



## Who'll Be Left Fishing?: The Dilemma of Recruitment in Small Boat Fishing

*"I'm trying' to discourage my son from goin' into fishin'."* (Guysborough County fisherman).

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### *Family and Community: the Heart of Small*

Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries (SRSF) has completed some research and analyses which reveal a serious issue that is facing the region's small boat fisheries. This issue is best described as the dilemma of recruitment. Put another way, where will the next generation of small boat fishermen be coming from? Atlantic Canada's small boat fisheries are now, and always have been, a family-centered livelihood and way of living. That is, the vast majority of those presently fishing were born into and raised within families and communities that are defined by their history and involvement with fishing. Most had their first fishing experiences and learned how to fish from family members. Their fathers, grandfathers and other male ancestors came to fishing in precisely the same ways. So, today's fishermen are the latest in a generations deep, family-centered association with fishing.

These 'social facts' are highlighted in the results of some recent research. A survey of all Richmond and Guysborough County lobster license holders reveals that almost 85% have or had fathers who fished, and almost 80% report having father's fathers who fished for their living. Indeed, almost one in every two report that their mother's

Similarly, a recent social survey of a stratified random sample of lobster license holders in Antigonish, Inverness, and Pictou Counties found that over 75% of the participants had fathers who fish or fished. Further, almost 60% reported that one or both grandfathers fish or fished, 65% had at least one uncle who fished or fishes, and over one in every two had at least one brother who fishes or fished for their living. Finally, the vast majority of the participants in these studies report that they learned fishing skills and knowledge from kin and familiars, most commonly their fathers. There is little doubt that similar social patterns in the small boat fisheries prevail throughout

## *Family and Community: the Heart of Small Boat*

There is no denying that fishing for a living is physically difficult and often dangerous work. It is rare to find a fishing family that has not experienced the loss at sea of one or more family members or close friends. Fishing for a living also comes with considerable uncertainties about catches and incomes, and little if any say about values received for landings.

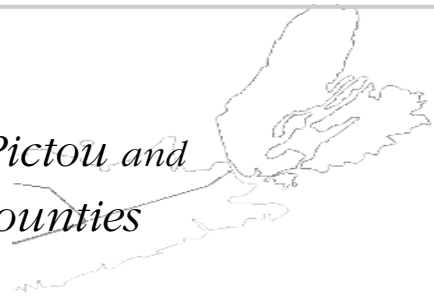
Yet, small boat fishing is also extremely satisfying and fulfilling. The vast majority of those questioned about these qualities over the last twenty years or so of social research consistently report deep personal attachment to and satisfaction with fishing, claiming that if they were to live their lives over they would choose to fish for their livelihood. The fact that family and community are located right in the heart of small boat fishing explains the intense attachment to fishing as a way of living and livelihood. Family and community are likewise the sites of the key social processes whereby children from fishing families are recruited to fishing, learn to fish, and become fishermen. Becoming a fisherman involves much more than simply getting a boat, gear, fishing licenses and going fishing. The fishing family and community way of living have been essential in the learning processes that equip recruits with critical skills, knowledge, behaviors, attitudes, mental toughness, and physical abilities. But, recent evidence reveals that these social attributes and processes are being challenged and

### *Changes in Family Recruitment of the Fishery*

Results from the studies noted above show that the vast majority of fathers are extremely reluctant to advise their children to fish for a living under any circumstances other than one in which children would enter the small boat fisheries already in possession of a boat, equipment and all of the important fishing licenses. This is simply a recognition of the economic and management policy realities in today's fisheries. For example, a Richmond County fisherman noted that,

*“My son is already set up to inherit my boat and licenses. But, he has others things planned for the future as well. You can not make a living off the fishery anymore.”*

New recruits would find it essentially impossible to make a viable living in the small boat fisheries if saddled from the outset with either the crippling debt loads associated with acquiring boats and high value fishery licenses or the licensed limitations of participation in only the less economically important fisheries. Certainly recruits minimally must be able to participate in at least one of the relatively high value fisheries such as lobster, snow crab and shrimp in order to satisfy livelihood needs and fishing costs.



## *The Case in Inverness, Antigonish, Pictou and Guysborough and Richmond Counties*

These conditions explain, in part, the finding in both of the studies that well under 30% of the fishermen have sons in the fisheries. In fact, Richmond and Guysborough County fishermen reported that they had notably more wives (35.9%) than sons (28%) currently fishing, while those fishing Nova Scotia's Southern Gulf of St. Lawrence reported slightly more sons (26.8%) than wives (16.4%) fishing.

