

Sub-region Profile  
 Counties: New London

## 5.1. Connecticut

### *Background*

When Connecticut was still a part of Massachusetts, fishing was a significant enterprise. Later, whaling became a key element of the economy. Over time, however, the Connecticut seacoast shifted away from commercial fishing. In fact, summer homes and recreational boating marinas now dominate coastal property. Even the presence of commercial fishing is masked by gentrification; nevertheless, it persists in clusters up and down the coast. However, the Connecticut coast sub-region is the least fisheries dependent of all the sub-regions in the New England NRR (see page 54). Despite its relative ranking, fishing in this region does provide important seafood resources to Connecticut's coastal economy.

The town of Stonington has the most obvious commercial fishery presence, boasting a small fleet of draggers and lobster boats in addition to a processing facility at the town dock. However, lobster boats are also found in the communities of Norwalk, Stamford, and Greenwich near the New York border, as well as farther east in Bridgeport, New Haven and Niantic. In New London a fish packing facility works with three large draggers that primarily target whiting (silver hake). The whiting is landed here, packaged, and shipped to Fulton's Market in New York. During 1999, there were approximately 397 fishermen in Connecticut, the majority (288) of whom held lobster licenses. However, since then there has been a loss of 57 lobster fishermen (based on license renewals), primarily from western Connecticut which was hit hardest by the lobster mortality event.

The transformation of the Connecticut seacoast from fishing to gentrified coastal living is partly related to the lack of replication of the human capital of fishing in this sub-NRR. Those fishermen who still work look on their job as a survival of times gone by, and do not see others coming in to replace them. The youngest fisherman in Stonington, for example, is 32 years old. Three factors that key respondents in Connecticut reported as responsible for the aging of the fleet include:

- Fishing is hard manual work under often difficult and dangerous working conditions, and most young people are "turned off" by this;
- The fishing industry is repeatedly portrayed in the local press as 'dead or dying', partially due to the reports on declines in stocks, and partly due to the irregularity in work imposed by the complex regulations and the difficulties in coping with these, and
- Increasing costs for some sectors make crew positions temporary at best and non-existent at worst. Fishermen sometimes work with a reduced or no crew to save on labor and insurance costs, despite the added risk this entails.

Most local fishermen started fishing as children with a family member. Having been fishing since high school, these long-timers will stay through the ups and downs of the industry. As one fisherman puts it: *"you always got to fight—you get what you put into this business. Hard workers are making money, but the slackers think the sky is falling, all 'doom and gloom'."*

Some of those who work as "lumpers" (those who help unload the catch and occasionally work for processors) do not look on the fishing industry in Connecticut as anything other than a source of employment, not as a way of life. A processor in Bridgeport expressed the sentiment that fishermen were treated "like peasants" by local government and received no special consideration from local officials. Working fishermen are generally satisfied with their fishing lifestyle, but feel oppressed by the numerous fishing regulations, what they see

as unfair state quotas for certain stocks such as fluke, the increasing risks associated with fishing, and the lack of new entrants into the local industry:

*"I lost my crew because I couldn't get the permits in time to keep them. With no future the crew looked for other jobs. I wouldn't encourage anyone to enter the fishery, it's too scary."*

Although Stonington represents the only major port with an established and spatially separate dock space, Bridgeport, New London-Groton, Stamford, and other smaller sites contribute to the overall regional presence of the industry. These smaller sites can best be described as fishing clusters of several to over twenty boats, linked by marketing ties to each other and to local and regional clientele.

#### Commercial fishing and fisheries-related employment

##### *Harvesting structure*

Overall, for 1999 the Connecticut sub-region has a total of 397 (241 for the 1990 census) fishermen, with the majority (43%) in New London County where Stonington's 75 fishermen are located. Most fishermen outside of New London are lobster fishermen, although the exact number of these is unavailable. New London also has two vessels that travel to Georges Bank to target whiting. There are indications that the numbers of fishermen are actually increasing. License data for 2000 has 497 individuals listed.<sup>1</sup>

A notable statistic is the number of women 'fishermen' in Connecticut, with 7.1% in Fairfield County and 17.0% in New London, for a sub-region average of 9.1%.

#### **Summary of fishermen by county, from 1990.**

<b>County</b>	<b>Total Number of Fishermen</b>	<b>Percent Female</b>
Fairfield	56	7.1
Middlesex	42	0.0
New London	104	17.0
New Haven	39	0.0
<b>Totals for sub-NRR</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>9.1</b>

Other major fishing communities by number of fishermen include Groton (31), Branford (25), Bridgeport (24), New London (24), Old Saybrook (23), and Waterford (Niantic Village) (18). The 15 dragnets of Stonington represent 52% of the total number of dragnets in the state, with Guilford (3), Old Saybrook (3), and East Lyme (3) making up most of the remainder.

