

Working Waterfronts

Efforts are on in parts of the US to forge innovations to maintain working waterfronts, and safeguard fishing livelihoods and communities

No matter the waters one calls home, every contemporary telling of the fate and future of small-scale fisheries culminates in a tangle of ever-shifting pressures and enduring sanguinity. Such was the underlying sentiment at a recent event sponsored by the Alaska Marine Conservation Council (AMCC) in Kodiak, Alaska, United States (US). Our primary purpose for organizing the forum, “Innovations to Maintain Working Waterfronts in the Nation’s Fishing Communities”, was to bring together fishing-community

Maine, described hope as “essential to counter despair and apathy” among the 3,000 fishermen PERC has been serving since its inception in 2003. Hope, coupled with strategic initiatives and the necessary skills and tools, is ultimately what underpins and ignites the political community-level action essential to ensuring that the 50 fishing communities of eastern Maine survive into the future.

The challenges fishing communities face on this front are well-documented. Here I would like to shift the focus ever so slightly away from the problems we face today, and draw attention to the work, opportunities and experiences of a few organizations at the forefront of creating innovative ways to maintain our working waterfronts.

Following the collapse of groundfish stocks roughly two decades ago, eastern Maine is now a lobster-dominated fishery. Last year’s lobster catch totaled 104 mn pounds. The long-term average is 20 mn pounds. “We are,” explains Robin, “sustained by a bubble of lobster abundance right now that will not last. Our problems are masked by that abundance.”

Regaining access

Working to regain access lost due to depletion of the groundfish fishery is one of the ways in which PERC is responding to a problem not yet fully realized. PERC’s New Entrants Project is an initiative designed to get permits back to the fishermen in eastern Maine who lost their groundfish permits as a result of poor catch history following the collapse. In other words, when the rights were given out, the fish stocks had been depleted for so long they did not have any rights.

representatives from across the US to exchange ideas and insights on the challenges encountered, strategies envisioned and successes achieved in stimulating viable community-based fishing opportunities and safeguarding the long-term health and vitality of fishing livelihoods and communities.

From resource abundance to access rights to profitability, the threats facing small-scale fisheries, and the communities depending on them, are formidable, myriad and bound up in complex political and power structures. The cumulative effects of these pressures are in part what makes hope such a critical resource in our fishing communities.

Invited panel member, Robin Alden, Executive Director of Penobscot East Resource Centre (PERC) in Stonington,

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This article is by **Rachel Donkersloot** (rachel@akmarine.org), Fisheries Programme Director, Alaska Marine Conservation Council, Anchorage, Alaska, US

“We have 3,000 fishermen and no active permits,” Robin stresses. “We have fewer than 20 permits in total. So we started a permit bank, not just to buy quota for existing fishermen, but to make sure that we buy permits before they disappear.”

PERC’s aim is to purchase cheap groundfish permits that do not have any rights on them, and to figure out legally how to covenant them to ensure they stay in communities. As part of this effort, PERC works on business planning with younger fishermen to help them figure out how to afford to buy a cheap permit and hold on to it for a time until the fish come back. “And the chief problem for us”, says Robin, “is hope. People don’t even think it’s worth trying to do this. Why would they do that when they’re making money lobstering now...? So we’re trying to counter that and say, ‘If we’re going to have a community, then this is what we’ve got to do.’”

On the other side of the nation, roughly 30 small owner-operator boats call the urban waterfront of San Francisco’s iconic Fisherman’s Wharf home. Among them is Barbara Emley, General Manager of the San Francisco Community Fishing Association (SFCFA), who has been salmon trolling alongside her husband, Larry, since the 1980s.

Established in 2010, the SFCFA was the first community fishing association (CFA) on the west coast. Barbara explains: “We formed our CFA so that we could speak with a stronger voice at the Pacific Fishery Management Council as they considered establishing catch shares in the west coast groundfish fishery.” Unable to thwart the onset of catch shares, SFCFA members then directed their efforts towards becoming vertically integrated like other processors in the area. Their initial efforts proved successful when they secured the promise of a location in the centre of Fisherman’s Wharf to build a retail establishment.

Aided by Ecotrust and leaders in the Fisherman’s Wharf community, SFCFA was able to secure *pro bono* legal services and a grant to develop a business plan and architectural drawings (Ecotrust also agreed to be

the fiscal sponsor of a US\$250,000 urban waterfronts grant from the State of California).

SFCFA now has its own fishermen-owned facility and is currently working on phase one of a plan to have a wholesale facility on Pier 45. “We have just finished our first year with a profit,” says Barbara. “We have 11 members and I think there will be more. We have a hoist, forklifts and freezers to hold our own bait. Even if we had not had profits to distribute to our members in our first year, our members have a greater sense of independence.”

