

Trip to BC an eye-opener for NE fishermen

New England fisheries are poised to undergo significant changes that will hopefully restore our fisheries to their glorious past. One particular change is the move toward sector allocations, and this process will be an adjustment for many in the industry.

For this reason, a group of 12 people with an interest in New England fisheries, including eight fishing industry members, visited British Columbia (BC) in Canada June 23-27 to see firsthand how the groundfish fishery there is managed under an individual vessel quota (IVQ) program.

The Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) sponsored this trip with help from the Alex C. Walker Foundation so participants could see a mature catch share system and have the opportunity to ask Canadian managers and industry members in person how the system works for them. The hope was to discover ways to improve fisheries management here in New England.

Bruce Turriss, an economist with Pacific Fisheries Management Inc., organized the tour. A former Canada Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) fisheries manager, Turriss pioneered BC's IVQ system and he did an excellent job walking us through the history of the province's groundfish fishery's transition to a catch share system.

Our group also met with Adam Keizer, DFO's groundfish hook and line coordinator, who is one of six DFO staffers working in the Groundfish Management Unit that manages more than 60 different stocks.

In addition to three EDF staffers and Amy Van Atten of the National Marine Fisheries Service, the New England industry member participants in the trip were: Tim Caldwell, Ted Platz, Rodney Avila, Chris Brown, Allyson Jordan, Maggie Raymond, Kim Libby, and Eric Brazer.



VOICES

Readers regularly approach Commercial Fisheries News

(CFN) with subjects they feel so passionately about that we suggest they write a Guest Column to share their observations or concerns with our audience. And every so often, we receive so many of these submissions that they merit a full "Voices" special focus. That's the case in this edition of CFN, which features five such pieces.

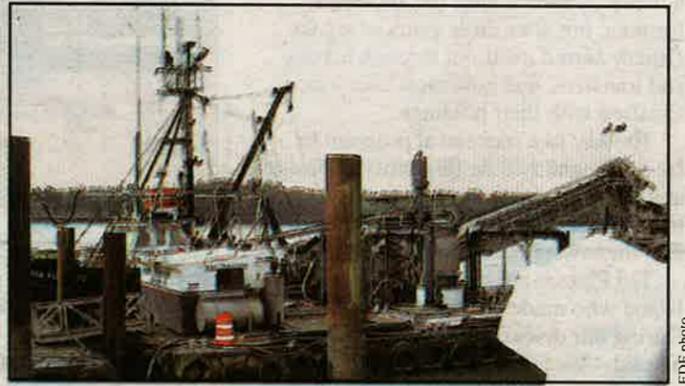
Fisherman Ted Platz of Newport, RI explains why he believes many management strategies are so obsolete they should be abandoned, while fisherman Stu Tolley of Chatham, MA describes his concerns about the potential harm of sector allocation formulas that take into account factors other than catch history. **Pages 6C - 7C.**

Northeast Consortium Director Chris Glass recounts the achievements of partnerships between fishermen and scientists over the last decade and how a lack of funding could put an end to these joint endeavors. He challenges commercial fishermen to speak up to help create a vision for the future of collaborative research. **Page 12C.**

Finally, starting on this page, Emilie Litsinger of the Environmental Defense Fund chronicles a recent trip by a



During the British Columbia trip, the New England group visited a processing plant to see firsthand how the fishery's dockside monitoring program works. A 65' trawler offloaded its 75,000-pound catch, landed under the fishery's catch share system. The fish, mostly all Pacific ocean perch and yellowtail rockfish, were tracked from fishing boat to dockside observer to processing plant and on through distribution and labeling.



group of fishermen and environmentalists to British Columbia to see firsthand how an individual vessel quota plan is working there. Point Judith fisherman Chris Brown, who went on the trip, adds some of his own thoughts on the system, see below.

We appreciate these thoughtful Voices contributions and are always open to hearing your ideas for similar columns.

—Editor

"Race for fish"

Before the groundfish fisheries catch share system was implemented, the fishery was managed under gear and vessel restrictions, trip limits, and seasons.