The most recent significant change in the number of fishermen was among gillnetters, dropping 43% from 37 in 1998 to 21 in 1999. Most of these were in Old Saybrook (12 down to 6, a 50% drop), and Stonington (7 down to 3, a 57% drop). Other 1998-99 declines occurred in rod and reel (down 19% from 62 to 50) and lobstering (down 5% from 305 to 298). The overall one-year decline was 42, or 9.5% of the total. Of course, the most dramatic decline in the fishery may come with the massive lobster die-off in Western Long Island Sound in the fall of 1999. This is affecting about 37%, or 114, of the total number of lobster fishermen and families in Connecticut, and may portend other more severe declines if the die-off spreads farther east into the Stonington area and south towards Rhode Island.

The cause of the die-off is still under investigation, but preliminary indications are that it may have been caused by a combination of environmental stressors and a parasite. It is unclear whether the parasite is a primary or secondary cause of the mortality event. Other theories focus on runoff of pesticides used for the control of mosquitoes carrying the West

<sup>1</sup> N. Balcom, personal communication.

Nile virus. Leading up to 1999, the Long Island Sound lobster population was at an all-time high abundance, water temperatures were several degrees warmer than average, an extended drought was followed by a hurricane. The disastrous die-off is having significant impacts on the social, economic, and psychological/physical well being of the lobstering population in this part of the Sound, and could have marketing ramifications throughout the sub-Region and other regions dependent on the sale of lobsters.

Species landed by the Connecticut fleet include a variety of groundfish, monkfish, butterfish, tautog (blackfish), shrimp, whiting, white hake, dogfish, lobster, shellfish and conch. Fishermen use a multiple gear and license approach to maintain economic flexibility, yet some are having difficulty with the reductions in DAS, regulatory paperwork, and quotas. The vessels consist of a mix of lobster boats, groundfish vessels, and scallopers, with at least one small vessel specializing in conch using horseshoe crabs as bait. Gill netting and rod and reel are also practiced.

### Changes in Community Enclaves

Declines in the overall numbers of fishermen in Connecticut may also be related to influences of gentrification. For example, the 24 lobster fishermen in Bridgeport are facing the loss of docking space if the city goes ahead with plans to 'develop' the riverfront. In recent city hearings on the subject, the mayor of the city was surprised to learn that there was a lobster fleet in Bridgeport. By putting up a boardwalk and condemning properties along the waterfront in the name of 'public access,' the city could effectively wipe out all available commercial dock space, with no legal mandate requiring them to replace it with alternative space elsewhere. Nevertheless, the fishermen and fish marketers hope to be able to incorporate a space for their operations into the overall development plan. This would make a public attraction out of the fishing operations, could include restaurants, a museum, and other components of a "fishing village" emphasizing history, culture, and economy of place and space for fishing. This style of "fishing village" imbedded in a larger context of tourism seems to have been successfully carried out in Plymouth, Massachusetts, for example.

With the gentrification of the coast, wealthy outsiders acquired houses once owned by fishermen as second homes. No fishermen live on the main street of Stonington, which consists of tourist-oriented gift shops and fashionable year round and summer residences. The commercial fleet survives in part because the town has reserved the dock area for commercial operations only. In contrast, in Bridgeport, Noank, and other lobster fishing ports, fishing boats must compete with recreational marinas and dockside tourist facilities. The property values of land and housing have increased as residents from New York City seek housing either for primary residences, weekend or summer homes. As the value of property have increased, the number of fishing families living near the water has declined, resulting in the loss of fishing neighborhoods as culturally defined communities. The Portuguese Club, still mainly frequented by fishermen and their families, seems out of place in the fashionable residential section of the Borough.

