

# UC San Diego

## Capstone Projects

### Title

Local Ocean: A Film Exploring Community through Local & Sustainable Seafood

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2g18c2jj>

### Author

Wallace, Biz

### Publication Date

2023-06-01

**Local Ocean: A Film Exploring Community  
in San Diego through Sustainable Seafood**

*June 16, 2023*

Biz Wallace

Master of Advanced Studies Candidate: Marine Biodiversity and Conservation  
Scripps Institution of Oceanography, UC San Diego

---

Capstone Advisory Committee:



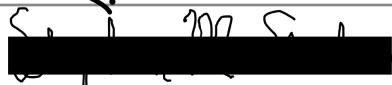
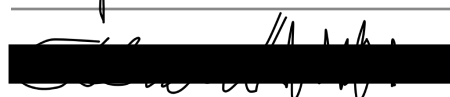
Dr. Theresa Sinicrope Talley - Committee Chair  
Extension Specialist, California Sea Grant  
Scripps Institution of Oceanography

Dr. Patty Ahn - Committee Member  
UCSD Communication Faculty  
MAS MBC Co-Chair, Scripps Institution of Oceanography

Dr. Stephen Stohs - Committee Member  
Industry Economist  
NOAA Southwest Fisheries Science Center

Capt. Adrienne Wilber - Committee Member  
Fisher, Mariner, Artist

Signatures:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date: 14 June 2023

June 19, 2023

June 14, 2023

15 June 2023

## Abstract/Executive summary:

LOCAL OCEAN is an uplifting documentary film that provides an insightful, earnest portrait of the struggles and value of seafood producers in the San Diego community, breaking down the "us vs. them" public perception surrounding commercial fishing.

## Background / Problem Statement

"In America, we have always morally subsidized farming because we have understood and respected the hardships of its labors... [but] we haven't understood the labors of fishermen and the role they play in our society and culture, and thus we have largely failed to comprehend the civic values they embody."- Barton Seaver, *American Seafood*<sup>1</sup>

The United States is a global leader in sustainable seafood<sup>2</sup> but the domestic fishing industry is threatened by cheaper imports, increasingly complex regulations, and rising operating costs.<sup>3</sup> Nationally, the United States ran a 17 billion dollar seafood trade deficit in 2020.<sup>4</sup> In San Diego, less than 10% of the seafood consumed is domestic.<sup>5</sup> Multiple studies have shown consumers are willing to pay more for sustainable and local seafood, but they often do not know where to find it.<sup>6 7</sup> In recent years, fishers have taken on active marketing roles in an effort to reach consumers and increase thin profit margins.<sup>8</sup> Historic concepts of sustainability centered around ecosystem health and fish stock analysis, but increasingly, resource managers have shifted to a holistic approach.<sup>9</sup> A more comprehensive understanding of "sustainable seafood" involves the intersections between ecosystems, food security, and stable livelihoods.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Seaver, B. (2017). *American Seafood*. Sterling Publishing. New York.

<sup>2</sup> NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service. *Understanding Sustainable Seafood*.  
<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/insight/understanding-sustainable-seafood>

<sup>3</sup> Helvey, M. et. al. (2016). *Can the United States have its fish and eat it too?* Marine Policy.  
[doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2016.10.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2016.10.013)

<sup>4</sup> NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service. (2022). *2020 Fisheries of the United States*. U.S. Department of Commerce, NOAA Current Fishery Statistics No. 2020.  
<https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/2022-05/Fisheries-of-the-United-States-2020-Report-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Talley, T. S., et. al. (2016). *Local Seafood Availability in San Diego, California Seafood Markets*. Future of Food: Journal on Food, Agriculture and Society.

<sup>6</sup> McClenahan, Loren. (2016). *Fair trade fish: consumer support for broader seafood sustainability*. Fish and Fisheries. doi: 10.1111/faf.12148

<sup>7</sup> Soley, Graham et. al. (2019). *Willingness to Pay for Shrimp with Homegrown by Heroes, Community-Supported Fishery, Best Aquaculture Practices, or Local Attributes*. Journal of Agricultural and Applied Economics. doi:10.1017/aae.2019.19

<sup>8</sup> Brinson, Ayeisha et. al. (Jan. 19, 2011). *Direct marketing strategies: The rise of community supported fishery programs*. Marine Policy. doi:10.1016/j.marpol.2011.01.014

<sup>9</sup> California Ocean Protection Council Science Advisory Team Working Group (2017). *Readying California Fisheries for Climate Change*. California Ocean Science Trust.

<sup>10</sup> Blincow, K. (2021). *Reconciling differences in management and sustainability of seafood consumption and production globally* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

California fishers are engaged in responsible resource management and make up one piece of the fishing community that includes: consumers, processors, maritime trades, government decision makers, and more. Decades of biased<sup>11</sup> media<sup>12</sup> representation<sup>13</sup> have spread scientific misinformation and cast the commercial fishing industry in a negative light. The film casts light on the delicate balance between the economic viability of a career in fishing, the ability of fishers to feed their communities, and the responsible use of marine resources. LOCAL OCEAN emphasizes the importance of people and their relationships to the ocean and dismantles the idea of fishing simply as an industry.

## Project Goal

**LOCAL OCEAN** explores how to craft a future with a more active and reciprocal relationship between fishers and local consumers. Through interviews with local fishers and community experts, the film examines ways to increase sustainability and resilience of this important industry by highlighting the importance of fishers' markets and businesses that carry locally-sourced products, supporting initiatives and official decisions, and exploring how consumers' own day-to-day decisions can allow fishing to thrive and provide jobs and food in our communities well into the future.

## Research Question(s)

How can the community craft a future with a more active and reciprocal relationship between fishermen and local consumers?