There were major resource sustainability problems due to the lack of information on discards and bycatch. The fleet was highly invested in electronics, gear, and crew. Fishermen were racing to

find fish and more ways to increase their catching power, while fish stocks were declining.

Safety issues were a concern because
See **FISHERMEN VISIT BC**, next page

RI's Chris Brown: 'We are now where they were then'

Recently it was my good fortune to be part of a small group of New England fisheries folks who were invited to Vancouver, British Columbia (BC) to study the monitoring systems currently in use there.

It is no secret that our groundfish fishery in New England has scratched and clawed its way to a perfect impasse with Amendment 16. As it stands today, no one who is groundfish-dependant can survive what the law now calls for.

We have come to the very same conclusion that the fishermen of the Canadian Northwest came to some 15 years ago. That is, we are in desperate need of a complete overhaul of our management strategy. We are precisely now where they were then just prior to their complete closure.

Overcapitalization in the BC region had sponsored an endless race to fish and subsequently rewarded the fishery's Olympians with the laurels of poor quality and low prices for their fish.

Unreported discards and misreported areas of capture, coupled with poaching and high-grading, had

effectively misled the science and sapped the ecosystem's ability to provide a sustainable livelihood for those who were so dependant upon it.

Lacking the management tools and an initial willingness to change, the BC fishermen were closed down for about five months by an unyielding government.

Does any of this sound familiar?

Darkest hour

It struck me how unfortunate it was to have had to close the fishery, to have had to hit such a low point, to have had to arrive at the darkest hour in order to foster meaningful change.

Yet, the BC fishermen told me that is what it took.

After five months of negotiation, they emerged with a catch-shares solution and mandatory observer coverage, both at sea and while unloading. They have never looked back.

In electing to hold themselves to a higher standard of harvesting ethics, the BC fishermen have returned to prosperity. By openly acknowledging the harmful effects of discarding perfectly good fish and developing a fully integrated groundfish



Chris Brown, facing camera, was among the group, which included eight New England industry members, visiting British Columbia.

fishery, they have traded a fishery in crisis for a healthy and robust one.

Catch shares, 100% observer coverage, quota trading, weigh masters – these are all terms and ideas that are strange to us and, admittedly, initially frightening. Get used to them. They are here to stay. And as you do, get used to some other terms as well – prosperity, security, and dignity.

Remember, we are now where they were then.

Chris Brown

Chris Brown has been the captain and owner of the Grandville Davis out of Point Judith, RI since 1979. He is also president of the Rhode Island Commercial Fishermen's Association.

Fishermen visit BC Continued from previous page

fishermen were going out in bad weather, unable to properly maintain vessels, and crews were working too many hours.

Sound familiar?

The "race for fish" forced the DFO to close the groundfish fishery for five months. BC fishermen were outraged with this decision, but desperate and willing to change in order to reopen the fishery.

Allocation

For once, fishermen and the DFO came together to design and implement a new and more effective management system. The industry members with whom we talked said that the allocation formula was one of the most contentious issues and took the longest to adjust to.

Initially, more than 70% of the permit holders disagreed with the allocation formula, but after three years or so, the fishery sorted itself out through leasing and transfers, and now most everyone is satisfied with their holdings.

The key to a successful program in New England will be flexibility in design and the ability to allow for quota transfers. In the first year of operation in BC, there were 6,500 quota transfers.

Ted Platz is a fisherman from Rhode Island who made the trip to Canada. During our discussion with BC fishermen, he said, "We are all going to take a big hit going to a quota system compared to our previous year's landings. But if you go from being disenfranchised in the days-at-sea system, like we are now, to being a stakeholder in a quota system, then that is a good trade in my mind."

Positive impacts

The transition to a catch share system had many positive impacts on the BC fishery. Fishermen no longer race to catch more fish. Rather, they now attempt to maximize the value of their quota by ensuring the health of the resource.