**Table XII. Breakdown of number of fishermen by gear type for each port, for 1998-99.**

Port	Fishpot		Gill net		Lob. Pot		Other		Rod Reel		Trawl		Total	
	98	99	98	99	98	99	98	99	98	99	98	99	98	99
<b>Branford</b>	.	.	1	2	20	22	.	1	.	.	.	.	21	25
<b>Bridgeport</b>	.	.	.	.	27	24	.	.	.	.	.	.	27	24
<b>Clinton</b>	.	1	3	2	7	7	.	.	1	1	.	.	12	11
<b>Cromwell</b>	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1
<b>Darien</b>	.	.	.	.	7	6	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	6
<b>Derby</b>	.	.	.	.	1	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	1
<b>East Haddam</b>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1
<b>East Haven</b>	.	.	.	.	2	4	.	.	.	.	1	1	3	5

East Lyme	.	.	.	.	14	13	.	.	3	3	.	1	17	17
Fairfield	.	.	.	.	2	2	.	.	.	.	.	.	2	2
Greenwich	.	.	.	.	7	6	.	.	2	2	.	.	9	8
Groton	.	.	.	.	32	27	.	.	7	3	1	1	40	31
Guilford	.	.	.	.	8	8	.	.	1	1	1	3	10	12
Madison	.	.	2	1	4	4	.	.	.	.	.	.	6	5
Mystic	.	.	.	.	9	9	.	.	5	5	.	.	14	14
Milford	.	.	2	1	6	3	.	.	.	.	.	.	8	4
New Haven	1	.	.	.	13	11	.	.	1	1	.	.	15	12
New London	.	.	2	2	16	17	.	.	4	2	5	3	27	24
Norwalk	.	.	1	.	15	14	.	.	.	.	.	.	16	14
Norwich	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	1	.	.	1	1
Old Lyme	.	.	.	.	6	10	.	.	1	1	1	.	8	11
Old Saybrook	3	3	12	6	7	9	.	.	3	2	.	3	25	23
Stamford	.	.	1	1	11	9	.	.	.	.	.	.	12	10
Stonington	.	1	7	3	37	36	.	.	25	20	15	15	84	75
Stratford	.	.	1	.	2	2	.	.	1	1	.	.	4	3
Waterford	.	.	.	.	17	13	2	2	2	2	2	1	23	18
Westbrook	.	.	3	2	12	12	.	.	2	2	.	.	17	16
Westport	.	.	1	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	1
Noank	.	.	.	.	22	19	.	.	3	2	1	1		22
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>438**</b>	<b>397</b>

\*\* This does not include Montville, with only one (1) lobster pot fisherman for 1998, but nothing for 1999, and Chester, with one "Other" for 1998, but nothing from 1999. Fishermen from Niantic register themselves as Waterford residents, and thus there are no figures on numbers for Niantic village.

### *Fishing Dependency*

Most fishermen in Connecticut are embedded as fishing 'clusters' within their communities, and as such do not make up a significant economic component of local economies. The decline in the fishery is directly related to the loss of fishing community as a definite space and place dominated by a populations sharing traditions of fishing. Nevertheless, fishing persists as enclaves, meaning a population in a specific area sharing common occupations of resource use. The historic loss of the core fishing population has proceeded simultaneously with an intense gentrification process that has converted fishing neighborhoods and dock space into expensive tourist weekend and summer homes surrounded by gentrified shops, restaurants, and marinas.

Connecticut Seacoast Region  
New London County, Connecticut

### 5.1.1.1. Stonington

#### *Background*

The town of Stonington, which covers 42.7 square miles, was settled in 1649. What is considered the town today, however, is actually several communities. The 1990 Census population totals 16,919 residents, with 10% residing in the Borough. Other concentrated areas are the Pawcatuck and Mystic sections of the Town, which have 40% and 20%, respectively, of Stonington's population. The remaining 30 percent are scattered widely in the semi-rural areas of the township.

“Stonington is located in the southeastern corner of Connecticut bordering Rhode Island to the east, Long Island Sound to the south, Groton, Ledyard and North Stonington to the west and north. Stonington is the only Connecticut town facing the Atlantic Ocean. Businesses have come to Stonington because it is an outstanding place to work, has a well-educated and highly skilled labor force and offers an attractive quality of lifestyle for business owners, management and their families. Stonington boasts that increasingly rare and attractive combination: a mix of seaside and semi-rural working and living sites.”<sup>2</sup>

“Wequetequock was the site of the first settlement in Stonington, when William Chesbrough came to chose a site at the head of the cove for his trading post in 1649.”<sup>3</sup> The Borough of Stonington, the oldest borough in Connecticut, was incorporated in 1801. A beautiful, safe harbor attracted sealers such as Nathaniel Palmer, discoverer of Antarctica, and other notable mariners. Stonington remains the principal port of the state’s commercial fishing fleet.

