

Lobster industry still uncertain

Workshop tackles issues for fishers

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Uncertain. That's one word Roger Fowlow might use to define the fishing industry.

Mr. Fowlow is 37 and has been fishing for 18 years. When he finished high school, he jumped in the boat.

Seven or eight years ago, he gave up for a short time. He sold his licence and went out west to work. A year later he was back because he hated it.

"You can take the boy out of the bay, but you can't take the bay out of the boy," he said.

Mr. Fowlow said there's a lot of uncertainty in the fishing industry right now. In the Codroy Valley, he's the youngest fisher. There was one younger person, but he sold his equipment and went to work out west.

At a recent lobster workshop, fish harvesters and others gathered to discuss the industry and present and future.

Approximately 20 people attended 'Opportunities for Sustainable Livelihoods in Newfoundland's Southwest Coast Lobster Fishery,' on Nov. 5.

The main project partner was the Community University Research for Recovery Alliance (CURRA). CURRA is a five-year research program looking at developing strategies to recover fish stocks and fishery communities on Newfoundland's southwest coast.

One of CURRA's components is a lobster project, for which there's a steering committee. Mr. Fowlow, Mr. Bateman and fisher Kevin Hardy are on the committee that helped organize the lobster workshop.

One of the things attendees learned about was Nova Scotia's Off the Hook - Atlantic Canada's first community supported fishery (CSF).

Customers become members and buy a share in the CSF. They pay an amount for a certain number weeks

and get a set amount of seafood. The goal is to provide fishers with secure livelihoods and customers with fresh fish.

Longtime fisher Melvin Bateman was at the workshop. He said he's doubtful such a co-op would work on the southwest coast.

"They're close to the city of Halifax, which is fairly populated," he said. "We're not a very populated area."

Mr. Fowlow said if the price of lobsters could come back up, he'd be all for doing something like Off the Hook.

"I don't know anything that's going to work right now," he said. "The price of lobster overall is down everywhere, right down through the United States, down in Maine, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick"

Mr. Fowlow said new markets are needed, which would require forming a group that would focus on marketing and research. His concern, though, is the future of the fishery.

He said many of the older fishers - who are in their late 50s and 60s - are telling him to hang on because they're preparing to retire.

Katie Temple, a fisheries research intern with CURRA, said similar concerns were addressed at the workshop.

"The fish harvesters and buyers are getting older," said Ms. Temple. "Their average age is definitely increasing, and there aren't as many young people getting into it."

To invest in a project that might have long-term benefits might not be as appealing to people who may soon be leaving the industry, Ms. Temple added.

Despite his worries, Mr. Fowlow is somewhat positive.

"I think it will be a good fishery down the road," said Mr. Fowlow. "It's just we're going to have four or five years I think that are going to be uncertain."