

Politics of fear

DFO heavy-handed in buying back lobster, crab licences

THE OXFORD Concise Dictionary defines terrorism as "favour[ing] or us[ing] terror-inspiring methods of governing or of coercing government or community."

We associate terrorism with acts that are heartless and inhumane, even when apparently motivated by lofty intentions and ideals.

We look to our government for protection from this threat. But, what do we do when agencies of our government are the threat, are the source of terror?

Does this seem unimaginable in Canada? Well, it is neither unimaginable nor unreal for many Atlantic Canadian fish harvesters, their families and communities. Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) is once again exercising its regulatory powers in a ham-fisted, threatening, intimidating, and terrorizing manner.

In Atlantic Canada the public's fisheries managers are now carving room for the Mi'kmaq by targeting snow crab allocations and lobster licenses for redistribution.

While some well-meaning souls might applaud this as an appropriate response to the Marshall decision, this initiative will undermine the viability of small boat fishing communities throughout Atlantic Canada while worsening the paranoia and conflict that already exists between the Mi'kmaq and fish harvesters.

Certainly, there are few more terrifying experiences than the loss of one's livelihood. Further, intentionally employing and manipulating this fear in order to achieve an objective satisfies the basic conditions of terrorist activity.

The current situation in the Canso region is a case in point. DFO's practice strikes hard at this fisheries-dependent area. It is already reeling from fisheries' closures and the shutdown of the local fish plant that has long been the region's largest employer. These downturns result, in turn, in the failure of other small businesses in the region and in still more unemployment. After years of struggle with this situation, many are surrendering and leaving.

The only good news fisheries story in the Canso region is the small boat sector. Small-boat, family-rooted fish harvesters have responded to the groundfish moratoria by diversifying into a variety of new fisheries such as snow crab while being able to fill in their manage-

economic ruin. This has been accomplished by developing ecologically sustainable fishing practices and being prepared to accept greater direct management responsibilities for their fisheries. DFO is once again placing all of this at risk.

The 1999 Marshall decision requires that room be made in Atlantic Canada's commercial fisheries for the Mi'kmaq. This decision affirmed the Mi'kmaq treaty right to participate in commercial fisheries expressly for the purpose of achieving, in the Court's words, "a moderate livelihood." DFO insists that this occur within the existing system.

Consequently, Mi'kmaq entry can only be achieved through obtaining and transferring licenses and quota from current licence holders. License and quota buybacks, often at values far exceeding current market prices, have been DFO's main tools.

But this process has gone neither as quickly nor as smoothly as desired. Fewer fishers than anticipated have been willing to sell out. DFO has countered this resistance by jacking up the offers, assuring that only DFO will be in a position to buy available allocations and fishing gears.

DFO is now resorting to tactics that directly threaten the livelihood of many, such as the Canso area's small boat fishers.

For instance, at a recent meeting in Port Hawkesbury, DFO representatives proposed to buy back "temporarily" allocated snow crab quota. DFO is reported to have offered \$11,300 per ton.

DFO has also made it clear that those failing to take up this offer within the next little while may not get a second chance. Buybacks have been offered on a first come, first served, basis, with little time to weigh the pros and cons of selling. The message here is that the "temporary" allocations may simply be allowed to expire at the close of this season and the quota may then be transferred without compensation to the Mi'kmaq. DFO's offer is nested in a threat intended to intimidate and to coerce compliance.

This threat is also being directed against the Canso area's fish harvesters' association. The Guysborough County Inshore Fishermen's Association has been managing the snow crab allocation on behalf of their members. Five per cent of the sale value from this fishery is

used as well as providing support services for members. Needless to say, substantial reductions in this revenue for the association will cripple its capacity. In turn, this will compromise the ability of the association to represent its members, concerns within fisheries management.