With an average age of around 50 years, most current small boat fishing captains have 15 or 20 years left before retirement and the 'freeing' of their licenses for new entrants. This length of waiting time will further discourage many sons and daughters from taking up small boat fishing. For instance, as one Guysborough County fisherman insisted,

*"The government keeps the young people out of the fishery. There are not enough resources to make a go of it. My licenses and boat are my retirement package and if I were to give them to my son or daughter than they would have to support me because I would not be able to survive on a government pension."*

Taken together, this information suggests that the fishing family and the fishing community are becoming seriously limited, if not fatally disabled, in their capacity to recruit and to prepare new entrants. Given this, how will a sufficient number of entrants

### SRSF Research Reports

The St. Georges Bay Ecosystem Project: A Social Profile of Lobster License Holders in Pictou, Antigonish and Inverness Counties.  
[www.stfx.ca/people/adavis/srsf/2005c2.htm](http://www.stfx.ca/people/adavis/srsf/2005c2.htm)

The SRSF Eastern Shore Nova Scotian Coastal Fisheries Ecosystem Project: A Social Profile of LFA's 29 (Southern Richmond County), 31A and 31B (Guysborough County) Fisheries  
[Www.stfx.ca/people/adavis/srsf/2005d5.htm](http://www.stfx.ca/people/adavis/srsf/2005d5.htm)

## *Key Background: The Impact of Fisheries Management Policies on the Small Boat Fishery*

The memory of factors that have played key roles in creating this situation often seems painfully short and incomplete. Yet, addressing this situation requires some recollection of what has brought us here. While difficult to pin down precisely as to when, where and by whom, there is no question that the fisheries management policy assault on the family- and coastal community-centered small boat fisheries began with the claim that Atlantic Canada had “too many fishermen chasing too few fish.” Simply put, this view reduces all the fisheries’ economic and organizational problems to a simple population equation and issue. That is, there are too many fishermen (also implying fishing families and communities) exploiting marine resources to enable the development of an economically viable and modern fishing industry. This has resulted in the generation of a vast ‘social’ fishery that is incapable of supporting itself economically, a fishery whose existence is maintained for political

The argument runs that this ‘social’ fishery consumes public resources at a level disproportionate to its economic value, thereby distorting the economics of fisheries and essentially ruining the industry’s capacity to become efficient and profitable. Thrown into this mix for good measure is the argument that ‘too many fishermen’ threaten the sustainability of fisheries resources. Obviously a circumstance that violates the public’s interests, this is a situation that responsible government management must forcefully address. Thus, ‘resource conservation’ becomes declared as the first principle and goal of fisheries management.

The solution to this problem has been presented as very straightforward. Develop fisheries management policies that will reduce the numbers participating and work to consolidate the fishing effort that remains in fewer fishing ports. Such outcomes are considered essential to the emergence of a modern fishery organized on and embodying so-called rational economic principles such as market-defined and profit-oriented fishing enterprises and fish businesses. This has been a guiding principle underwriting most of the contemporary fisheries management system of limited entry licensing, sector quotas, individual enterprise quotas, and individual transferable quotas. Within this framework, Atlantic Canada’s family-centered and community-based small boat fisheries have been tagged as the problem, and have been the prime target for regulation, down-sizing and rationalization through the last twenty-

