

User login

Username: *

Password: *

Log in

- [Create new account](#)
- [Request new password](#)

Navigation

- [Recent posts](#)

Search Our Site

Search

News Service Blogs

- [JB Bittner](#)
- [Tom Lindley](#)
- [William Ketter](#)
- [David Joyner](#)

Recent blog posts

- [Put people first in election coverage](#)
- [Open government advocate delivers powerful message](#)
- [How do you get people to read stories that matter?](#)
- [Warm up to videography](#)
- [Links to tools to use the Web](#)
- [Positive signs for](#)

Home

Fish scientists cozy with media: Blurring the lines of balanced news coverage

Fishery Under Siege: Sidebar

1,000 words

By Nancy Gaines
CNHI News Service

For five days, esteemed scientists and elite journalists gathered on Bonaire in the Netherlands Antilles, east of Aruba, to loll on the island's fine beaches, sip cocktails at the Topsy Seagull and marvel at the flamingoes for which Bonaire is famous.

A purpose of the October 2002 gathering of the Pew Charitable Trusts marine fellows was to train the scientists in the ways of the media, the better to market their message on protecting ocean fish and other issues.

"Learn how to navigate the stormy waters of the media," read the description of one Bonaire workshop. "Packaging your message is a key to success — whether talking to the media, submitting a paper to Science or Nature (magazine), writing a grant proposal, or writing an op-ed for your local paper."

But it wasn't all business.

The workshops were followed by "barside discussions" as the sun-soaked setting blurred the line that usually separates reporters and

Send Us Your Stories

CNHI News Service features stories, photos, columns and editorials of widespread interest. Most have already appeared in CNHI newspapers or Web sites and are edited for a national audience. If you are a CNHI journalist with a story to share, please [send it to us](#). Be sure to note Zope links to photographs that accompany your stories.

Send stories by e-mail to newsCNHI@gmail.com.

Have other questions about CNHI News Service or this site? Contact CNHI News Editor J.B. Bittner at jbbittner@cnhi.com.

investigative reporting

- [Tracking stimulus money in Milwaukee](#)
- [APME reprises Webinars on tracking the federal stimulus](#)
- [APME 2009 on line](#)
- [APME opens with a look at Detroit Free Press, Chicago Tribune, diversity and managing change](#)

[more](#)

CNHI Links

[CNHI Newspapers](#)

[CNHI Homepage](#)

[CNHI Jobs](#)

[CNHI Internet Support](#)

[CNHI's Award-Winning Journalists](#)

Tools and Guidelines

[The Editor's Toolkit](#)

[Tips on covering H1N1 virus \(Nieman Foundation\)](#)

[Open Government Laws](#)

[Journalism Resources \(Links\)](#)

[Newsroom Guidelines \(PDF\)](#)

[Online Dialogue Guidelines \(PDF\)](#)

Best of CNHI

2009

[List of Winners](#)

[Announcement](#)

2008

[List of Winners](#)

[Announcement](#)

2007

[List of Winners](#)

[Announcement \(PDF\)](#)

2006

those they cover. So, too, did it blur the line between trainers and trainees.

The scientists being trained on Bonaire had a ready pool of journalists on which to practice what they were learning about working the media. The list of reporters invited to Bonaire was a who's who of science journalism: Cornelia Dean of the New York Times, Natasha Loder of the Economist, Tom Hayden of U.S. News and World Report, and Charles Alexander, formerly of Time magazine, among others.

Dean told the Gloucester Daily Times her trip to Bonaire was paid for by Pew, the powerful nonprofit that uses its multi-billion-dollar endowment to influence public policy on the environment and other issues.

While the New York Times has strict standards against junkets, Dean said, an exception is made for "teaching," and that's what she was doing in Bonaire.

"My goal was to help scientists to speak more clearly to the public," she said.

Another notable scientist on Bonaire was Daniel Pauly, the author last year of "Aquacalypse Now: The End of Fish," and a professor whose fisheries center at the University of British Columbia has received some \$15 million from Pew.

Pauly is a longtime prophet of doom for commercial fishing. In a 1998 article he co-authored for Science magazine, Pauly predicted that rapacious commercial fishermen would work their way down the marine food chain — eliminating predator fish such as tuna and swordfish, then setting their nets for the bait those fish feed on. In the end, nothing would be left on the menu but "jellyfish and plankton soup."

The Bonaire conclave is just one example of the symbiotic relationship that has developed between environmental advocates and scientists and some of the big-media journalists who cover them.

The journalists are wined and dined by the advocates and hired to train the scientists to use the media to advance their message.

The journalists, in turn, call on those same scientists as sources when writing about the advocates and their agenda.

(Editors: Cut here for 500-word version)

In June 2003, eight months after Bonaire, Tom Hayden warned of the cataclysmic consequences of overfishing in a cover story for U.S. News and World Report,

The story, "Fished Out," quoted 13 different concerned scientists and citizens coming to the same awful conclusion: Jellyfish might one day be fishermen's only catch.

Although Hayden was virtually unknown in commercial fishing circles, his story had the potential to influence the American public's view of the fishing industry.

Hayden did not mention to his readers that, of the 14 sources he quoted for the article, 13 received their funding directly or indirectly from Pew, as Pew fellows or the recipients of Pew grants. The 14th was a restaurant chef.

Hayden's Pew-connected sources included Pauly, the godfather of the jellyfish scenario, and Jeremy Jackson, a Scripps Institution of Oceanography ecologist.

Both Pauly and Jackson were on Bonaire with Hayden, who did not return several messages for comment on this story. Hayden's magazine cover story quoted

Jackson thusly: "Jellyfish have become a commercial fishery in many places because that's all that's left. That and the bacteria."

Hayden also quoted Jane Lubchenco, now head of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the parent agency of the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Lubchenco, a Pew fellow and mentor of many other Pew fellows, wasn't on Bonaire. But she appeared in a PBS-produced film shown at the event titled "Empty Oceans, Empty Nets," another cautionary tale of overfishing, funded in part by Pew.

Lubchenco for years has urged her fellow scientists to become activists in the debate over issues like global warming and overfishing and to help shape public policy through the media. Toward that end, she founded the Aldo Leopold Leadership Program to advance her activist vision in 1998.

Trainers hired to work with Aldo Leopold fellows have included reporters for the New York Times, the Washington Post and National Public Radio, as well as leaders of environmental groups and White House and congressional staff members.

Lubchenco also helped organize two groups with a similar mission, SeaWeb and the Communication Partnership for Science and the Sea or COMPASS.

Lead trainer for all three advocacy groups — Aldo Leopold, SeaWeb and COMPASS — is Nancy Baron, a zoologist and former science writer. She has boasted to colleagues about her success in manipulating the media message — and the media.

In a 2005 e-mail — a copy of which has been obtained by the Gloucester Daily Times — she cited an article in The New York Times, and wrote: "We worked with these scientists to

help them frame their messages and talk about their study so it resonates with the wider public. Note their quotes in particular which are not just off the top of their heads ..."

In 2008, referring to a story on damage to the ocean ecosystem written by Andrew Revkin for the Science Times section of The New York Times, Baron wrote: "This Science Times piece came out of AAAS (American Academy of Arts and Sciences) and our infamous marine mixer."

The infamous mixer was a cocktail party hosted by COMPASS for members of the academy and the press.

Nancy Gaines, a veteran Boston journalist, is a publishing consultant and special projects writer. She lives in Gloucester, Mass., and is married to Gloucester Daily Times reporter Richard Gaines.