## Specific Objectives

- Communicate the issues facing and opportunities provided by local fishing communities
- Highlight the personal stories of one to three fishers to illustrate barriers to and value of local, sustainable fishing fleets
- Facilitate knowledge exchange and nurture a sense of community between fishers and coastal communities

## Defined End Products

- 10 minute film, hosted on Vimeo or YouTube
- Shorter films/reels for Instagram and TikTok
- Trailer

---

<sup>11</sup> Murray, R. (Director). (2009). *The End of the Line* [Film]. Dartmouth Films.

<sup>12</sup> Tabrizi, A. (Director). (2021). *Seaspiracy* [Film]. A.U.M. Films, Disrupt Studios.

<sup>13</sup> Castaing-Taylor, L. (Director). (2012). *Leviathan* [Film]. Sensory Ethnography Lab.

- Future Screening Events

## Existing Films/Shows for Inspiration

- Pete Halmay, Commercial Fisherman. Meet the Working Waterfront. Port of San Diego.
- What is the California commercial fishing apprenticeship program? 2020. CA Sea Grant.
- The Fishmonger. 2021. Outdoor Channel.
- Of the Sea: A Film about California Fishermen. 2007. TrimTab Media.
- Men & Fish. 2019. Virgil Films.
- The Last Man Fishing. 2019. Skyler Creative.

## Methodology

### Equipment

I originally planned to borrow equipment from the media lab but the unpredictability of my shooting schedule made reservations impossible. I shot one interview on the Canon C100 Mark II and then switched to a borrowed Fujifilm XT3 as I had better access to it. I also switched from 1080 to 4K resolution. I used my funds to purchase a Tascam X8 and DJI remote lavalier mics.

### Interviews

I conducted interviews with multiple local fishers and industry experts. Interviews were conducted in informal settings such as at fishers' markets, dockside or in homes.

### Footage & Editing

Footage was edited using Adobe Premier, After Effects, and Davinci color correcting software. As many interviews were shot on location, I had to clean audio recordings in After Effects.

### Field Research

I used funds to visit John Ugoretz of California Fish and Wildlife in Santa Barbara. Additionally, I made many visits over six months to Tuna Harbor Dockside Market, the G Street Pier, and Driscoll's Boatyard in Mission Bay.

### Fishers & Experts

Through a local fisher (and graduate of the California Sea Grant Commercial Fishing Apprenticeship Program) named Janelle Louie, I was able to meet many fishers for this project. Theresa Talley and Emily Miller of Sea Grant connected me to other fishers as well. Experts were located through my personal network or through SIO/NOAA connections.

### Timeline

I spent January and February conducting preliminary interviews with fishers to identify overlapping themes and scheduling for future shoots. In March, I wrote a film treatment to brainstorm what a storyboard for this project could look like. April was dedicated to most of the interview shoots and some b-roll footage. I obtained one interview in May as well as additional b-roll footage but spent most of the month processing footage and audio and editing eight total rough cuts.

## Measure of Success

In creating this film, I was interested in both pedagogical and socio-political impacts. To engage with the community, I plan to hold public viewing events. Some of my goals include submitting the film to Salty Cinema, an SIO film festival and partnering with organizations like San Diego Food Systems Alliance and local restaurants to facilitate a screening and seafood event. Additionally, I will distribute the film via social media to maximize accessibility.

## Skills Built & Lessons Learned

Through the process of making this film, I improved upon my filming, interviewing, and editing skills and forged relationships in the fishing and seafood communities. I feel like my interviewing skills grew the most over the scope of this project. I am grateful that I was able to conduct more emotionally challenging interviews by the end. I also gained many technical skills and have a better understanding of equipment to invest in for future projects.

The reality of documentary filmmaking is that one has only so much control. The most important skill I learned from this project was the ability to pivot and reimagine the film's story arc as "life happened." By the time the project wraps, I will have attended two funerals. The fishing community tragically lost one of its own which slowed production as film subjects mourned. One subject lost a parent over the filming of this documentary. Various legal troubles and personality clashes meant that other potential interview subjects were unavailable. I had to reconstruct my story arc while maintaining the intention of the piece. There is an old saying that editing "is a thousand lies in service of the truth," and I crafted my storyline around the lived truth of fisherman, Jimmy.

I wish that I had been able to start shooting earlier but recovering from Covid during Winter quarter made it impossible to take on any extra work. It also took time to build relationships and manage competing schedules for interviews. Being able to test shoot would have helped avert some of the technical difficulties I encountered on early shoots. For example, one of the rented sound recorders cut out in the middle of interviewing my subject. As a result, I lost some

time in locating and purchasing my own audio gear. However, all of these lessons are valuable in planning future shoots.

## Conclusion

When I set out to create this film, I wasn't sure exactly what I would find. I felt overwhelmed by the opacity of the seafood industry, but what I found was dedicated members of the community working together to strengthen our food system and uplift local producers, and support themselves and their families with honest meaningful work. I don't know if I could have made this film before the pandemic as it laid bare the issues with our industrialized and globalized system and provided the time and space for a resurgent local food movement.

Seafood tells a story and food is inherently political. In the film, Pete mentions that the media fervor around the opening and success of the market led the Port of San Diego to realize that fishers exist. My hope is that this film will lead to further appreciation for this local resource, and additional investment by the community in support of local ocean resources and the people who can bring those benefits back to shore. The reality is the creation of food is a labor intensive process and we must do more to better honor those who fill our plates. I think if we all look a little closer and seek community we will find hopeful stories in our own backyards.

## Links:

Trailer: <https://youtu.be/LellUN7EpHA>

Film: [https://youtu.be/V\\_RQh3qz1VY](https://youtu.be/V_RQh3qz1VY)