

## MIT Sea Grant: New England's Fishing Communities [Table of Contents](#)

### 7. 0 Conclusions and Recommendations

We view the research that this report is based upon as a "work in progress." Like the species they depend upon, fishing industry participants and community stakeholders are constantly adapting to change in their lives and livelihood. Static portraits drawn by individual community studies at single points in time cannot convey the dynamic dimensions characteristic of this industry or its people.

We feel very strongly that the collection of socio-economic data should be institutionalized. There is currently no database of consistently gathered information about fishing and fishing-dependent communities in the region. Certainly, there is nothing to correspond to the 30-year biological data that National Marine Fisheries Service has been collecting via their assessment cruises and landings data. Nevertheless, fisheries managers are forced to select among regulatory alternatives, knowing that they are supposed to weigh impacts on communities, but having little or no data upon which to judge potential effects. Furthermore, because of the complex nature of the industry and its complicated network of total capital flow, many coastal communities have limited information about the direction or consequences of change that affect the industry or their own community.

This project made an effort to reflect the goals and concerns of participants in the fishing industry and community members in the development of these profiles, however, we recognize that the generation of more complete profiles would require the active and on-going participation of a broad group of stakeholders. Fishing industry participants, managers, scientists and members of fishing communities could contribute information through participatory research that is not readily accessible to a researcher from outside the community being studied.

A community-based program for gathering and assessing data would be an excellent first step. This study, however, also reminded us that details collected at the community level apply well beyond the arbitrary political and geographic boundaries of any single community. Community studies that are limited in time and space provide some understanding of the impacts of regulatory change, for example, but are unlikely to address either the cumulative impact of multiple regulations, or the impacts of regulations in a wider geographic context. The capital flows must be charted over time at local, sub-regional, regional, national and international levels to trace effects and predict change.

The significance of the social structures and institutions described in the data collection effort may be lost if the data and the analyses are confined to single communities. For example, we have noted that Boston's Logan airport is the predominant air freight center in the region. This could have critical regulatory import affecting both individual state's rules and international agreements. By way of illustration, a lobsterman recently noted that Downeast Maine lobstermen are fighting proposed gauge increases and may decide to ignore interstate rules set by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. However, he explained, if the Maine lobstermen do land lobsters that are smaller than those allowed by Massachusetts, they will not be able to air freight their smaller lobsters via Logan. The same restrictions would also apply to Canadian lobsters from the Maritime Provinces. While in theory, Canadians could ship from Halifax and Maine lobstermen out of Portland; neither airport has a significant air freight capacity and opportunities for airfreight distribution would therefore be limited.

Other cross-community impacts stem from both biological trends and regulations, for instance, the migration of vessels from one port to another may be associated with the movement of their target species, better marketing strategies, and/or simply access to fishing grounds unimpeded by regulatory closed areas. The effects of vessel migration are likely to be different for the homeport and the recipient port.

We encourage National Marine Fisheries Service to work with communities and regional groups to develop a database for social science that corresponds to their long-term biological database. We applaud recent efforts of the New England Fishery Management Council staff to learn from fishing communities about how they have been affected by amendments to the Multispecies Fishery Management Plan since 1994. The Council staff held a series of 10 meetings in the region during

November and December 2000 that attracted about 400 people. Two reports, one on social impacts and the other on economic impacts, have been prepared and will be incorporated into the impact assessment required for the next regulatory change in the management of groundfish.<sup>5</sup>

The ideal is to work towards not only collaborative information gathering but also a review process for the analyses that brings together diverse stakeholders from a variety of communities and social scientists representing multiple disciplines. Again, the review of biological data in NMFS' annual SAW provides precedent.

We anticipate that the work reported here will serve as a baseline for the long-term collection of socio-economic data. The first step has been taken...

<sup>5</sup><http://www.nefmc.org>

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