

PREFACE

(Senator Barry Keene was a freshman Assemblyman in 1973 when Bill Grader approached him about holding a meeting between fishermen and legislators. The Senator recalls the early Forums and reflects on the Forum process.)

It occurred to us that those groups which acted together had the advantage over those that didn't, and that those who managed to catch the ears of a number of legislators had the advantage over those which only talked to one legislator.

The Forum provided an arena where the fragmentation which had worked to the industry's disadvantage could be utilized positively. It brought together legislators from all areas that had fisheries. A lot of them with just a little interest were pulled together and could accomplish more as a group than more than could be done separately.

The first Forum was open warfare. It was fishermen fighting fishermen, fishermen fighting legislators, fishermen fighting the department. The earliest Forums were knock-down, drag-out affairs. Now, many of the issues that separated people have been resolved through the process, although the Forums still get heated.

I can recall one Forum in which gillnetters and harpooners battled over swordfish. It was a dramatic confrontation.

The fishermen often say they are not great orators, but in fact, their colorful prose descriptions make them wonderful storytellers.

Eventually we all learned a powerful lesson from the Forums - that if you can get together on issues you can multiply your political leverage.

There have been some very real benefits from the Forum process:

*There is a regular dialogue now. We can't understand another's point of view if we attribute motives to them. Understanding comes when we finally hear what their motives really are.

*There is now confidence that participation can make things happen.

*Legislators ARE interested. Legislators have respect for institutionalized groups that have a track record as the Forum does.

*The Forum has focused attention on fisheries, and increased visibility.

When the women's organizations began to hold the seafood receptions in 1981 the Forum began to reach a whole second tier of legislators - those that simply like seafood. We've been able to use those contacts when the industry was in trouble. The reception has created a great fund of good will.

The Forum eventually led to the formation of the Joint Legislative Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture. The committee enabled us to get an effort together on legislation. Differing interests are able to support each others bills.

In the near future we will have to be careful that funding for important programs doesn't dry out. We will also have to deal with a major water plan in the next year.

As for the future of the Forum process - I see any changes being evolutionary in nature. They will be incremental changes. After all, you don't fix something that is working. And the Forum does work.

Senator Barry Keene