



Leslie Harris Centre of Regional Policy and Development

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**Memorial University Fishery Policy Meeting
June 1, 2012, 9:00 am to 11:45 am
McCann Centre, Education Building**

In attendance:

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| 1. Carey Bonnell | 5. Larry Felt | 9. Robert Sweeney |
| 2. Tom Brown | 6. Noel Roy | 10. David Vardy |
| 3. Mike Clair | 7. Gabriela Sabau* | 11. Bob Verge |
| 4. Reade Davis* | 8. Alvin Simms | 12. Dick Whitaker |

* By teleconference

Record of Discussion:

1. Welcome and Introductions: Mike welcomed the new members to the committee and outlined the agenda for the meeting, which is to discuss the purpose and governance of the group. He asked the new members to outline their areas of research and/or expertise:
 - Dr. Gabriela Sabau is with the Department of Business and Economics at the Grenfell Campus. She is currently researching the fishery of Iceland, and is concerned about the drain of wealth from the country, as quotas are being sold to foreign interests. She is also concerned that the commons are not protected.
 - Tom Brown is with the School of Fisheries at the Marine Institute. More specifically, he works with the Centre for Fisheries Ecosystems Research, which is led by Dr. George Rose.
 - Dr. Alvin Simms is a Professor of Geography in St. John's, with research expertise in the economy and demography of rural Newfoundland and Labrador.
2. Cyr Couturier of the Marine Institute had planned to attend the meeting but was called away at the last minute. He had planned to make the following comments at the meeting and asked that they be included in the report from this meeting:
 - The Provincial Government does appear to support fisheries renewal. They appear to have a policy of support towards sustainable aquaculture in terms of economic renewal of coastal communities in need as this is reflected in the work plans of a few of the Zone Boards, in Rural Secretariat studies and in infrastructure support. Several dozen communities around the island

are happy to include sustainable aquaculture as a major socioeconomic factor in their area. There is a need however to further support R&D for ongoing development and improvement of the sector, much like the millions in R&D devoted for wild-capture fisheries (e.g., contributions to CFER, FITNOP, CCFI, etc.).

- Sustainable aquaculture will contribute over \$200 million to the NL rural economy this year, will employ almost 1,000 full-time and 1,000 part-time workers in rural communities, in comparatively well-paying and mostly year-round jobs.
 - More than half of the workers in aquaculture now come from the fishery; some still fish. The industry does coexist with wild-capture fisheries and not at its expense. Nor has it displaced any fish harvesters.
 - Recruitment for full-time employees in both plants and farms is increasingly difficult, owing to demographics as well as challenges associated with the Employment Insurance program.
3. The main purpose of this meeting is not to discuss any specific issues in the fishery, but rather to agree among the group as to how it should work. Mike outlined some of the questions which need to be answered (attached in appendix). This generated the following discussion:
- The role of this group is to speak truth to power: to governments, to interest groups, etc. It is time to be brutally honest.
 - Should we add the word "sustainable" to the name of the group? Should the group focus on fishery policy or address the broader issue of rural sustainability? There seemed to be some consensus that rural sustainability was too broad and that the fishery was complex enough. In any event, the fishery was an important contributor to rural sustainability, and if we could gain some successes there, it would *de facto* address rural sustainability. We are interested in research on fishery policy that helps sustain a viable rural Newfoundland and Labrador
 - There is no shared vision of what we want to accomplish with the fishery as a society. We need to have a collective vision. There seems to be a complete lack of understanding about what NL should expect from this common-property resource. But one thing is clear: the fishery has to operate as a business, otherwise, it will not contribute to rural development. The recommendations of the Kirby Task Force of 30 years ago on the fishing industry are still as valid today as they were then. We are facing a dire economic situation. We are not doing what customers want, we have a cost structure that is not sustainable, we are inefficient. This is not a crisis, rather it is the end of an illusion. Despite the highest revenues in the province's history, all is doom and gloom in the public discourse.
 - We are going through an exercise that Iceland and Norway have already done. Can we learn from them? Our industry is restructuring by attrition; because there is no overall policy to handle restructuring, we may not end up with the end result we want. (For example, it looks like crab and shrimp stocks might be dropping, but there is still no clear idea of whether cod will bounce back.) Resource sustainability is a major issue today.

