

**Speaking notes on the modernization of
fisheries management**

**Canadian Council of Professional Fish
Harvesters workshop on co-management**

**by Dan Edwards Vice President of the
Canadian Council of Professional Fish
Harvesters**

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I am going to frame my discussion on the new fisheries policy in relation to a recent article I read on the need for government to develop a new relationship with its citizens. The Canadian Council has done a considerable amount of work over the past five years on the framework for developing co-management with government in fisheries on both the east and west coast of Canada and this overview has also been informed by this work.

The central thesis of the article is about the fork in the road for public policy we are now at and the recognition that governments from the top down will not be able to make the right decisions in an increasingly complex world. The article states that for a new way of managing to occur, there must be a proper engagement between citizens and government so that shared decision making within a structured and principled framework will produce much better results than simply reducing and streamlining regulations in order to allow the market to set policy without any reasonable framework to engage citizens in policy making.

There is very little in the document about shared decision making but there is a statement about long-term stable approach to fisheries management decision making. This could mean any number of things: one framework for this is a government corporate model of decision making. This model is actually very old, and has been proven to be disastrous on several fronts, including the development of social equity principles, the safeguarding of the environment, the equitable distribution of wealth, the stability of communities as they are ravaged by corporate interests that quickly move from one resource to another searching for venture capital to exploit. So let us assume that the government of Canada is not promoting this form of fisheries management decision making.

I would think that this is not what policy experts such as Mathew Mendelsohn of the Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation are talking about. The truly new way of providing solutions is to build structures that bring citizens into partnership with government in a way that would allow new and innovative management solutions to develop. There are some very clear guidelines for doing this properly. One is to facilitate the building of a co-management table for the management of a fishery. There are a significant number of experts in the world now that can teach government how to build and facilitate such processes so that they are more than simply an empty advisory process feeding a top down government. These tables can be built to be truly a shared decision making process. They however require a number of important principles, transparency, accountability, inclusivity.

The setting of policy objectives is done at these tables, as well as the implementation strategies for managing a fishery. This may appear messy and time consuming compared to the more streamlined approach of the corporatist model but the outcomes will be more durable, the distribution of benefits will be more fair, the protection of the environment and the sustainability

of the fishery will be more sustainable than will ever be produced by the corporatist model.

Because I see nothing in this policy document that refers to community stability or shared stewardship within a principled an inclusive policy table, that references social objectives as being an important consideration for governments to be aware of and part of their mandate, I become very concerned that in fact what is being described by this policy direction is in fact the same old tired globalization agenda of top down corporatist decision making with very little regulatory control, very little framework for rational planning in which to contain very dangerous and corrosive market forces. In other words, the policy has been written for large monopolized corporate interests by large monopolized corporate interests. Too bad.

It is true as it states in policy paper, that there is a plethora of regulations and there is no doubt a need to streamline some of them but only after considerable consultation. However, there are actually many different types of fisheries on many different types of stocks, all of which have their own life cycle situations so there are actually many good reasons why there is diverse management options that have been in place. The life cycle of salmon and consequently the management of them is potentially considerably different than groundfish, or shrimp or crab or lobster. Some fisheries have been developed with effort controls that have worked quite well, such as the number of pots that are allowed in a particular crab fishery, or the number of overall vessels that are allowed in a fishery or the type of gear that is allowed to be used to maintain a particular fishery, such as the troll or jig regulations of the directed lingcod hook and line fishery.

This particular gear restriction was put in place not to maximize the amount of lingcod that can be taken out of the water in the shortest amount of time but rather for the opposite reasons, to slow down the catch in order to maintain markets and to make sure that there is some distribution of benefits to all the participants.

One major project that the Canadian council is involved with is based on the assumption that the best way to manage fisheries is through the building of collaborative arrangements that includes industry academics Dfo scientists and managers is the nserc network. Here in BC a partnership with UBC and SFu is working on a number of different fisheries with the intention that these collaborations will be informed by the best and the brightest scientists economists managers, students and industry leaders.

What is critical, however, is that we have a fisheries management system that is open to meaningful engagement by diverse interests. It is great that we are undertaking management strategy evaluations with academia to identify opportunities to improve our fisheries - to meet multiple objectives of healthy ecosystems, stable fishing fleets, healthy fishing communities, in

short, to achieve successful fisheries.

If there is no real opportunity to see fisheries management respond to this collaborative research, however, it will be for naught. If we see a further push towards a one size fits all approach, which is what this is, moving fisheries management to a lowest common denominator that focuses on short term, narrowly defined economic benefits and a disastrous vision of giving away our resources to a corporate fleet with no connection to working fishermen or fishing communities, we will suffer the consequences.

This policy is a frightening combination of saying nothing and saying far too much. We need a policy framework for fisheries in Canada. This is not it. We need stability, we need transparent management, but this will not achieve that.

We need a proper consultative framework for how fisheries management decisions are made. The very consultative approach taken with this policy breaks nearly every best practice rule for consultation.

We need stability in our allocation. In BC, our fisheries are losing access to the sports fishing sector, leading to death by a thousand cuts. You have here a commercial fisheries policy that ignores the movement of fisheries resources from a heavily regulated, monitored and responsible commercial fishing sector to an unaccountable sports fishery dominated by commercial sports lodge businesses - to be clear, this is not about the weekend angler, this is about two types of businesses competing, and the reallocation of fisheries access, without any compensation, without transparency, to one of these groups - which so happens to be dominated by corporate interests. Interesting.

And finally (as far as my comments now, anyway) we need an approach to science and management that is consistent and transparent, yes, but also an approach that is responsive to individual fisheries, that respects the fact that what works in one fishery is not necessarily what works in another. Given that this is a national policy covering an enormously diverse range of fisheries, there should be a decision tree approach outlined, or something of that nature. There should be a commitment and outlining of how decisions will be made, responsive to the fishery, not a commitment to multi-year IFMPs, except of course, where that doesn't work. How is that good policy.

This policy needs a lot of work. Probably best to start with a blank piece of paper.