

## North America/ Canada

### And so we Meet Again

*A report of a meeting to mark the first anniversary of the Workshop on Gender, Globalization and Fisheries held in May 2000*

**By Donna Lewis, a shellfisher from Brooklyn, Prince Edward Island, Canada. Donna is an articulate advocate and spokesperson for the rights of artisanal fishers.**

May 5 2001 marked the first anniversary of the *Workshop on Gender, Globalization and Fisheries* held in Newfoundland, Canada in which women from 18 countries had participated. To sustain the momentum of the partnerships that had been formed within Canada, the Women's Committee of Fish, Food and Allied Workers (FFAW/ CAW) Union, with support from the Status of Women Canada, hosted a meeting to "review issues raised last May, introduce new issues and concerns and prioritize issues that participants wish to work on". Twenty women from Atlantic Canada—fish harvesters, plant workers and researchers—participated.

Barbara Neis of the Department of Sociology, Memorial University, who had hosted the May 2000 workshop, updated delegates on the status of the book and the documentary film on the workshop—part of the planned outcomes of the gender and globalization project. She also spoke of upcoming projects and priorities for Memorial University and its partners.

This was followed by regional updates by representatives from Prince Edward Island (PEI), Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Representatives from Newfoundland spoke of crab or shellfish asthma—on the rise in plants across the Atlantic Region. This year 750-900 workers were tested for links between their respiratory problems and their work with shellfish. Other occupational health problems include swelling, hives and breathing difficulties.

Nova Scotia reported progress in establishing Family Resource Centres. These provide support ranging from literacy to educational opportunities for setting-up home-based businesses for women displaced from the fishery. 'Women Outside the System' are a priority—women who do not receive employment insurance or

social assistance and are unable to secure funding for upgrading their skills and education. This project is attempting to tie up with local community colleges to make it possible for women to take courses that will facilitate their re-entry into the workforce. A Community University Research Alliance has been established with representatives from coastal communities and universities, to develop a 'tool box' for coastal communities to effect policy change. The Nova Scotia Women's FishNet has submitted a provocative and inspiring Discussion Document to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, in response to the request for inputs to the document on Management of Fisheries on Canada's Atlantic Coast.

Representatives from New Brunswick reported a continuing preoccupation with the issue of pay equity. Workshops have been held across the province with fish plant workers to discuss the issue, gain support and lobby for policy and legislative changes. Participation in the workshops has, however, been poor.

Prince Edward Island (PEI) reported on the events on World Fisheries Day. This included news of the Save Our Seas (SOS) and Shores Coalition and their concerns with the proposed development of the petroleum industry.

In PEI the plight of oyster cleaners continues to be a concern and priority. Previously allowed to fish with a Can\$50 permit, oyster cleaners now face a ban and can fish only if they purchase a license costing more than Can\$10,000. An oyster cleaner who had purposely defied the ban last fall, was arrested on the first day of the fishing season. She is still awaiting trial.

Other areas of concern are the methods of investigation and continuing disqualification of individuals from the Employment Insurance Program by Human Resource Development Canada and the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency. Stories from across the Atlantic Region reflect the ongoing physical, mental and financial stress on families of low-income fishers and helpers. In Newfoundland there are ongoing cases in court over TAGS (income support programme for those displaced from the cod fishery after its collapse) qualification.

In the workshop last year ethics and industry-driven, practical research was a hot topic. I am pleased to report from PEI that at our Annual Aquaculture Alliance meeting in April 2001, we passed a resolution that we, as Alliance members, distribute and promote the use of Industry Research and Development Priority lists and take an active lead on developing project proposals and partnerships. This view is being accepted and adopted at the provincial level but still meets with resistance at the Federal level.

None of us could have summarized our feelings of frustration over the attitudes of bureaucrats, policy-makers and governments, including Ministers—the lack of consideration and exclusion of coastal communities, small family fishing operations and plant workers who rely on the industry and provide financial support to their communities.

Recognizing the importance of communication to the sustainability of our coastal communities, there was much discussion around a website that was created for this project and its potential value for communities currently connected to the internet. It was agreed that it is an excellent resource and a good place to continue to post regional/ international updates. The possibility of creating a ‘chat room’ or ‘bulletin board’ was discussed.

The consensus from this meeting was that communities are still dying and that the state of family mental health continues to be a cause for concern. The importance of developing social work skills remains paramount. Participants (they continue to amaze me with the depth and breadth of topics discussed—no fluff or flowers here), remain committed to developing a strategy to stay connected, as there is an invaluable wealth of information to be shared, enabling even the smallest of communities to improve their quality of life.

The energy and enthusiasm witnessed last May has not diminished. I am proud to be a part of this project and to witness the inspiration it provides to the smaller, more remote communities, mine included, in our country. The next meeting, which will include a larger number of participants, hopes to facilitate a public forum on community-based management of fisheries. Scheduled for November 2001, it will be hosted by representatives from Nova Scotia.

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