



The effects on salmon stocks of a common fishery, in which anyone with a rod and a few dollars can pursue Atlantic salmon, continues to be the subject of debate sparked by our Watershed Down series.

Make coastal communities stewards of fishery

IN THIS final bid to shed light on the issue of privatizing fish resources, it is left for me to propose an alternative. After all, critics may interpret my opposition to private property rights in the fishery as inferring that I support the current system of heavy-handed federal control of the vast resource off our coast. Far from it.

The privatization issue has been presented by Philip Lee and Elizabeth Brubaker as a conservation matter alone. Their only end appears to be fish in the water. In their wake are a myriad of negative social and economic consequences of privatization, their preferred means of achieving that end. (Never mind that I strongly disagree that private interests will in fact protect fish resources. All indicators point to the contrary where commercial fisheries are concerned.) My preferred option is neither top-down federal management nor turning our common fish resources over to private economic interests. It is instead a model which has a high potential for resource stewardship while avoiding the inequality and exclusivity of a private property rights regime. I believe the future of marine fisheries lies with the coastal communities whose economies depend on these resources. It is at this level that the stake is the greatest, the incentive to conserve the strongest, and the impacts of abuse most keenly felt. This model acknowledges that marine resources were the historical basis of these communities' economy and culture and that their present and future social cohesion depends on them.

In order for communities to be able to assume a role in managing fish resources,



they will indeed need property rights over a prescribed marine territory. This would require DFO to apportion to communities jurisdiction which that department currently holds. This would include the right to decide how adjacent marine resources should be used and managed, and by whom. Jurisdiction would be exercised by elected community-based marine resources boards, by definition publicly accountable bodies, with strong participation of representative fishermen's organizations. Decisions of the boards would be within a broad conservation framework with legal status at the federal level, in order to prevent one community from undermining the resources of the next.

Defining community boundaries within which marine resource property rights would be assigned would be a tricky task, since many rural communities have no distinct boundaries or governing structures. Nonetheless, every coastal community or region with economic development responsibilities should have priority rights to their adjacent marine resources. Other criteria could be developed to define board jurisdiction areas where gaps exist.

Adjacent marine resources, including water rights, fish habitat, marine plants, as well as fish, should be seen as natural capital that the communities may invest on their own behalf and on which their economies can be built. Adjacent resources could be defined by current fishing activity from local wharves, existing local processing plants, and shoreline boundaries. Distances from shore could conform to the current midshore fleet range. Since fish are mobile and marine ecosystems relatively open systems, communities would have to be able to exercise some control over offshore resources in order to protect their own allocations. Destruction of offshore spawning grounds, for example, could have disastrous effects on inshore fisheries. Thus, management rules for and access to offshore resources should be developed and administered by publicly accountable regional boards whose membership would include representatives of the community marine resources boards within that region.

This model is fundamentally different from a private property rights regime. In this case, marine resources remain in public hands, but at the most local level of governance. Benefits from those resources would accrue to local communities as well as the harvesters. They could not be sold, thus ensuring that the community's access to those resources would remain in perpetuity.

When fish resources are privately

owned in the form of individual transferable quotas, fish landings could well move to other ports or even provinces. When the corporate fish plant closed in Canso a few years back, the quotas which supplied the plant left with the corporate vessels that owned them. Canso essentially lost access to the fish that provided hundreds of jobs for the town. Thus, they had no basis for reclaiming those jobs.

Now, as fishing villages throughout Atlantic Canada await the end of the cod moratorium (assuming there will be one), the question on everyone's mind is who is going to have first access to a revived stock. The pressure from the fish processing industry and larger fishing enterprises to move entirely to a private property rights regime is intense. Those who control the markets also want to control the resource. This vertical integration of the fishing industry serves only to integrate profits, not to sustain communities.

However, if the villages and towns of Atlantic Canada which will surely die without fish had the rights to those stocks, they would have a basis on which to build a future economy. Their motivation to conserve and steward those stocks would be strong because of their obligation to the long-term health of community. The capriciousness of the profit motive would be avoided, and the benefits of common resources would remain with the public. It is a model which protects marine resources while protecting communities. Surely this is the best purpose towards which common resources could be put. *

**WATERSHED
DOWN**