

## Co-management

## The way forward

**Inshore harvesters throughout Atlantic Canada are gradually extending their influence over fisheries management through co-management processes**

Creating New Wealth from the Sea, published by the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters (CCPFH) in June 1996, included the following statement: "We support the concept of co-management with industry shouldering more management responsibilities together with government."

Since the report was published, however, the idea of co-management has become increasingly confused and controversial, and industry organizations now express views on the topic ranging from cautious interest to outright distrust.

Many harvester leaders see co-management as yet another example of government talking about grass-roots participation and consultation, but doing the opposite. They point to top-down decision-making on issues like fleet reduction, licence fees, small craft harbours, downloading of surveillance and enforcement costs, and resource allocations. The most serious criticism is that the co-management policy of the Department of Fishery Operations (DFO) is just a smokescreen to advance the governments agenda to privatize fish resources and force everyone on to individual transferable quotas (ITQs).

The fact that the DFO has targeted specialized corporate or mid-shore fleets for their initial 'partnering' agreements (on, for example, offshore scallops, Pacific halibut, groundfish mobile gear, snow crab, etc.) has also made the multi-species inshore sector suspicious of the government's motives.

Against this background of mistrust and controversy, the DFO asked the Council to consult with its member organizations about guidelines for co-management in

the multi-licence inshore fishery. The project provided an opportunity for the Council to look closely at some of the many fisheries management activities that inshore harvesters in Atlantic Canada and Québec have initiated in their local areas, and for harvesters to discuss and debate wider policy issues related to co-management. What follows is a brief summary of the Council's report.

The DFO's co-management policy has been in place since 1995. It involves two principal elements which impact on the multi-licence inshore sector: Integrated Fisheries Management Plans (IFMPs) and partnering arrangements. IFMPs are gradually being introduced by the DFO for each individual fishery. They are built on the established system of advisory committees and fisheries management plans, but are intended to involve wider consultations with licence holders and other stakeholders. They are also supposed to pull together the activities of all the DFO sectors—Resource Management, Science, Conservation and Protection, Policy and Economics, etc.—in one planning process.

Fisheries management 'partnering arrangements' involve negotiated agreements between the DFO and industry groups to share regulatory, administrative and other responsibilities. At present, such arrangements are set up as joint project agreements (JPAs) which define the administrative and financial aspects of the legal contracts between the partners.

### Micromanagement

In most cases, industry is expected to take on some responsibilities and costs for the day-to-day micromanagement of the fishery that were previously carried on by the DFO, in return for greater security of

access to resources and expanded control over their own fishing operations.

**A** proposed new Fisheries Act contains legislative mechanisms for more comprehensive and longer term transfers of management authority, subject to the Minister's continuing responsibility for conservation, through formal fisheries management agreements.

Multi-licensed inshore harvesters throughout Atlantic Canada and Québec have consistently raised concerns about co-management throughout the consultations leading up to the Council's report. These concerns can be summarized as follows:

1. The need for multi-species approaches to fisheries management: From a conservation perspective, as well as in terms of the way they conduct their multi-species enterprises, inshore harvesters want to see mechanisms that promote integrated planning and regulation of all fishing activities in a given area.

2. Privatization of the resource: Co-management is seen by many harvesters as part of a continuing push by the DFO for privatization of fish resources and of the management system, particularly through the implementation of ITQ regimes.

3. Concerns about 'economic viability': In contrast to the DFO's narrow approach to enterprise viability based on single-species fisheries, multi-licence harvesters favour a comprehensive accounting system that would also look at the viability of fleets and fishing communities.