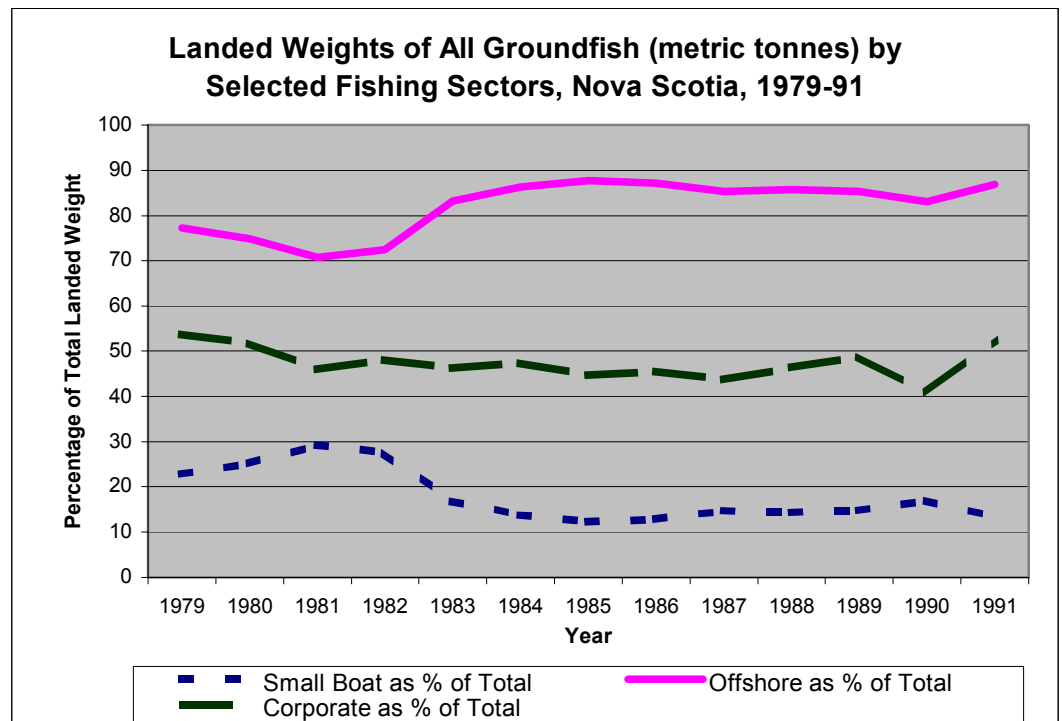
These issues are also being discussed by the **Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters** in their document :

*Response of the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters to the Atlantic Fisheries Policy Review:  
The participation of Fish Harvesters in charting a new direction for the Atlantic Fisheries (May 2001).*

This document can be found on-line at: [www.ccpfh-ccpp.org/councilspos1-en-table.html](http://www.ccpfh-ccpp.org/councilspos1-en-table.html) or by contacting the Council at 102 Bank St., Suite 202, Ottawa ON, K1P 5N4 Tel: (613) 235-3474 e-mail: [fish@ccpfh-ccpp.org](mailto:fish@ccpfh-ccpp.org)

## Corporate Industrial Sector and Offshore Fishing

A brief review of the pre-moratorium government statistics shows that the corporate industrial sector and offshore fishing rather than the small boat fisheries are largely responsible for marine resource depletion and the threat to resource conservation.



Source: Canadian Fisheries, Annual Statistical Reviews, Fisheries and Oceans Canada  
 Note: Category changes between years have necessitated occasional approximations. The 'corporate' category used here only includes the reported landings from vessels 100 ft. in length or longer, all of which are corporately owned. In addition to these landings, the 'offshore' category includes the landings of vessels over 25 g.t. but less than 100 ft. in length. A substantial portion of this sector is also corporately owned.

What this information clearly shows is that the industrial corporate sector (minimally represented by vessels 100 ft. or longer) accounted for a notably disproportionate share of Nova Scotian groundfish landings, while employing relatively few vessels and persons.

The small boat sector (boats under 25g.t. and mostly fishing within the coastal zone) accounts for the smallest proportion of landings while employing the vast majority of persons and boats. This rather elementary walk through the government's own statistics shows that resource depletion and the violation of resource conservation is an outcome of large vessel, corporate industrial and offshore fishing. In short, resource depletion is a result of excessive and ecologically damaging corporate and offshore fishing power, rather than the numerous persons and boats participating in the coastal fisheries. So, why has federal fisheries management been guided by the chant '*too many fishermen chasing too few fish*', and in the process mounted a full assault on family- and

## *Where Does This Leave Small Boat Fishing ?*

The concise answer to this is simply that the corporate offshore sector has been in a far better position to influence policy than have been small boat fishing associations. To some extent this influence derives from the corporate and offshore sector's economic power, which provides them with ready access to government ministers and bureaucrats. But it is also the case that government ministers, policy makers, managers and analysts hold a common world view and set of preferences with those of the corporate industrial and offshore sectors. Corporate organization and behavior is valued as representative of modern and developed industry. Consequently the corporate sector is held to embody the core economic principles of rational organization within a market- and profit-dedicated economy. In contrast, the small boat sector has been characterized as backward, chaotic and inefficient. Its family and community attributes are neither understood nor valued. Its skills, knowledge base and economic strengths are debased and