In effect, DFO is pursuing fisheries management objectives by intentionally terrorizing livelihoods. It is threatening to strip away access to one of the few remaining resources that provides a reasonable income and that is critical economically to sustaining many small boat fishing enterprises and families. And this is being done in a region of Nova Scotia that has been most affected by the groundfish collapse and that has been working extremely hard to survive through diversifying and development of more sustainable fishing practices. The Canso area events are being repeated throughout Atlantic Canada.

Furthermore, DFO's heavy-handedness and threats are only deepening resistance to and resentment among small boat fishers about Mi'kmaq participation. This approach is making a difficult situation much worse.

It is important to understand that for most, small boat fishing is more than just a job. It is a way of life and living into which the vast majority of fish harvesters are born and reared. They are usually families that have a history of as many as twelve generations (360 years) of unbroken participation in fishing and life in coastal communities. Now, as in the past, fisheries remain the primary livelihood for most of these families and communities. Surely, we should expect this track-record be understood by DFO fisheries managers, to provide fishing families and communities with due consideration, dignity and even-handed respect.

But DFO continues to show little regard for the conditions and needs of "their clients." They are determined to defend their management system—one that has a track record of failure and that does not respond effectively to either the needs of the Mi'kmaq or to fishing communities like Canso.

Unfortunately, anger and deepened cynicism are the predictable outcomes. In fact, current events bear an unsettling familiarity with the processes and practices known to be at the root of management decisions that resulted in the collapse of groundfish resources and the imposition of fishing moratoria. That is, DFO resource managers and bureaucrats continue to

survive, while pandering to the economic interests of the corporate and advantaged sectors. Disaster and misery are the known outcomes.

Notably, while tens of thousands of Atlantic Canadians have had their livelihoods turned over, few if any of DFO's decision-makers have been held directly accountable for the decisions and actions that resulted in the most massive industrial shutdown and layoff in Canadian industrial history. Perhaps it is time that these civil servants be brought to account for their actions.

Viable alternative approaches to integrating the Mi'kmaq into commercial fisheries are available. They begin with achieving site by site dialogues and collaborations between the Mi'kmaq and small boat fishermen. Most recognize that room must be made for the Mi'kmaq. The main issue is how to develop reasonable and respectful ways to achieve this end.

Further, integrating the Mi'kmaq also requires that the entire fisheries allocation management system be opened up for re-development, including allocations and licences currently held by fishing companies. It is unfair to expect the small boat sector to bear the whole load.

Certainly, an "iron fist in mink glove" strategy designed to mask coercion through offers of cash buyouts is not the sort of fisheries management that embodies the interests of the Mi'kmaq, let alone the spirit of the Supreme Court's decision. This situation is more than simply the unfortunate experiences of those working and living in a failing industry on the margins of the nation. This case highlights critical issues concerning the present state of citizen and government relations.

Government officials have lost sight of their first order of responsibility; that is, careful and considerate attention to citizen interests and needs. Given this, the cynicism and distrust Canadians report feeling about politicians and government is not at all surprising, although deeply troubling.

The citizens of this province and country certainly require and expect a higher order of conduct from its civil servants and elected officials than is evident here.

Anthony Davis is a professor at St. P.X. University and director of Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries.

John Wagner is a post-doctoral fellow at St. P.X. and research co-ordinator for Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries.

Virginia St. Jean is a post-doctoral fellow at St. P.X. and research co-ordinator for Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries.

But if all goes well, \$40 million and two years from now, the beach at Wolfe's Cove will be ready to welcome up to 1000 frolicking bathers. If the

pending on land acquisition and decontamination costs, the price tag could reach \$250 million. Still, capital commission officials poo-hoo the costs. They

less, as long as they get their beach and boardwalk.

Peter Black is a broadcaster and journalist who lives in Quebec City.

pblack@herald.ns.ca

bit showing \$8.04. I said, "Oh, there must be some mistake!" At the saleslady says, "No, all the items are marked in U.S. funds."