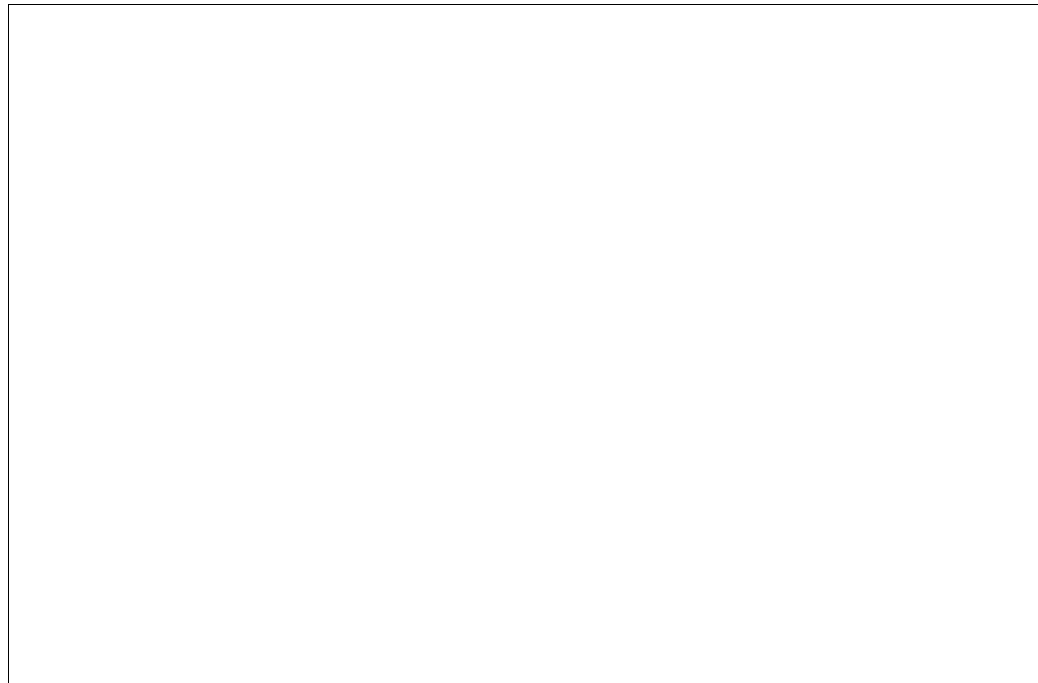
4. Cost downloading: Harvester groups are concerned that the continued downloading of costs through higher licence fees, dockside monitoring costs, etc. is having negative impacts on enterprise viability in the inshore, multi-licence fleets.

5. Ineffective capacity reduction: Harvesters want to see more industry control over capacity reduction and programmes that are sensitive to local conditions and will produce optimal gains in terms of overall fleet viability.

Inshore harvesters would like to see provisions in the new Fisheries Act to define clear roles and responsibilities for broad-based organizations with regard to co-management in their sectors. They also want the Act to define clearly who can be partners in a transparent process of negotiation for fisheries management agreements.

#### **Exciting projects**

The report of the Council describes a number of exciting local projects where



harvesters, with or without the support of the DFO, are taking the initiative to build new fisheries management systems that work effectively at the local level.

**I**n Newfoundland's Eastport Peninsula, harvesters are doing their own lobster stock assessment research, after setting up a new system to enforce minimum size limits. In Gulf Nova Scotia, groups have come together to design a comprehensive capacity reduction strategy. On Digby Neck and in Shelburne County, Nova Scotia, local harvester groups are managing their groundfish allocations through innovative community-based management systems.

All around the Atlantic region, local harvester groups are adapting new approaches to research and education to improve recruitment levels in the critically important lobster fishery.

These current activities are clearly part of a long tradition of multi-licence harvester groups taking responsibility for the management of their industry.

While the DFO has only recently embraced the concept of co-management, harvester groups have long pushed for genuine partnership with government whereby the knowledge, competencies and economic interests of harvesters are fully recognized, and where they have a

meaningful say in the decisions that shape their working lives.

The Council's Board of Directors is circulating the co-management report to stimulate discussion among harvesters and their organizations and within government. While it is not able to take a clear policy stance until its member organizations have fully considered the issues, the Council is putting forward for discussion the following three action steps to advance co-management in the multi-licence inshore sector:

**1. Co-Management Advisory Councils:** The DFO and the legitimate harvester organizations could work together to design and put in place representative advisory councils to act as consultation, planning and co-ordinating bodies for the continuing elaboration of co-management in multi-licence inshore fisheries. The councils would generate advice and seek industry consensus in areas such as harvester registration systems, professionalization, long-term fleet planning, community-based management, and locally based co-management projects.

#### **Harvester communities**

In determining their coverage by area, such councils would be built from the ground up and shaped by harvester communities who choose to group together. DFO staff and harvester

representatives would work together through the councils on fisheries management plans, local co-management projects and partnering agreements.

2. Regional Working Groups on Capacity Building: The DFO and the established harvester organizations in each region would work together to help harvester groups to participate in co-management for multi-licence inshore fisheries. Among the issues to be addressed would be: the need for stronger, better financed harvester organizations; education and training programmes to strengthen local knowledge and skills; better networking among local and regional harvester groups; and ongoing evaluation of regional and local co-management initiatives to support the sharing of experience, knowledge and skills.

3. A Co-management Investment Fund: These regional working groups could undertake to set up funds for local harvester groups to support the development of co-management projects. Harvester groups often have excellent ideas for ways to improve their fisheries but have difficulty getting the start-up money. An investment fund should be self-sustaining by investing in activities that can pay for themselves over the medium term.

It is hoped that the CCPFH discussion paper on co-management for multi-licence inshore fisheries will contribute to a well-informed debate on fisheries management issues and to better understanding among government and the harvester community. ¶

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