



Leslie Harris Centre of Regional Policy and Development

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

In attendance:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---|
| 1. Carey Bonnell | 5. Reade Davis | 9. Noel Roy |
| 2. Ratana Chuenpagdee | 6. Ian Fleming | 10. Robert Sweeney |
| 3. Mike Clair | 7. Garth Fletcher | 11. David Vardy* (notes in blue) |
| 4. Cyr Couturier | 8. Barb Neis | 12. Bob Verge |
| | | 13. Dick Whitaker |

* Teleconference

Record of Discussion:

The agenda for the meeting was to review the draft document prepared by Mike regarding what the mandate of the group is to be. Of the 18 slides in the document, there was time to examine only seven of them. They are listed in the order in which they were discussed.

Slide 7 – Mandate of the Group

To study the fishery of Newfoundland and Labrador from all possible angles in order to bring clarity to complex interrelationships

To share information among the group and to discuss issues – even the most contentious – in a respectful and collegial manner, so that we may all learn from each other

To share information with the public and with decision-makers in order to inform public policy

There was general agreement that the core function of the group was the second bullet, and that the other two were of a secondary nature.

While research is core to the University and is a major part of every faculty's job, it is not the job of this group to undertake research. As well, "from all possible angles" seemed to imply a certain amount of hubris. It was therefore suggested that the first bullet be changed to: "To promote the study of the fishery of Newfoundland and Labrador from a variety of perspectives in order to bring clarity to complex interrelationships."

The second bullet was felt to include an important contribution that the group could make, which is to identify, [prioritize](#) and encourage multidisciplinary research projects.

No decision was made as to whether the third bullet would be retained. There was general agreement that simply engaging in internal discussions wasn't sufficient, and that we should try to provide solutions to real-life problems. Some felt that, while we may not be able to do this right away, it should still remain in our mandate statement. However, others felt that it was the job of the Harris Centre and similar units (e.g., CURRA, "Too Big To Ignore") to mobilize research results as part of their work, and that this should be done outside the group.

Some questioned whether it was explicitly the role of the group to inform public policy, and that it should be sufficient for the group to act as an internal forum only. This issue arose later on in the meeting during the discussion about the title slide.

The question arose as to whether this group should recommend policy positions to the University administration, so that they might advocate for these positions in the public sphere; that is, the group would provide arguments to bring the University's authority to bear on specific issues. It was felt unlikely that the University administration would want to weigh in on specific issues and, in any event, it is even questionable whether the necessary consensus could be achieved within our group, such that we could make a recommendation to the administration. [There was a distinction drawn between the University, as a corporate body, entering the public policy fray by making recommendations compared with the University's internal priority-setting process whereby the allocation of funds among disciplines and University units represents an articulation of priority. The University's policy decision with respect to fisheries relates mainly to how fisheries research is funded within the academy. Clearly, it is inappropriate for the University to take public policy positions on matters relating to how the fishery is managed.](#)

Slide 9 – Focus on fishery policy

The group is a community of interest; it has no corporate existence other than being a committee of Memorial University; therefore, the group may not seek funding under its own name nor may it advocate for any issue (except for basing fishery policy on an open, non-partisan, informed and respectful discussion)

The term "community of interest" connotes a group whose agenda includes advocacy. As well, it is not formally "a committee of Memorial University" since it does not have a formal mandate from the University. The slide was therefore changed to: "The group is composed of people at Memorial University who share an interest in the fishery; the group will not seek funding under its own name nor advocate for any issue (except for basing fishery policy on an open, non-partisan, informed and respectful discussion)"

Slide 10 – Valuing differing viewpoints (1)

The group makes decisions in a collegial manner, i.e., it recognizes individual independence of thought and mutual respect

The group decides by consensus; no one has a veto; the decision process is explicit, rational and fair; members are listened to and treated fairly; and all commit to the outcome of the decision

It was felt that this slide added nothing to the discussion about the group and, in fact, created confusion. It was therefore decided to eliminate this slide.

Slide 11 – Valuing differing viewpoints (2)

Conflicts will arise based on knowledge gaps, the interpretation of facts and differing values; unresolved conflicts are acknowledged explicitly, as they reflect differing points of view in the fishery

The group is a safe place to discuss controversial issues without fear of attribution outside the group

Some in the group argued in favour of transparency and felt that excluding others from our discussions goes against the principle of open discussion, which is what a university should be all about. Others felt that, because issues in the fishery can be extremely contentious, there should be a "safe space" where a robust discussion among academic colleagues could take place. There is no correct answer to the issue of confidentiality; it depends on what the group wishes to accomplish and whether it is more likely to accomplish it within a safe space or without one.

It seems that, whenever the fishery is discussed in public, whoever promotes a viewpoint that is not to one's liking is subject to *ad hominem* attacks, which discourages open and critical discourse.

The fear was expressed that, if the group is not a safe space, members will hold their opinions for fear of being misrepresented outside, and that some will refuse to take part. In fact, several members of the group stated that they would not participate if there was no guarantee of confidentiality within the group.

It was suggested that the committee adopt a "default mode" of confidentiality, but that if one of the members wanted to quote another outside the group, that the former seek permission from the latter.

This matter was left unresolved to give people a chance to think about it further. It will be brought back at the next meeting and a decision made then.

Slide 3 – Draft vision of fishery policy

The fishery of Newfoundland and Labrador is guided by the wisdom, energy and creativity of all its stakeholders, including harvesters, processors, unions, community leaders, regional development practitioners, government officials and academic researchers. Decisions regarding the fishery are made in an open, evidence-based, non-partisan and respectful fashion.

It was decided to add non-governmental organizations to the list of stakeholders. We also added "concerned citizens" to represent those members of the public who don't fall within any of the categories listed.

Slide 5 – Draft scope of the mission

Memorial University recognizes that, in order for the fishery to be sustainable, the following must be sustainable:

Fish stocks and their habitats

Commercial enterprises related to the fishery

Communities which provide the base for the fishery

"Fish stocks and their habitats" was changed to "Fish ecosystems and their habitats"

Slide 1 – Title slide

How Memorial University will inform public policy

The discussion on this slide generated a great deal of discussion about exactly what the role of the group should be.

Some felt that the focus on public policy (i.e., on government) was misguided:

- It is difficult, if not impossible to inform public policy, especially with governments who are intent on taking a *laissez-faire* policy regarding the fishery.
- Governments are not the only groups which formulate policies regarding the fishery; others include corporations, unions and municipalities.
- Some in the group deal with "practice", whether along with policy or not. Should the title therefore read "How Memorial University will inform public policy and practice"?
- Some felt that the term "fishery or fisheries decisions" should be used instead of "public policy" to recognize that not all of the decisions taken are public policy decisions; some are individual and some are corporate.
- Some felt that the focus on public policy was too restrictive in that the group should focus on overall sustainability (ecological, economic and community). However, this raised the issue of how to define "sustainability", which seems to be an even more contentious issue.

The issue of the title slide was deferred until the next meeting.

Time ran out at this stage, and it was decided to dedicate one more meeting of the group to finalizing the governance structure, before undertaking the "real work" of the group. Mike will send out a survey

to determine the members' availability, and will select a date and time when the largest number of members are available.

Several members expressed the concern that we need to get more Memorial researchers involved in the meetings, otherwise, this initiative will run out of momentum. Mike will do his best to ensure that members are aware of the next meeting.

Members were asked to come up with suggestions at the next meeting as to who should chair the group.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 am.