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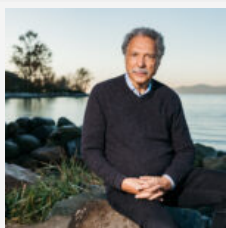
A Conversation with Daniel Pauly (Part 2)

“My personal and political identity was always questioned”

June 2023 (Part 2)

In this very candid interview, we sat down with Daniel Pauly; 2023 Tyler Prize Laureate, and eminent marine biologist – to discuss the importance of being an active citizen. Professor Pauly delves into the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements, the career cost of speaking up for change, and the risks of a career in science.

(This interview is part two in a series. You can read part one [here](#)).



Daniel Pauly (Photo Credit: Kim Bellavance)

You’ve not been afraid to ruffle feathers in your career. Are there any particularly difficult situations that stand out in your memory?

The center where I worked had a big scandal. Essentially one of my male staff assaulted one of the female staff, and I went to complain to the CEO at the time, and he said, “oh, boys will be boys”. This was 10 or 20 years before #Metoo. I did not accept my CEO’s response. We wrote to the board, who in their wisdom decided that we should have been silent. Of course, the whole thing exploded. So in 1994 I walked away from that contract and decided to accept a job here (at the University of British Columbia).

I’ve heard you speak in interviews about the Black Lives Matter movement in North America and your identity as a black scientist. How does that inform your work?

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I am indeed a black scientist, and I present myself as such, but until recently I played it down because in a sense when you're a minority, you *are* the point. I don't need to do or say anything: the fact that I'm there says something. But with the murder of George Floyd two years ago and the reaction of the Western world, I realized that I ought to do more. I ought to be more explicit about things and not let people implicitly infer what my position might be.

I will tell you a secret. As a black person, I had assumed that the default in white people is to be racist. I assumed this as a default because we live in a society that is profoundly racist: the structure of income, of relationships. If you as a white person live in a context that is structured by racism, if you don't protest it, if you don't do anything about it, then the default setting is that you accept it and you are infected by it as well. But I realize now that things have changed and I should change my assumptions about the people around me. The murder of George Floyd outraged a lot of white people and they were willing to go out into the street and to protest. That realization got me out of my shell. So now I participate in discussions and give interviews about this, whereas I didn't before.

Do you have any thoughts on getting more black students into science?

I must find out how to connect with young people, not on the basis of being a professor of marine biology, but being a role model. When students tell me they are considering doing science, I tell them that they have to believe in it. You have to be involved in it. That has to be your life if you're gonna be at all successful. For black students, male and female, it is difficult, because another thing is the expectation of success.

When I went to South Africa one time, a young woman studying marine biology told me that in the immigrant community there, the only academics were lawyers and doctors who earn enough money to help their families and stuff. What a fishery scientist will earn is just enough to be getting by.

There's a huge risk involved: the risk of not getting tenure, the risk of not getting a job, the risk of failing as a scientist to make a mark. When you come from a community that has been fragile, that has been enslaved for 300 years, are you gonna move into something that is risky as hell? If they don't have an uncle or aunt that is in the business, they don't have a door to this world. So this is very difficult.

I'm not a hundred percent pessimist. This is something that can be solved, but I don't think there is a magic solution, it is like a ship slowly changing direction.

What led to your interest in working in the Global South?

I wanted to work in the global south because I was uncomfortable living as a biracial person in Europe. My personal and political identity was always questioned. There was a cultural revolution in the sixties and seventies in the Western world and we all wanted to do something. And that's what I did.

What are your thoughts on the concept of decolonizing conservation? Would you say that this is a key feature of your life's work?

My take on decolonizing is, having worked much of my career in the tropics, I have seen the disparity in my field between the Global North and the Global South. And much of my

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Daniel Pauly and Rashid Sumaila (Photo Credit: Kim Bellavance)

work has been about how I can overcome this disparity. I call it empowering, which is just another way of saying it. I'm explicit about empowering people who have not been empowered so far. My work has been explicitly addressing this issue. For example, Fishbase has the same level of depth or superficiality for rich countries as for poor ones. We include something only if it can be done fairly.

