

Singers for Fish

Bibliography of Current Songs of Fishing Communities

Mystic Seaport Sea Music Symposium, June 10, 1995

State of the Groundfishery

Commercial Value

The LTPY of all fishery resources fished by the United States is estimated at 9.5 million metric tons (t). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates the limit of the world's annually sustainable yield of marine and freshwater fish at about 100 million t. Therefore, the long-term potential harvest from all fisheries involving the United States exceeds 9% of the total world potential.

Recreational Value

The total RAY is 6.6 million t. The U.S. RAY is estimated at 4.8 million t or about 64% of the prorated U.S. LTPY (Table 1), which is just under 5% of the world catch. In recent years, the United States has ranked sixth among major fishing nations, following China, the former Soviet Union, Japan, Peru, and Chile.

1990-92, the fisheries of the Northeast region (Appendix 5) contributed about 20% of the prorated U.S. revenue and 16% of the volume (i.e., U.S. RAY) of the Nation's commercial fisheries. Total 1992 landings of all species in the northeast were 769,667 t, with an estimated ex-vessel revenue of \$818 million. The mixed-species groundfish fishery is the most valuable fishery of the region (\$188 million), followed by American lobster (\$161 million) and Atlantic sea scallop (\$152 million). Recreational fisheries are extremely important to the region's economy. 19 million recreational marine fishing trips in 1992 produced landings of over 100 million fish.

Issues in the Fishery

- Management Concerns
- Bycatch and Multispecies Interactions
- Resource Allocation
- Jurisdiction and Transboundary Issues
- Habitat Concerns
- Underutilized Species
- Recovery of Protected Species
- Scientific Information and the Adequacy of Assessments.

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"The offshore trawler captains do not think there is a problem except for the seals that eat the inshore cod; the inshore fishermen believe that offshore fishermen are the problem; the foreign experts say it is Canadian mismanagement; the provincial government blames the federal government; and an independent study suggests that a serious resource problem exists, one that stems partly from inaccurate Department of Fisheries and Oceans' estimates of the cod stocks for the past thirteen years; the scientists who made the estimates deny there is a resource problem; and a woman at the Petro-Canada station in Goobies believe it is God's will." (Don Gillmore, Equinox, July/August 1990)

Recent Regulations

Northern cod landings make up 3/4 of all fish landed in Newfoundland. 69% of Newfoundland fishermen and 70% of plant workers depend on northern cod for their livelihood, which is worth \$700 million to the province.

In 1991, 19,000 people earned a living directly from the fishery and a further 8 000 depended on the resource for a portion of their income. On Friday, 3 July 1991, those same people were told that they could no longer fish for northern cod. The industry had declined by 95% since 1990, and a complete two-year moratorium has since been extended into 1995. An assistance program, the Northern Cod Assistance and Recovery Program (NCARP) provides \$1.9 billion in aid over five years.

In the northeastern US, Amendment 5 to the FMP for the Northeast Multispecies Fishery will limit effort by commercial fishing on groundfish in New England and also prevent the issuance of new vessel permits in this overcapitalized fishery. Amendment 4 to the sea scallop FMP will control fishing effort by limiting the days at sea for each vessel and placing a moratorium on new entrants.

The FAO hosted a 10-day Technical Consultation on the drafting of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing, in Rome from 25 September to 5 October 1994. Delegates from over 60 countries attended.

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Culture Won't Die: Themes in Fisheries Music

"It is a horrifying thing to have our fishery labeled as a thing of the past. Without it a whole culture is dead. There are a lot of people who have always depended on the fishery...outsiders sit back and ask, "Can't they find something else to do?" or "Train them for other employment." In many cases this is not possible. We cannot all be businesspeople or shopkeepers. There are a good many people (in Labrador) between the ages of 35 and 65 who cannot even read. Making a living at fishing is all they know. Nobody can expect all of them to go back to school, get a college degree and prepare for other work that may not even exist. The young people today have a much better chance to further their education and to work outside the fishery and are constantly being encouraged to do so. But what about everyone else? How do people survive when their culture is being torn from them?" (Shirley Hopkins, Labrador)

Compiled and edited from a collection of primarily Canadian and New England recordings and songbooks commercially released between 1985 and 1995. Music was collected in: St John's, NFLD; Corner Brook, NFLD; Rocky Harbour, NFLD; Goose Bay, LAB; Halifax, NS; Lunenburg, NS; Charlottetown, PEI; Summerside, PEI; St. John, NB; St. Stephen, NB; Bangor, ME; Portland, ME; Gloucester, MA; Cambridge and Boston, MA; Mystic, CT; Vancouver, BC; Victoria, BC; Anchorage, AK.

Six themes emerged from the collection of 150 songs:

Fisherman's Alphabet: Songs of daily life and tradition in the inshore fishery

Boats & Gear: Celebrating the tools of the trade

All the Fish In the Sea: Songs of fishes, seabirds, marine creatures and their habitats

Dockside: The fish industry from packing plant to table

Rod and Reel: Songs of sports anglers and their freshwater catch

Bound Away: Leaving home, finding other work and the politics of that struggle

Hard Times and Heaven: Work, rest and dreams of this life and the next

Sea People: Drawing a sense of identity and community from the bond between people and place

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Conclusions

Songwriters as Creators of Community

Today's sea music is being written less by working fishermen than by community musicians and educators. Much of the most powerful and polished music, in fact, is written not by the practitioners but by songwriters who reflect their words in song. Many of these songwriters themselves live in larger cities and may have little connection to the working fishery, but they respond to social, community and increasingly environmental issues.

Public Awareness

Many of the songs are adopted in local communities and receive radio airplay, creating a powerful sense of public awareness about the crisis in the local community and in its resource base and increasing the awareness of the larger regional and global community.

Nostalgia and Hope

Recent music of the fishery parallels similar declines in resource-based industries and their accompanying social change. Lumbering, mining and farming songs toward the "end" of their eras all have similar themes of pride, nostalgia, intergenerational skills transfer, and anxiety about the future.

Values

The songs are powerful carriers of local culture and community values: pride in hard work, courage in the face of danger, endurance through turmoil and difficulty, continuance of tradition across generations, collective action and co-operation.

Dealing with Negatives

It is striking how few negative songs there are in comparison to other communications -- media, government and other public information -- about the fishery. Even songs addressing negative feelings do so either with humor, as satire (Jim Payne), or by telling a story that allows the protagonist to come to terms with the experience (Heidi Marie, My Down-easter Alexa). Only overtly activist songs point a finger, and even those refrain from blaming a single force, reflecting the growing consensus that only collective

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action will solve a collective problem. Singing the songs becomes a demonstration of the collective action needed to make change happen.

Coping Devices

Songs and stories of the fishery blend the best of the past with hope for the future in powerful coping devices for allowing communities to process rapid change, grieve for the loss of a way of life, explore often frightening alternatives, and envision a positive collective future. They open the remote and closed communities of the fishing outports to the broader community of the North Atlantic region, creating common ground to understand and cope with change.

"There has to be a balance between humans and nature for everything and everyone to coexist, but there is not enough emphasis on saving our culture. Fishing is our culture and without it we are in terrible shape. What is to become of our people? We must work together to reach balanced agreements and find solutions to conserve our natural resources. It is very sad to think that in modernizing our society we have destroyed more than we could ever hope to replace, but maybe by working together to save our fishery, there could be a brighter future for everyone and everything." (Shirley Hopkins, Labrador)