“Pawcatuck, developed largely around the now vanished textile industry, has continued its proud heritage as the home of industrial leaders. These leaders include Davis Standard Corporation, the premier supplier of plastic extrusion systems, and Yardney Technical Products, producer of batteries involved in the Trident Submarine Program, as well as those involved in the exploration of outer space.”<sup>4</sup>

“In some ways, Mystic differs from both the Borough and Pawcatuck. Developed around the shipbuilding industry, Mystic currently boasts three distinct visiting areas. Historic Downtown Mystic is rich with diverse specialty shops, while Mystic Seaport, the Museum of America and the Sea, provides an inside look at New England's maritime heritage. Olde Mystic Village has over 60 shops set in a New England style village, and lies adjacent to the Mystic Aquarium and Institute for Exploration. Old Mystic is the original community at the head of the Mystic River and Foxwoods Resort Casino is located 15 minutes north of Mystic.”<sup>5</sup>

#### *Governance*

Selectmen/ Town Meeting/ Board of Finance

#### *Demography*<sup>6</sup>

##### Population

According to the 1990 Census, Stonington (borough) had a population of 1100, 492 male and 608 female.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.town-usa.com/connecticut/newlondon/stonington.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.munic.state.ct.us/STONINGTON/stonington.htm#GOVT>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.munic.state.ct.us/STONINGTON/stonington.htm#GOVT>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> <http://venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup/982362785>

Education

Among persons over 25, 173 were high school graduates, 167 had some college, 52 had an Associate's degree and 363 had a Bachelor's or higher. One hundred eleven individuals had no high school diploma.

Housing

Of the 713 housing units in 1989, 571 were occupied and 142 were vacant. Of those occupied, 300 were owner occupied and 271 were rented. Median year the housing units were built was 1939 and the median value of owner-occupied housing was \$303,800.

Racial and Ethnic Composition

All except for 3 individuals were white in 1989. Ancestry was most often English, German, Irish, Italian and/or Portuguese.

*Economic Context*Income

Median household income in 1989 was \$38,654; per capita income was \$27,965.

Employment

As noted in the introduction, the census data generally available is not a particularly satisfactory indicator of the prominence of the fishing industry. Nevertheless, the tables below offer some relative comparisons by way of context.

INDUSTRY<sup>7</sup>

Universe: Employed persons 16 years and over	
<b>Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries (000-039)...</b>	<b>18</b>
Mining (040-059)...	0
Construction (060-099)...	40
Manufacturing, nondurable goods (100-229)...	56
Manufacturing, durable goods (230-399)...	116
Transportation (400-439)...	5
Communications and other public utilities (440-499)...	8
Wholesale trade (500-579)...	7
Retail trade (580-699)...	92
Finance, insurance, and real estate (700-720)...	37
Business and repair services (721-760)...	22
Personal services (761-799)...	26
Entertainment and recreation services (800-811)...	13
Professional and related services (812-899):	
Health services (812-840)...	35
Educational services (842-860)...	42
Other professional and related services (841, 861-899)...	66
Public administration (900-939)...	20

## OCCUPATION

Universe: Employed person's 16 years and over	
Managerial and professional specialty occupations (000-202):	
Executive, administrative, and managerial occupations (000-042).	94
Professional specialty occupations (043-202)...	156
Technical, sales, and administrative support occupations (203-402):	
Technicians and related support occupations (203-242)...	21
Sales occupations (243-302)...	100
Administrative support occupations, including clerical (303-402)...	64
Service occupations (403-472):	
Private household occupations (403-412)...	4
Protective service occupations (413-432)...	3

<sup>7</sup> <http://venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup/982362785>

Service occupations, except protective and household (433-472).	35
<b>Farming, forestry, and fishing occupations (473-502)...</b>	<b>17</b>
Precision production, craft, and repair occupations (503-702)...	69
Operators, fabricators, and laborers (703-902):	
Machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors (703-802)...	27
Transportation and material moving occupations (803-863)...	5
Handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, and laborers (864-902)...	8

### *Transportation and Access*

Stonington lies within two hours or less of major research and transportation centers in Boston, Providence, New Haven, Hartford and New York. I-95 is minutes away. Major airports are located nearby in Groton, Hartford/Springfield, Providence and Boston. Amtrak trains are located in Mystic, New London and Westerly.

### *Fisheries Profile*

#### Community

Stonington's commercial fishing infrastructure consists of a central wharf with two processing facilities, flanked on the seaward side by a double dock for finfish and lobster boats and the upriver side by a single commercial dock. At the end of the Stonington dock is a public access area and fishing memorial, which brings the public into contact with the commercial fishing sector.

