

Changing Course: Towards a Paradigm Shift in Fishery Policy

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Our small organization, "*Changing Course*", seeks to promote a shift in fishery policy so as to achieve the goal of maximizing net economic and social benefits to harvesters, coastal communities and the Canadian economy while ensuring the sustainability of fish stocks and marine ecosystems. *Primarily, we advocate replacing the current quota-based management system with **input-based management*** – basing harvest management on controlling input (regulating fishing effort) instead of controlling output by setting quotas. This input-based (effort-based) approach has been continuously successful in our lobster fishery for almost a century, and is compatible with many Indigenous traditions of sustainable harvesting.

Changing Course evolved from years of individual research and consultation by founder [Barry Darby](#), retired fish harvester, educator, and former Fisheries Adjustment Coordinator at the College of the North Atlantic in the 1990s. In 2018 he was joined in his fishery policy work by writer and advocate [Helen Forsey](#), and in 2019 we produced our basic [policy paper](#), "*Changing Course - A New Direction for Canadian Fisheries.*"

Since then we have worked to refine and promote our approach as part of the public discourse around the fishery. We do continuous research and networking, and regularly contribute material to the media. We participate in organized and informal discussions with people in the fishery, governmental circles, academia, and civil society.

In our presentation to the 4th World Small-Scale Fisheries Congress in St. John's in June, 2022, and in our 2019 policy paper, we present a challenging analysis of Canada's current quota-based fishery policy framework. The current system has failed and will continue to fail because of inherent flaws in its fundamental assumptions. The quota-based management system actually fosters fishing practices that worsen climate change and destroy the marine environment. Its results are also economically dubious: we are often catching much less of the harvestable biomass than we could safely catch if we managed by input controls.

The input-based (effort-based) management approach we advocate regulates input rather than output by regulating the amounts and types of effort put into the fishery (the "who, how, when and where" of harvesting) rather than the amount of fish coming out (total allowable catches and quotas.) *Changing Course* points to the multiple advantages of this approach – economic and social benefits for fish harvesters, coastal communities and the nation; ecological benefits for the fish and the marine ecosystem; and benefits for DFO itself.

Our proposal recommends that the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans immediately begin changing course, from its current quota-based management system to one of input-based management – i.e. managing by regulating fishing effort. Groundfish in 2J3KL presents a particular opportunity to institute the new approach, and several other stocks and areas should be switched over concurrently.

We also include further recommendations, addressing DFO's mandate, harvester training and certification, bycatch, data and information technology, separation of harvesting from processing, and community involvement. Taken together, the recommended actions will

transform our capability to achieve economic, social and environmental sustainability in the fishery.

Clearly, a move to bring about such a major change will raise many questions and present many challenges that require full consideration by everyone involved in the fishery. Quota-based management has been in place for so long and is used so widely that a proposal to replace it will not be easily accepted. Because the fishery is now structured around this decades-old system, quotas are treated as a core element of the current regulatory, financial, institutional and physical structures governing our fisheries. Altering these established practices will inevitably be as challenging as it is necessary, and implementing the shift will require recognizing and mitigating temporary problems that may arise for those affected.

Basing management decisions on quotas means a heavy reliance on particular types of Western science, especially those elements that fit into predictive computer models of stock biomass. The new approach will integrate traditional Indigenous knowledge and ongoing local input so as to complement, expand and enhance the scientific basis and shift the emphasis to the ecosystem and the human role within it.

The existing decision-making process is also influenced far too much by political considerations, corporate lobbying, competing regional and sectoral interests (eg. processors, plant workers and harvesters), etc. The compromises arrived at are rarely in the interests of independent harvesters, coastal communities, or marine ecosystems. However, once we recognize the potential economic and other benefits that input-based management would offer, many of the sticking points and some of the conflicts could be eliminated, resulting in a much improved decision-making process.

No system is perfect, of course, but some approaches to fishery management are better than others. The next few years will be a crucial time for our fisheries. We have the chance to trade the current year-to-year crisis management mode for a long-term approach that will benefit harvesters, coastal communities, and the nation in terms of both economics and sustainability.

CHANGING COURSE:
A New Direction for Canadian Fisheries

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