The value of a quota is increased when fishermen stay within the total allowable catch and when there is more certainty of the health of the stock through improved science and monitoring.

Under the catch share system, fishermen are able to plan for the future

The New England group visited Archipelago Marine Research Ltd. on Vancouver Island to learn more about BC monitoring.



The BC groundfish monitoring system has three programs: dockside, at-sea monitoring, and electronic. At left, components of the electronic system include the cameras, upper right in the photo, a control box, and computer with specialized software. Above, members of the New England group watch intently as a computer operator, not pictured, shows how information viewed by the cameras appears on the computer screen, pictured at left.



Rodney Avila photo

and time their landings to maximize their profits by delivering products at the time requested by the market.

"Rationalization"

A tough adjustment for a number of fishermen regarded fleet rationalization. Before the transition, there were approximately 1,000 active permits in the BC groundfish fishery and now there are around 400.

Crew employment also changed. The number of crewmembers employed has dropped by approximately 50%. However, the crew jobs that remain in the industry are better paying, longer term, and more stable.

Cleaner catch

During the trip, we visited a processing plant to see firsthand how the fishery's dockside monitoring program works.

We were able to witness the offloading of a vessel that was targeting Pacific ocean perch and track the catch from fishing boat to dockside observer



EDF photo

onboard hook-and-line vessels and inshore trawl vessels. This portion of the program consists of 200 electronic monitoring systems that monitor 1,300 sea days on 230 vessels a year.

to processing plant and on through distribution and labeling.

The vessel was a 65' trawler that landed around 75,000 pounds. One thing that was striking was that these 75,000 pounds were primarily composed of only two species - Pacific ocean perch and yellowtail rockfish.

Despite the diverse species composition of the fishery, the vessel was able to fish much more carefully and strategically under the catch share system and harvest mostly the species of interest on any given trip.

Strict monitoring

We also visited Archipelago Marine Research Ltd. on Vancouver Island to learn more about monitoring.

Rodney Avila is a New Bedford fisherman and member of the New England Fishery Management Council who participated in the trip.

"After seeing how this system works, I think this is a more user-friendly observer or monitoring system than the one the US uses," he said.

The BC groundfish monitoring system is comprised of three programs: dockside monitoring, at-sea monitoring, and electronic monitoring.

The dockside portion of the program consists of 60 monitors who travel to 30 ports across BC, some in very remote areas. There are around 3,500 landings each year and all offloads are monitored.

At-sea monitoring consists of 100% at-sea observer coverage for all offshore trawl vessels. There are 60 certified at-sea observers who put in a total of 5,000 sea days a year and go out on 50-trawl vessels.

Electronic monitoring is required

Data collected from the dockside observers and the at-sea observers are consolidated, analyzed, and reported within a day of landing. It takes about a week for data collected by electronic monitoring systems to be interpreted, analyzed, and reported. One of the trawler crewmembers said that it took three-to-five years for everyone to come around on the monitoring programs, but he believes that if it weren't for these programs, BC wouldn't have a fishery today.

As Ted Platz put it, "Without accountability you won't have sustainability."

Learn from BC

No two fisheries are alike. However, certain key elements of fisheries management can be translated for different species, gear, areas, etc. As New England slowly begins to adopt sectors, we can learn from our neighbors to the north without losing what is most important and distinctive about our fishing heritage.

There is still much work to be done and much more to learn about how we can choose the best elements of the Canadian system, but we have to start somewhere.

Stakeholders, those of us here in New England who want healthy fisheries and profitable fishing communities and industries, are working towards that goal, slowly but surely.

Emilie Litsinger

Emilie Litsinger, who is the groundfish project manager for the Environmental Defense Fund's Oceans Program, is based in Boston. The information presented in this Voices column was collected during the trip to British Columbia from participants and presentations given by Bruce Turris, Adam Keizer, and Howard McElderry.



Rodney Avila photo

The purpose of the British Columbia visit was to provide New England fishing industry members the opportunity to see firsthand how the province manages its groundfish fishery using an individual vessel quota program.