An attitude prevails that commercial fishing represents a significant cultural and economic feature of the town, and the present fishing infrastructure will most certainly support the fishing industry at its present level. "If this stopped, knock on wood, I would see the Stonington Borough businesses shut down, especially in winter." In the summer, tourists and summer residents visit the docks to watch the fishing operations, and local seafood restaurants are provided with fresh fish products from the dock.

Nevertheless, recent reports indicate that new property owners in Stonington are less supportive of the fishing industry. "*The dock area and the surrounding borough are struggling a lot with some of the newcomers.*"<sup>8</sup> This is a theme common to fishing enclaves throughout New England. As gentrification creeps in and property values soar for shoreside property, the conflicts between users will surely multiply.

#### Commercial fishing and fisheries-related employment

Boat numbers have fluctuated dramatically in recent decades. For example, in 1950-51, local docks in Stonington registered around 36 boats, but by 1959 only 13 boats were reported by *Atlantic Fishermen* magazine. One year later, the fleet had dwindled to 9 boats. The decline in numbers was due to a slump in local market conditions. As early as 1950, *Atlantic Fisherman* reported that fewer fishermen were docking their boats in Stonington because they got a better price in New Bedford. The state made an attempt to keep fishermen in Stonington by suggesting construction of a fish meal plant in the town.

Regardless of the causes for the decline, business picked up in the late sixties to around 24 draggers and 18 lobster boats.<sup>9</sup> Between 1960 and into the 1970s the numbers dwindled again so that by 1979, there were only about ten fishing vessels working out of Stonington. However, the fleet recovered again, and by 1989 there were over forty vessels and locals were optimistic about the chances for growth.<sup>10</sup>

*"Stonington's commercial fleet may be small but we're doing well. We're building up. I'm proud*

<sup>8</sup> Key respondent interview, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Campbell 1997

<sup>10</sup> Brown 1989

*of the fleet. With the fishing business kind of tough right now, Stonington's fleet continues to steadily grow. The town is behind us, we've got better facilities, and we're going to keep building.*<sup>11</sup>

#### *Harvesting structure*

Stonington is the main commercial finfish fishing port of Connecticut, with a 1999 total of 75 commercial licenses (19% of the total of 397), including 3 gillnetters, 36 lobster fishermen, 20 rod and reel, and 15 draggers. There are 150 directly employed in fishing and approximately 200 households in related industries, trucking, scales, welders, etc. About one third of fishermen own their own home, with most living outside the borough because of the high property value of local residences. At least two fishermen are well off enough to own summer places in Vermont and Maine.

The fishing fleet in Stonington is split between day boats and offshore draggers. Offshore (up to 14-day trips) vessels target scallops, squid, butterfish shrimp, monkfish, and whiting. The one vessel that specializes in shrimping is an eastern rig trawler that fishes out to 180 fathoms. Inshore, non-selective, day-trippers go after fluke, lobster, black fish, and conch.

Lobster boats are one to two-person operations and the larger scalloper and dragger boats have crews of up to five persons. In general, lobster boats have 2 crew, scallop boats 4 to 7 crew, day boats 2 crew, and shrimp boats 4 crew. Many of the lobstermen have other full time jobs, fishing afternoons and/or weekends, often taking 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> shift jobs. In the summer the long days leave more time to work the traps. Overall, the number of fishermen in Stonington is down 11% from 84 in 1998 to 75 in 1999.

A special niche fishery in Stonington is conch, which are fished in other ports in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, but always in small numbers. In Stonington, two "retired" fishermen pursue conch. For 1999, the reported ex-vessel value of conch from Connecticut was \$.60/lb. A good daily catch would be twelve 50-lb bags, giving a gross of \$360/day. Operating costs include fuel, maintenance, traps, transport, and bait. Pots are hand-made, and battery-powered winches are used to haul traps. Fishermen work every day that conditions permit. The catch location of each bag of conch is recorded for tracking purposes required for interstate commerce. Conch are sold in New Bedford, where they're boiled, removed and resold to many markets. The preferred bait is *Limulus sp.* (horseshoe crabs). These are split into quarters and inserted in the traps. They are sold 10-15 in a bag, purchased as by-catch from local fishermen.

Besides the resident vessels, outsiders ("transient vessel") may occasionally work out of Stonington. Currently one boat from Maryland is fishing dogfish. He uses gillnets and goes up and down the coast from Connecticut up through Massachusetts and Maine chasing dogfish.