- We need to decide what kind of a group we are. We need to talk about how we know about things. People are coming at things from various – and sometimes conflicting – angles. What can a group like ours at a university do? At the very least, we can act as a forum among ourselves, and talk about current research being undertaken. If this group brings together useful information, to what end? Who will be listening?
- While we should not be a lobby group, we do want to influence fishery policy. Some units at Memorial University are not comfortable with an active role in this area. However, there are a variety of ways in which the University could impact policy. For example, the Marine Institute conducted research on biodegradable twine to reduce “ghost nets”; as a result of this research biodegradable twine will now be mandatory in the snow crab fishery next year. Another example might involve research on property rights in the fishery, a topic with much greater political repercussions. We should not shy away from helping to set a vision for the fishery. If policy is not appropriate, we should attempt to influence it through our activities. We need to examine the tension between economic profit and social benefits. We need to make sure that the people who depend upon the fishery obtain a fair share of the benefits. It is unlikely (and not necessary) to achieve a consensus as a group. But at the very least, we can share our research and feed each other. We can agree to disagree.
- Given the differences of approach and of epistemology within the group, how should the group be structured? It was felt that the group should be relatively loose. The group is a mechanism for harnessing the interests of people with an interest in any aspect of the fishery. (It was suggested that the group acts like an independent think-tank dealing with policy.) The group sanctions the actions of researchers and may also provide shelter for them if the need arises. The group does not “speak for” Memorial University when it comes to the fishery. However, the group can provide a platform for scholars and researchers who wish to address the public and/or the media.
- The identity of the group needs to be developed over time. There needs to be a period where we get to know each other and our different approaches to the fishery; we need to be comfortable talking with each other before we do much more in terms of communicating our existence and our activities externally. It was suggested that there be one meeting during July-August, and that a monthly meeting be scheduled starting in September.
- One of the first orders of business for the group would be to develop a "curriculum" at the regular monthly meetings. Exactly what is the information which we would like to convey to the public and to decision-makers. Given the complexity and scope of the fishery, this will require some thought and some discussion.
- It was suggested that the name of the group be the "MUN Fishery Forum", a name which is general enough to encompass everyone interested in the topic at Memorial University.

- There is an overabundance of opinion in the fishery, not often founded on facts. Collective decisions are usually based on the absence of facts and on opinion polls. We have no idea of whether previous research projects (such as Coasts Under Stress) have had any impact on public policy. (When Gabriela published a paper on the lack of waste water treatment in rural NL communities, there was no public policy reaction whatsoever.)
- There is already a lot of collaboration on the fishery taking place at Memorial University. We should do an inventory of the research and outreach that has already been done as well as is currently being done.
- We are an elite group, and therefore vulnerable to accusations of being out of touch with the realities on the ground. However, it was pointed out that much of the research being undertaken by Memorial researchers is in partnership with stakeholders (fishers, plant owners, municipal leaders, NGOs, etc.). This is certainly the case with everything being done at the Marine Institute. There was general agreement that we should be listening to the people who are active in the fishery: fishers, plant owners, etc. We need to ensure that we gather local intelligence about the fishery, e.g., by monitoring local newspapers. Larry related a story of a fish captain who was unhappy that the cod were returning, because they were eating the shellfish spawn, and he generated more revenue from shellfish than he ever did with cod. This was a counterintuitive reaction, which isn't at all what we would have expected; we need to be aware of these opinions and vested positions, so as not walk naively into a tempest.
- (Has there ever been a fishery person given an honorary doctorate at Memorial University?)
- The public thinks that there is nothing happening at Memorial University dealing with the fishery; we don't communicate enough. For example, it would be great if George Rose would communicate the findings from his recent field trip to the public. As another example, we could do presentations at the semi-annual meetings of Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, where 300 people attend. We could do podcasts. It's important that we don't appear as being "ivory tower" representatives. We have a responsibility to educate and to clarify, to provide empirical evidence. This is an argument in favour of having the public as the target audience for the group. We need to communicate with the community, not just with policy makers. If we communicate our research to the public, this should indirectly influence public policy.
- Multi-disciplinary teamwork is not frequent in fishery research. Where can we build more interdisciplinary research? We need to tear down the silos.
- Tom stated that his Centre has difficulty recruiting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to study the fishery, especially at the graduate level. We don't have much of a focus on the fishery at the undergraduate level in Biology; the lack of an academic path means they are not guided to the graduate level. For her part, Gabriela has difficulty encouraging her students to do research in the fishery; they're simply not interested. There seems to be a stigma against the fishery in the

