

Fundy Fixed Gear Council: An Organizational Profile

*Intended as a draft of a background document for inclusion in a final report under the CURA project,
Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries*

Background

The Fundy Fixed Gear Council is an alliance of inshore fishing groups that came out of the fisheries crisis of 1996. Collapsing ground fish stocks, cutbacks to enforcement by DFO, changes to licensing policy that would effectively exclude handliners, a dramatic increase in lobster licensing fees, and the introduction of individual transferable quotas (ITQs) all contributed to unrest, ultimately leading to the occupation of DFO Offices throughout the Maritimes. The resolution of the conflict provided for community based management boards with community quotas in five regions starting with the 1996 fishing season. In the Digby area, the Islands Inshore Fishermen's Association, the Digby County Inshore Fishermen's Association, and the Maritime Fishermen's Union Gillnet Society, formed an alliance creating the Fundy Fixed Gear Council. The nature of the inshore fishery and its use of "fixed gear" distinguished it from the "mobile gear" or offshore dragger fishery.

Governance

The FFGC is governed by a Management Council, made up of three members from each of the founding organizations and a series of committees, including management sub-committees for the handline, longline, and gillnet fisheries, an Infractions Committee, and an Advisory and Research Committee.

Each management sub-committee administers the fisheries management plan for each gear type. Quota is allocated among gear types, although some transfers take place by mutual agreement.

Catches are recorded by a dockside monitoring company and the results recorded by the FFGC office manager.

The infractions committee reviews catch records and has the power to invoke sanctions, ranging from letters of warning, reduction of weekly or trip limits, to outright prevention of fishing. The committee membership changes each time it meets and operates as a "blind" committee, in that the identity of the license holder under consideration is not known to the committee.

Funding

Costs are kept to a minimum; any funding required is usually taken from fishers' dues and contributions. Expenses include office rental, a staff person during the fishing season, and travel. Funding beyond the operational expenses is raised from other grants and contributions.

Activities

The Council is tasked with the management of the fixed gear groundfish fishery on the Nova Scotia side of the Bay of Fundy. That is, it manages the compliance, the research, access, representation and dealing with other groups. The activity also includes sitting on DFO committees and making representations.

The Council has carried out a number of research projects including developing recommendations on Marine Protected Areas with the World Wildlife Fund. It has received a grant to document Community Based Management and has carried out a DFO study on length frequency and otolith removal on groundfish.

Key Alliances

The Council has key alliances with academic institutions, including St. FX University and St. Mary's University. It also is allied with non-governmental organizations including the MRC, the Western Valley Development Authority, the Coastal Communities Network, the Bay of Fundy Fisheries Alliance, the Maritime Fishermen's Union, the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters, and the Ecology Action Centre.

Future Developments

The Fundy Fixed Gear Council is now engaged in a process of setting a strategy for wider community involvement in integrated coastal zone management. It is attempting to draw community stakeholders into discussion of what the fishery would be like if the groundfish stocks recover and the fishery is managed under a community based system. The key issues include who would have the principal say in the management, and how would other stakeholders have input.

The Council is also involved in ongoing economic development initiatives, including a fisheries marketing cooperative, and developing models for marketing fish through auctions with e-commerce capabilities.