The present generation of fisheries management policies have been intended, from the outset, to impose a corporate industrial-like set of access and participation conditions on the small boat fisheries, thereby down-sizing and rationalizing them. One of the key approaches has been to assail the small boat fisheries' family and community heartland, and through that process to disable fundamental recruitment processes. For many fishing families, limited entry licensing and quotas policies have fermented internal tensions and conflict. Many are now confronting impossibly difficult choices such as either selecting those who will receive licenses and quota from among sons and daughters wanting to fish or selling out to others in order to assure access to adequate retirement funds. These outcomes further disable family and community with regard to nurturing

Finally, this entire situation will be made much worse should oil and gas begin to create employment opportunities that attract large numbers of fisheries-oriented young men and women away from the small boat fisheries. Such processes have already been noted as a major challenge facing fisheries recruitment and social renewal in places such as Northeastern Scotland and areas of coastal Northern Norway. With such evidence in hand, there is an immediate need for government to initiate measures that will assist in the social renewal of coastal communities and small boat

## *What Can Be Done?*

There are several concrete and practical steps that can be taken to improve the situation. To begin with, current fisheries allocation management system and policies must be assessed with respect to their impact on the social and economic sustainability of fishing families, communities and the small boat fishery.

Policies found to be threatening to sustainability, including the social processes critical to recruitment, must be either modified or eliminated. A more family- and community-centered system of fisheries management needs to be developed, one which empowers family and community to determine the terms and conditions of access and participation.

In Norway, fisheries management has set aside a portion of groundfish quotas exclusively for the use of new entrants, especially young men and women from fishing families and communities keen to fish during the summer months while out of school. This measure is intended to provide employment and income while also providing opportunity for learning and recruitment. This sort of policy initiative should be studied closely as one means to assist the

Additionally, federal and provincial governments might consider developing a differential taxation system that would provide a benefit for those pursuing livelihoods in rural, primary resource sectors and communities. A modest reduction in provincial sales taxes, federal income taxes, and the goods and service tax would provide incentives for some either to stay in or take up residence in rural communities, thereby contributing to community and livelihood vitality and sustainability. Such initiatives would also concretely express policy support for the importance of maintaining families and livelihoods within rural community settings that often face challenges respecting access to reasonable incomes and services, particularly when compared with the situation

New policies and legislation can be developed that would strengthen the 'voice' of small boat fisheries representative associations within policy formation processes. Nations such as Norway and Japan have employed legislation to empower fisheries associations in matters such as representation, dues payment, ownership of fishing capacity, and port markets. Canada and the Atlantic Provinces should study such initiatives with the intention of initiating changes that will at least provide small boat fisheries and coastal communities with the means to engage.

Last year Nova Scotia's fisheries contributed over one billion dollars in export earnings, far outpacing all other sectors. The fisheries are by far this province's and the Atlantic Region's leading and distinguishing primary resource. In recognition of this fact and the further potentials, the public sector must redress the relative absence of investment in fisheries related education, research and development. Most major fishing nations have developed extensive fisheries-focused education and research institutions. Canada is an exception here. Investment in fisheries-specialized education and research would realize many benefits. There is little doubt that such an initiative would elevate the social status of fisheries and fisheries-related livelihoods, thereby increasing interest in and recruitment to fishing. For the bottom-line minded, this initiative would also dramatically stimulate research, development and investment in the region's fisheries, thereby increasing, sustaining and diversifying the wealth realized from fisheries resources.

Certainly in order for the fisheries to achieve the full benefits of participation and competition within an information-based and global 'new economy' it is essential that education and research become much more of a distinguishing feature of the region's fisheries than has been

*About SRSF . . .*



## Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries

**S**ocial Research for Sustainable Fisheries (SRSF) is a partnership linking university researchers and capacity with Mi'kmaq and inshore commercial fisheries community organizations. Although administered at St. Francis Xavier University, SRSF engages and represents a working collaboration between Guysborough County Inshore Fishermen's Association, the Gulf Nova Scotia Bonafide Fishermen's Association, the Mi'kmaq Fish and Wildlife Commission, Afton Band and St.FX as well as other university-based social researchers. Additional fisheries and community organizations are linked with SRSF through relations with these core partners.

**S**RFSF is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) through its Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) programme. The basic purposes of SRSF are: to develop fisheries-focused social research linkages between university researchers and community organizations, to build social research capacity, and to facilitate specific fisheries social research activities that will examine the concerns of the partnered community organizations. Social research capacity, experience and linkages are developed through research-focused workshops and specific research projects.

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**F**urther information about SRSF is available either through the project's web site ([www.stfx.ca/people/adavis/srsf](http://www.stfx.ca/people/adavis/srsf)) or by contacting any of the SRSF project staff, either at St. FX or the offices of the partner organizations.