province. In contrast, schools in Iceland have developed an apprenticeship program in the fishery, beginning in Grade 8.

- One problem with analyzing the fishery in NL is the difficulty of acquiring data. Some of this difficulty is due to some data being proprietary to firms. But even government makes its own data difficult to access. This is an issue where the University can take a stand as an institution.
- Municipal governments need to have more involvement in the fishery. There is currently too little collaboration between municipalities in certain regions.
- A significant gap in the industry (and also at the university) is the lack of knowledge about markets for seafood. Because markets are usually outside the province, they are "out of sight, out of mind". Having said that, there is also potential to build a provincial market for locally-caught seafood. The Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) in the Faculty of Business Administration keeps winning awards; why not encourage them to tackle projects in the fishery? However, while markets are important, we need to place more emphasis on fish stocks. This does not seem to be a priority of policy makers. We need to find the appropriate balance between profitability, a sustainable resource and social benefits. As well, upcoming changes to Employment Insurance will significantly affect rural Newfoundland and Labrador. There was a general agreement that the fishery of the province will be going through some very difficult times in the near future. We are probably not going to be happy with the outcome unless we (the MUN Fishery Forum) becomes involved in some way.
- Mike mentioned that the Harris Centre had a budget for public forums as well as for in camera sessions with decision-makers and policy advisors. Some of this funding could be redirected to the MUN Fishery Forum.
- The report "Defining the Reality" (Keith Storey, 1993) was a particularly valuable work, as it included data and articles by government people, as well as MUN. it might serve as a useful model for future research.
- Aboriginal groups in the province are developing commercial fisheries. This will likely have significant implications on the fishery of Newfoundland and Labrador.
- Robert Sweeney suggested the following as possible next steps: (1) an inventory of existing research and resources, which he has volunteered to lead; (2) a quick link on the MUN homepage for "Fisheries"; (3) a regular article on the fishery in the Gazette; (4) monthly meetings of the group; (5) undertake 4-6 public sessions per year; (6) publication of occasional papers. Carey added (7) the need for an inventory of research gaps.
- Mike suggested that the bibliography should be incorporated into Yaffle, since that database is already set up to catalogue and promote research and resources at Memorial University.

4. Concluding Remarks by David Vardy: He is a great believer on sound public policy based on evidence. We need more directed research dealing with public policy. Very comfortable with the direction of the discussion this morning. Governments have not come to us; we are trying to interpose ourselves in the policy process. We need to establish our bona fides. MUN has the reputation of not doing enough in the fishery. Art May complained how difficult it is to establish a research agenda at a university. Our focus should be on exchanging information and on building our internal capacity. But this is not enough, we need to bring people in from the outside. Engagement means that research is a two-way street. The current crisis has come as a shock to many communities; we haven't done enough to communicate with them over the years. Because of the euphoria of shellfish, we never came to terms with the loss of the codfish. The herring on the South Coast of the Island collapsed, and again, this has never been appropriately acknowledged.
5. Next steps
 - Mike will convene a third meeting of the group at the end of July, where this discussion can be continued. A detailed agenda will be sent out prior to the meeting.
 - Mike will circulate an invitation to all members of the MUN Fishery Forum to submit items for the bibliography to Robert Sweeney: past research and current activities.
 - Mike will talk to the Division of Marketing & Communications regarding the setting up of a hyperlink from Memorial's homepage and the creation of a regular feature in the *Gazette*.