#### *Processing and marketing sector*

Up until 1974 there were no fish buyers in Stonington so fishermen had to go to Newport to sell their product.

Local seafood processors buy from 15 draggers on a daily basis as well as 36 lobster boats and 5 scallopers. The seafood processors will occasionally buy/exchange product with each other. Products sold include various types of lobster bait such as whole small skate, skate wings, salted herring, and mackerel. Processors have diversified to compensate for lower local landings due to the diminishment of the stocks and regulatory measures. Among finfish, the primary moneymakers are fluke and blackfish (tautog). Both processors have their own icemakers. Fish are marketed in myriad of ways to local and international destinations, including Fulton's in New York City, Philadelphia, Boston, New Bedford, Korea, and Japan (monk livers, fluke, whole monkfish tails).

Another processor (Atlantic Gem Seafoods) went out of business during the course of this

<sup>11</sup> Key respondent interview, 1999.



study. When still in business, they bought from 12-14 boats and had five full-time staff.

A longtime lobster operation (Garbo) located near the town dock in Stonington recently relocated to Groton after new neighbors from outside Connecticut moved in next door and complained long and loudly about the hours and noise of the trucks used to transport the lobsters. The facility in Stonington was purchased by the Mohegan tribe, which has plans to set up a shellfish hatchery in the building and conduct extensive aquaculture operations on leased shellfish grounds off of Stonington and Groton.

Stonington products move through many vendors, including other fish markets, restaurants, international seafood brokers, wholesale to individual buyers, processors, and freezers, cutting houses, wholesale import-export companies, and SYSCO Corporation, North America's largest foodservice marketer and distributor. Fishery products are available year round, with the slowest season being the winter, when monkfish and whiting are the primary moneymakers.

The fishing fleet of Stonington must compete with other larger fleets and producers to sell their product. Key respondents noted that competing with large frozen fish producers is difficult for small fresh-fish producers.

#### *Support Services*

The commercial dock in Stonington is maintained under a lease from the town and is reserved for fishing-related activities. This preservation of space is critical, for throughout New England one of the features that is most threatened by development is fishing infrastructure. At the present level of fishing effort, the remaining infrastructure is the minimum necessary to sustain the present fishing population. Because of the threatened status of virtually all fishing infrastructure in New England, support and protection of fishing infrastructure should be considered a priority of fishery managers, including improvement and maintenance of remaining docks, bait houses, gear and vessel storage, ice houses, and related processing facilities.

The Southern New England Fishermen and Lobstermen Association's facility sits on the dock beside the local processor. The association helps fishermen survive by keeping costs of ice, fuel, gear and supplies down.

Trucking of produce sends fish along the entire coast. For example, some lobsters are trucked to Maine where they are sold in restaurants as "Maine lobsters." One trucking company specializes in monkfish, the tails of which are shipped to the West Coast and livers are sent overseas to Japan and Korea. The product is shipped via Boston, which has a large number of seafood brokers and access to airfreight through Logan International Airport. Other trucking companies run back and forth between New Bedford and other sites and call in to pick up fish products as orders are placed. For example, W.E. Pray Co. that has a daily run between Stonington and New Bedford will send different size trucks depending on what has been ordered.

#### *Employment (year-around and seasonal)*

An estimated 150 fishermen/fish processors work out of Stonington, and an additional 50 work in support roles. This makes an estimated 200 households directly dependent on the fisheries, and there are an estimated 300 additional households that are indirectly dependent in their roles in marine transportation, repair, and related business and supply activities.

#### *Species, Seasonality*

Fishery produce from Stonington includes lobsters, finfish and shellfish.

Landed species include:

Groundfish: Cod, red hake, flounders (including fluke), haddock

Small mesh: Whiting

Crustaceans: Lobsters

Other finfish: Butterfish, monkfish, dogfish, tautog ("Black Fish"), scup, and bluefish

Other shellfish: Scallops, conch

Lobsters are sold locally but also supply markets throughout the New England region and New York. For example, lobsters are shipped to Boston and via Logan International sent nationally and internationally.

Whiting at 30-40 cents a pound is at the low end of the scale in value compared to other species caught by Connecticut fishermen.

Dogfish, caught as bycatch when other fish are targeted, were a hated species because of their volume, low price, rough skins that damaged nets, and their propensity to quickly spoil. However, a niche fishery developed when it was discovered that they had a variety of uses and markets. Their skins are used in Asia for medicine, their fins for soup, cartilage for supplement pills, fillets go to Europe, and their guts and scrap to fertilizer. Today (2001) dogfish cannot be targeted due to strict regulations.