You've clearly had many successes during the course of your career. What have you learned from any failures you've had to deal with along the way?

Well, I didn't have many failures, but I think that I've learned from success. When I've had one success, it's enabled another one, and another one. So I think that learning from success is just as important as learning from failure.

—
A big thank you to Daniel for taking the time to speak with the Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement.

In part one of this interview, Daniel discussed 'forgetting' he was nominated for the Tyler Prize, how growing up in Germany pushed him towards a career in marine science, and how global overfishing is "a giant Ponzi scheme".

You can read part 1 of the interview [here](#).

To read more on Dr. Pauly's incredible work:

[YouTube – Dr. Daniel Pauly](#)

Faculty Website: [Dr. Daniel Pauly, University of British Columbia](#)

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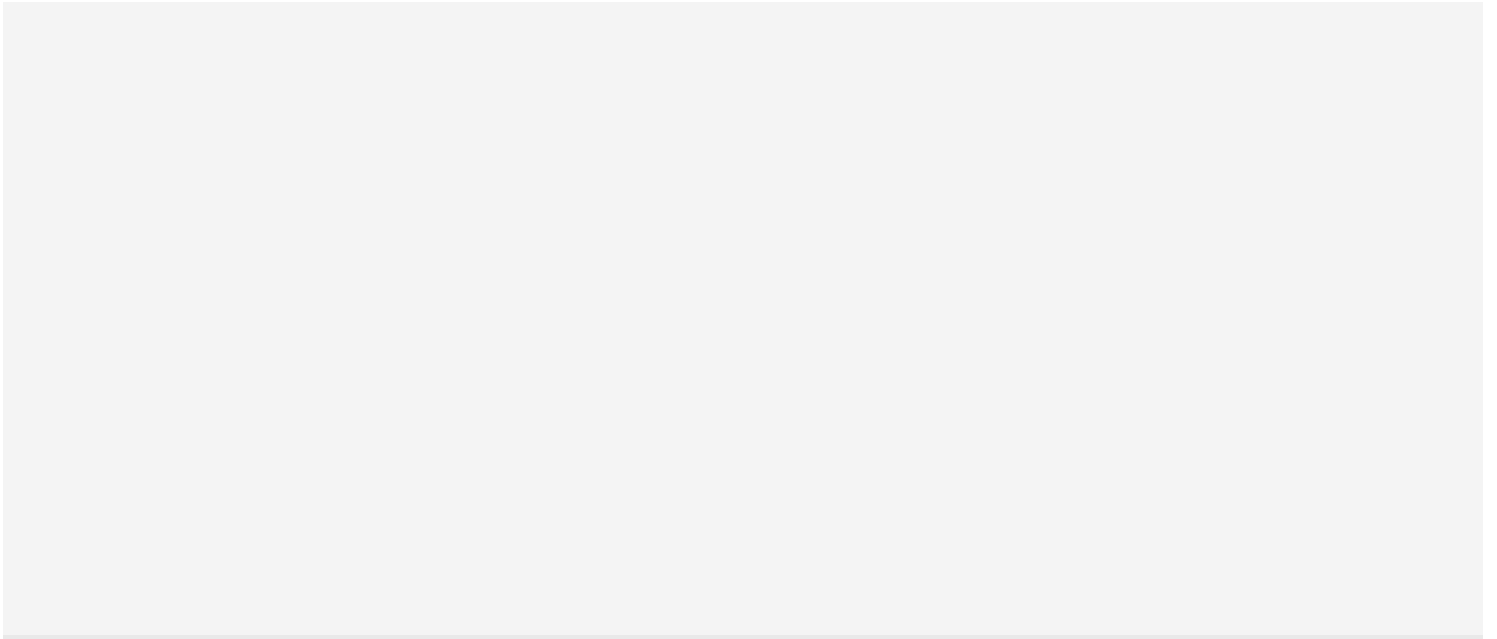
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