Comments concerning Amendments to the Owner Operator policy as part of the revisions to the federal Fisheries Act

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I will list my concerns:

First of all, this is supposed to be a new policy aimed at saving the inshore fishery. As I see it, it will be very hard to manage in this form because we don't address other policies we have in this format that were put in place before public consultations took place. The first policy is the Indigenous policy, which is first and foremost in all policies, and is exempt from this program.

Next, we have the organizational operator policy, which are given huge amounts of allocations or quotas in different stocks that are tendered out to the highest bidders generating millions of dollars, to fund or pay out to fishers and fund their organizations. Also with this, they co-manage these fisheries. Would this be considered a conflict of interest? Would this be a role that DFO should be responsible for? I hope DFO will continue to be Department of Fisheries and Oceans not the Department of Fisheries and Organizations.

Next, we have the owner/operator policy for fishers which seems deemed they will be held to the letter of the law, under strict guidelines, without any exceptions. And last, we have the Minister's policy which can do away with all the above and make political decisions at his own discretion.

This is done to get away from third party trusts, which I believe will not happen. We were told a number of years ago from a policy rep from Ottawa that third party trusts are not against the law. They are against DFO policy. Now we are being told the new policy will be made law and this loop hole will be covered, leaving me to wonder will the fishers who are in third party trusts will remain and be rewarded, and those who were never involved will be penalized for following the rules earlier.

Also, we were being told that this will be a new Atlantic-wide management policy. This seems deja vu. When I started going to meetings in the 1970's we did have Atlantic management policies. Over the years, we went to Regional Management, Area Management, micro-management to crisis management. Now I believe we are in Depressed management, because of most of the stocks under these different regimes are either collapsed or under a moratorium which leaves the department more time to manage fishers which will not solve the problem of the stocks not rebuilding or being sustained.

I think this should have more consultations with the fishing industry, with more knowledge to the fishers on the wharf, instead of the boardrooms so that they will know what is taking place. As this stands now, it will bring about bigger problems which will permit lawyers even more loopholes to win cases with DFO policy. It is said that lawyers are notorious in finding cases in the most unlikely places, especially ones with the huge potential of damagers awards. If there are rewards given out in this policy, I would want fishers to benefit not to lawyers and others. With the loopholes in this policy, there is a strong possibility the opposite will prevail including 3rd party organizations becoming an arm of government.

The money going to these organizations could better be invested in improving the viability of the commercial fishery.
If the objective, as I understand it, is to preserve the independence of the inshore fisheries and not allow it to become corporate as it is in BC by processors, organizations, and harvesters then why were organizations exempt from the new Atlantic policy? They were given allocations and then licenses. It is obvious that we are on the wrong course with this initiative.

The last observation that I will make based on my 50+ years in the fishery as an owner-operator is that if it is deemed to hold fisherman to the letter of the law and leave the loopholes for other groups to have royalty fisheries, harvesters will have little faith in the integrity of this program and they will believe that policy will only stand for politics as it has many times in the past.

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