Is this some kind of a joke? Is this a marketing strategy to see how few Canadians will go for a U.S. currency in Canada? Is this an experiment? Are we going to let Internet U.S.-funds practice the shopping malls of Canada? Am I just an old diehard dinosaur's-circa-1960s entity without a grounding in reality — i.e., the 21st century?

I don't care. I believe in our difference. I also believe that sitting tourists want to know they are in a different country and do not wish to express an anti-American mindset claiming the inferiority of the continent. Though I have noticed the grab for a new American inventor of the television and the desire for a new marketplace for the sport of hockey.

I am appalled by this practice at Claire's Boutiques. I went back to the store later and saw that the labels now have the U.S. price in large print, and, in smaller size and on the bottom of the tag, the Canadian price. I checked my daughter's item and it was definitely labelled in U.S. funds only.

Lia MacLean, Dartmouth

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Sense, not sensation

By Neil A. Bellefontaine

RE: "POLITICS of fear; DFO heavy-handed in buying back lobster, crab licences" (The Sunday Herald, June 30).

Our world, unfortunately, is all too often witness to the suffering and deaths caused by terrorism — a reality so horrifically underscored by the events of Sept. 11, 2001.

So, it is doubly disturbing to see The Sunday Herald publish a commentary about fisheries management practices in Atlantic Canada that begins with the startling premise that Fisheries and Oceans Canada condones and endorses terrorism.

First, the article cheapens the pain inflicted through violence on real victims and minimizes what the world has come to know as terrorism.

Second, the accusation that the 10,000 men and women working at DFO operate in a "threatening, intimidating, and terrorizing manner" is a gross insult. It is disappointing that a major newspaper would give credence to such allegations.

In no sense are shellfish harvesters being "terrified" by DFO officials. Holders of licences and quotas are not being "intimidated and coerced" out of business to make way for aboriginal fishers.

Far from it. Licence retirement is voluntary and retiring fishers are fairly compensated. Moreover, the licence retirement system now in use was suggested by the fishing industry and is widely regarded as the best and fairest approach to increasing aboriginal participation in the fishery following the

Marshall decision.

This is an industry in transition. Fishery resources fluctuate and affect people in small communities. Adjustments will be needed along the way and DFO officials, along with industry representatives and First Nations, are working hard to facilitate these changes.

The article failed to mention that the fishery in Nova Scotia is the most viable and stable in Canada and, for many rural communities, is the primary industry and employer. In the 2001 Eastern Nova Scotia snow crab fishery alone (much of the focus of the article in question), DFO allocated 4,341 tons to approximately 850 temporary CORE fishers. This was in addition to 4,448 tons allocated to permanent licence holders and 1,100 tons to the First Nation bands. Furthermore, there was no suggestion that in Eastern Nova Scotia, quota would be transferred without compensation should insufficient quota be voluntarily provided in 2002. Industry was informed that should this occur, the department would consult with industry representatives in 2003. Additional consultations will not be required since the voluntary buy-back program did provide sufficient quota for the department to meet all signed commitments with First Nation bands.

An end result that meets the needs of the vast majority is far more likely if we stay in the real world and use common sense, instead of getting sidetracked by wild accusations stirred up by overactive imaginations.

Neil A. Bellefontaine is regional director-general, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Maritimes Region.

ere seems to be more labour unrest," as business analysts could have it, in the private sector than in recent years. While it's hard to establish a pattern, it would seem reasonable that the general buoyancy of the Quebec economy might have something to do with it. Quebec, after all, leads the country in job creation so far this year (128,000), and just last

randa operations in Quebec. The company pulled out of Murdochville this spring, ostensibly because it could not make the copper smelter there pay by processing imported ore. The strike at the Secur armoured car company, whose gun-toting employees staff ATMs with money, seems to be settling in for a long run. Workers nearly unanimously re-

Glendyne slate works in the lower St. Lawrence, the seven-week conflict at Radio Canada/CBC, and a couple dozen other skirmishes, and 2002 is shaping up to be a year with little love lost between labour and management in Quebec.