Fishing schedules are highly flexible depending on the seasons. For example, squid are most plentiful in the winter, the spring and summer are prime lobster seasons, and whiting, hake and butterfish are caught in abundance during the fall. One dragger describes his season round as follows: summer—fluke, scup, flounder; fall—fluke, other flounders, cod; winter—flounder; spring—yellowtail, other flounders, and haddock.

#### Recreational fishing and employment

Upriver from the commercial dock are moored numerous recreational vessels, and a marina with a haul-out facility for vessel repair.

#### Fishing related organizations and their roles in the community and fishery

##### *Commercial fishing associations*

Southern New England Fishermen and Lobstermen Association (SNEFLA): The volunteer board of the association is comprised of a president, vice-president, and a nine-person board of directors who are elected annually. There are approximately 125 members from the states of Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. The organization started in 1931 to help fishermen and lobstermen with such common problems as the hijacking of trucked shipments of fish to New York. Membership requires a \$100 initiation fee, then \$20 annually. Members are allotted tie-up space at the Stonington Pier. They are presently (1997) attempting to join the fishermen's health care plan initiated by the Massachusetts Fishermen's Partnership.

#### Cultural role of fishing

##### *History and museums*

##### *Old Lighthouse Museum*

"Located on Water St., the museum is housed in a stone lighthouse built in 1823. The building was moved from the shore in 1840 because of erosion and operated at its present site until 1889 when breakwaters were installed. The lighthouse contains ship models, whaling and naval battle gear, a China trade exhibit, oil portraits, as well as early kitchen implements, stoneware and wooden tools. Feature exhibits change yearly. A trip up the stone steps to the top of the tower provides views of three states."<sup>12</sup>

##### *Ethnicity in the fisheries*

In Stonington, although there are few fishermen living in the central part of town, the Portuguese Holy Ghost Society and the Feast of the Holy Ghost, persists as a social nexus for many fishermen. The Portuguese presence in Stonington parallels that of the fishing industry. The Portuguese were attracted to Stonington in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as participants in

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.ohwy.com/ct/o/oldligmu.htm>

the sealing and whaling industry. Vessels would leave Stonington short-handed, intending to pick up men in the Azores or Cape Verdes.<sup>13</sup> Many of these Portuguese additions to the crew returned to Stonington instead of their native land.

SNEFLA hosts the Annual Blessing of the Fleet festivities and ceremony on the last weekend in July.

#### *Kinship & family*

Kinship, particularly patrilineal, plays a part in port operations, with fathers, sons, uncles and nephews working together in the same operations. For example, in one case, the parents run the wholesale/retail shoreside operation while three sons run two scallop boats, all family owned and operated. Another family has two sons running two scallop boats and the father is active in the Association. One reason for having multiple large vessels in the families is because of the Days-at-Sea (DAS) program. The DAS are worked on one boat, then it is tied up and the family members work off the second boat's permit.

## Perceptions of the Fishing Community<sup>14</sup>

### **Importance of fishing to the community**

Key respondents considered fishing in Stonington a "dwindling" industry. There are no young people coming into the Stonington fishery, and the increasing complexity and costs of fishing make it a difficult venture at best with many risks and uncertainties.

The increasing absence of a sense of "fishing community" is attributable to three things. The first is the dispersion of the fishing population (loss of "neighborhoods" of fishermen). The second is the breakdown of kinship in the continuance of the fishing business (human capital), which comes from weakening kinship ties, a loss of the oral tradition (storytelling and exchange of information on fishing itself), and the attraction of easier occupations. Many older fishermen are now deceased and their knowledge and sense of community is lost. A third factor contributing to the loss of community is in the changing demography of coastal Connecticut. The increasing property values have made the cost of living too high to live close to the docks, decreasing opportunities to share their life on land. In neighborhoods formerly inhabited by fishing families, the average property value is over \$200,000.<sup>15</sup>

*"In the old days, the whole crew would probably be from one little town or one little community and now that's the one big difference in all of the fisheries now is that they don't live on the same street."*

*"Like I say, years ago there was more Portuguese here. Most of them are deceased now."*

One key informant noted that she did not know the other fishing families and attributes this fact to the absence of fishing families and the change in the composition in the Stonington borough over the past half century:

*"You knew everybody. I mean, there was a lot of fishermen. Now I'm down there, I work down there on the docks and I don't know half the people down there. It's changed, it's, I don't know, more developed. It's not that quaint, little town we grew up in. It's not the same."*

### **Boundaries**

The community fishermen have the most contact with is Point Judith (Galilee), Rhode Island. They go there to market product, pick up crew, and restock marine supplies.

