The Honorable Click Bishop, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Labor & Workforce Development

The Honorable Cora Campbell, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish & Game

Mr. Barry Collier, President & CEO, Peter Pan Seafoods, Inc.

Mr. Larry Cotter, CEO, Aleutian Pribilof Island Community Development Association

Mr. Morgen Crow, Executive Director, Coastal Villages Region Fund

Mr. Dennis Guhlke, CEO, Icicle Seafoods, Inc.

Ms. Diane Kaplan, President & CEO, Rasmuson Foundation

Mr. Mark Palmer, President & CEO, Ocean Beauty Seafoods LLC

Mr. John Pugh, Chancellor, University of Alaska Southeast

Mr. Brian Rogers, Chancellor, University of Alaska Fairbanks

Mr. Robin Samuelsen, President & CEO, Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation

Mr. Terry Shaff, President and CEO, UniSea, Inc.

Observers:

Mr. Ian Dutton, Vice President, Rasmuson Foundation

Mr. Jeffrey Jones, Special Staff Assistant, Office of the Governor

Ms. Beth Leschper, Communications Director, Dept. Labor & Workforce Development

Mr. Jordan Marshall, Initiatives & Special Projects Manager, Rasmuson Foundation

Mr. Trevor McCabe, Chief Operating Officer, Coastal Villages Region Fund

Mr. Mark Myers, Vice Chancellor for Research Services, University of Alaska

Mr. Frederick Villa, Associate Vice President, Workforce Programs, University of Alaska

Invitees Unable to Attend:

Mr. Inge Andreassen, President American Seafoods

Ms. Janice Ivanoff, President & CEO Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation

Mr. Phillip Lestenkof, President Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association

Mr. Jeff Trandahl, Executive Director National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

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