Peter Black is a broadcaster and journalist who lives in Quebec City. pblack@herald.ns.ca

reasonable to expect of ordinary citizens. Maybe we should go back to garbage removal once a week; I'm sure the complainants have enough time on their hands to assist in the removal process. *Bob Carvery, Halifax*

Job well done!

Dear editor:

It is with pride that I write with respect to the wonderful Nova Scotia International Tattoo, which has completed its run at the Halifax Metro Centre.

What a country we are, Canada (and Halifax), to have a coupe from Japan and Germany, plus a tremendous tribute to our wonderful friends and neighbours of the U.S.A. I was ever so proud of my country! All events were spectacular. The volunteers are to be congratulated immensely, especially the Mass Choir. These men and women are very dedicated for many months prior to the big night, which one witnesses by attending a performance. They certainly did a great job!

Bravo to all!

Race M. Kendziora, Bedford

Terrorists at home

Dear editor:

Terrorists from abroad killed over 3,000 innocents on 9/11.

Terrorists at home are destroying the livelihoods of millions of innocents.

The recently retired "terrorist" of WorldCom is building a 10-million estate in Florida, with (no doubt) tens of millions safely invested.

Terrorists abroad are being pursued and killed by the Western alliance. What justice for those at home? Stay tuned, but don't hold your breath.

David Craft, Dartmouth

No sense or substance

THE RESPONSE (The Sunday Herald, July 7) by Neil Bellefontaine, DFO regional director-general, to our previous week's commentary is insubstantial and disappointing. But it does further illustrate one of our central points: Protection of their fisheries management system is the first priority for senior DFO management. They will as militantly resist the prospect of changing this system as they do accepting responsibility for its abuses and failures.

The case of the buyback of "temporary" snow crab allocations exemplifies how permit holders have been intimidated and coerced into selling. A meeting in Port Hawkesbury of permit holders was called by DFO for April 17, during which DFO announced the buyback plan. This was not a consultation since nothing was up for discussion. DFO management dictated the terms and conditions, stipulating that buybacks would proceed on a "first come-first served" basis. On receipt of applications, DFO forwarded a copy of the contractual agreement with the stipulation that "the signed agreement MUST be returned to this office by no later than noon, May 10." While dated May 3, 2002, this letter and the agreement were not received by many until May 6, and by some until May 8. The deadline left many without opportunity to consider the situation and to access legal advice. This illustrates the all too common strategy of leveraging "voluntary" participation by creating overly pressured and uncertain conditions within which decisions are forced.

Creating leverage through the

manufacture of doubt and fear, greased with grossly inflated prices, is a common tactic. This is a management style that is especially heinous, given that it plays off of the social and economic difficulties facing many fishing families. If this is what the director-general means by "realism" and "common sense," our preference is for "overactively imagining" a process wherein citizens' interests and dignity are fully respected.

Dismissing as "a gross insult" the claim that these strategies are terrorism ignores the key issue. The loss of livelihood induces extreme fear. This experience violates the most elemental qualities of human social well-being and dignity. We identify the decisions of senior Fisheries and Oceans management as responsible for the current situation, not the "10,000" staff. DFO managers are employed by this country's citizens to manage public resources. Their track record is one of failures and autocratic manipulation.

It is disingenuous for Mr. Bellefontaine to imply DFO has fostered stability and viability of Nova Scotia's fisheries. DFO policies have had little to do with the economic qualities noted. The "new," high-value fisheries such as shrimp and crab are an unforeseen consequence of devastated groundfish stocks and water temperature changes.

In our view, DFO leadership remains to be held accountable for the failures and misery brought about by their decisions.

Submitted by Anthony Davis, John Wagner and Virginia Boudreau, Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries, St. Francis Xavier University.

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