Vision and innovation in fisheries are enveloped in long-term, often slow-moving, processes. SFCFA continues to work towards opening a retail store on the wharf. In the meantime, Barbara identifies key factors contributing to SFCFA’s successes to date. For one, she notes, the support SFCFA received from the community and Ecotrust has been crucial.

“Equally crucial was my husband’s ability to sell his vision for the future,” she adds. “An additional item is the paperwork—absolutely crucial. Number one was the business plan. Without a business plan, nobody takes you seriously. Number two was the legal service. Our lawyers guided us through the process of incorporating, and helped us figure out what kind of business entity we needed to be and helped us craft our by-laws.”



SFCFA members loading pots in front of the waterfront facility on the fisherman’s wharf. SFCFA hopes to open a retail store on the wharf soon

HOLLAND DOTTS



Fresh-caught cod on the deck of a jig boat in Kodiak, Alaska. Kodiak jig fishermen collaborated with the AMCC to ensure entry-level access, and enhance benefits to the sector

catch-share systems. Pacific cod is the one fishery that is harvested by all gear groups—trawl, pots, longline and jig—and has recently undergone significant management changes to limit access.

In 2009, federal fishery managers reduced the number of licences, with the most loss of opportunity in the sub-50-foot vessel class. The annual total allowable catch (TAC) was divided among each of these gear groups, forming a sector-based catch-share programme. These steps created new barriers to entry because they raised the value of licences and, therefore, cost to future participants.

Darius explains: “We opposed the sector split starting out because we maintained that those fisheries that were most ecologically responsible and employed the most amount of people should be allowed to compete with the other gear groups, but we were not successful in averting sector splits.”

Instead, their success, which Darius describes as “contributing to our local fishing community, economy and morale” is this: through years of consistent representation, Kodiak jig fishermen, in partnership with AMCC, were able to secure regulatory measures that led to the creation of the jig sector as the entry-level opportunity within two large catch-share programmes for Pacific cod and rockfish.

Federal fishery managers created sector quotas for the jig fleet of up to six per cent of the cod TAC and 2.5 per cent of the pelagic rockfish TAC. The initial allocation of federal quota to the jig fleet figured at one per cent, but with a step-up provision to increase by one per cent a year up to six per cent.

This quota allows for gradual growth far beyond the current catch history of the jig fleet but the fleet must prove the full quota is needed; fishermen must gradually increase harvests up to the sector allocation or quota will be returned to the other sectors.

New programme

“This is the first year of the new programme”, Darius points out, “and we didn’t have any problem with the

Darius Kasprzak is an active small-boat fisherman who grew up on the south end of Kodiak Island on a remote site. For the past six years, Darius has represented the Kodiak jig fleet as president of the Alaska Jig Association (AJA). During these years, Kodiak jig fishermen collaborated with the Alaska Marine Conservation Council (AMCC) to ensure entry-level access, and enhance economic, social, and environmental benefits of the jig-gear sector.

The Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries are steadily becoming managed through various kinds of

first year's portion of [the quota]; presumably, we'll keep stepping up."

On a closing note, Darius stressed, "My hope for the future is this: as fisheries throughout the world become regulated, allocated, chopped up and privatized, there should always be a practical set-aside allocation that accommodates the needs of a traditional fishery operating by environmentally sustainable practices and that employs large numbers of local community members.

The Alaska Jig Association sincerely hopes that the example of a low-impact, set-aside, step-up fishery afforded to our fleet by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council will be recognized and talked about by fisheries managers across the world."

Although AJA's successes thus far have been on the political front in efforts to maintain access to resources, AJA is actually structured as a marketing association. As political work on jig access in the Gulf of Alaska begins to ebb (albeit momentarily), AJA, in partnership with AMCC, is working to further enhance value and create community-based opportunities within Kodiak's jig fisheries.

AMCC recently received one of 18 competitive grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Fisheries Innovation Fund. With these funds, AMCC will work with local jig fishermen to transform the fishery into a high-value enterprise by working with the fleet on best careful handling practices, value addition, direct marketing and appreciation in the market for strong conservation performance and social benefits of buying from small-boat, community-based fishermen.

Across the nation, local fishermen and fishing communities face many common challenges. We can confront them more effectively by working together. The organizations featured here—PERC, SFCFA and AMCC—are members of the recently established Community Fisheries Network (CFN).

What I hope for is that this quick account of the good work currently underway in a few of our fishing communities will serve as an important example that local leadership,

involvement and ingenuity are key ingredients in shaping a positive future for our fishing communities. The hopes we harbour for the future should not be conflated with an underestimation of the serious obstacles we have to overcome to ensure a viable future for small-scale fisheries. Rather, hope is the impetus for action. **3**

The Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries are steadily becoming managed through various kinds of catch-share systems.

For more



www.akmarine.org/

Alaska Marine Conservation Council

www.communityfisheries.org

Community Fisheries Network

kodiakjiggers.blogspot.in

Alaska Jig Association