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<sup>13</sup> Bailey 1971

<sup>14</sup> Based on key respondent interviews, 1998

<sup>15</sup> U.S. 1990 Census

Capital contacts can be divided up into those encompassing social capital (e.g. visit friends, go for recreation, go for vacation, visit relatives, socialize, go to church), economic (e.g. sell fish, offload fish, buy fishing gear, haul out for boat repairs, go to bank, go shopping), and human (e.g. go to school, go for childcare, go for health care, go for retraining). The following is a chart of typical contacts for the Stonington fishermen:

Sell Fish	Stonington – Local processors
Offload Fish	Stonington – Local processors
Buy Fishing Gear	Pt. Judith, RI (Trawl works), New London (Boater's world)
Buy Ice	Stonington dock
Buy Fuel/ Oil	Stonington dock
Haul out Boat Repairs	Pt. Judith (Galilee)
Book Keeping	Where live
Banking	Stonington
Shopping	Westerly, New London Mall
Go to Church	In town
Got to School	Stonington Public schools
Go for Health Care	Clinics in Westerly, New London, Hospital in Groton
Go for Childcare	Stonington, wherever household located
Visit Relatives	In Connecticut, out of state
Visit Friends	Westerly, Stonington, Groton
Go for Vacation	New England area
Go for Recreation	Stonington
Socialize	Local restaurants

### **Communication Issues**

When key respondents were asked to rate communication with fishing managers on a one to five scale, ratings for state and local managers were *very good*, while communication with Federal officials only rated *fair*, with the exception of the Coast Guard, which received a *very good* (4). Fishermen voice a variety of concerns over the relationship between knowledge generated on the water and in the fishery and that from the scientific sector. Another key respondent indicated *fair* for local managers, *fair* for state managers “*they do come down but they don't listen*”, and poor for federal managers “*the public hearings are just a showcase for “good actors”*”. We propose that these low communication scores derive from the perception that fishery managers are not concerned with the well being of fishermen, and further have no idea of the kind of impacts the increasing process of regulatory layering is having on fishermen's livelihoods, families, and networks. They also perceive a bias and devaluation of their potential contribution to the improved management of marine resources:

*“Fishermen are bitter about “drastic regulation so fast. . . For twenty years we've proven scientists wrong, why do they think they're right now? Why don't they admit they could be wrong?”*

Fishermen in Stonington are also angry about methods the Council uses to get data, and regard the underlying motivations for fishery policy as suspect:

*“The Council shows they have no regard for fishermen's livelihood when they make restrictions. The Council thinks nothing of reducing a fisherman's catch 10% a year for four years. The Council wouldn't take forty- percent pay cut though. As soon as the council implements a restriction that the fishermen can live with, they change it. They are*

*systematically trying to get the laws to a point where fishermen can no longer fish.”*

There is also a widespread complaint about the public hearing process as a forum for communication:

*“Fishermen would attend public meetings, make constructive comments that the council seemed to agree with, then the council would still enact the same plan without taking into account comments. Then the council complains when fishermen stop attending the meetings.”*

All of these issues reflect a lack of understanding and communication between managers and fishermen, and may speak to the need for new venues of communication. They also point to the need for new means to integrate fishermen’s observations and input into the management process, as well as a better means to monitor and mitigate the human impacts of new regulations and management policies.

As competition for fishery products has increased, fishermen who used to be close friends are now experiencing a breakdown in traditions of cooperation and mutual aid.

### **Assessments**

Key respondents also indicate that they “strongly disagree” with the stock assessments of scientists, saying that there are many more fish in the water than the managers will admit. Also, Connecticut fishermen question the reliability of data because of the lag time between data collection, analysis and release of the assessment. In consequence, they feel that regulations are too far behind actual changes in stock sizes. Fishermen would like to see regulations refined so they can respond to real time data and circumstances (e.g., the recovery now being seen) rather than out-dated stock assessments.

Fishermen claim that some are cheating to make ends meet, while others are not, and this creates friction within the industry. Others claim that the different regulations for the inshore and offshore fleet also split fishermen. The increased competition for regulation-limited resources has “broken down the sense of closeness and community [that existed] between fishermen.” Other concerns included the following:

- *Federal regulations keep everyone on edge, arguing back and forth, not knowing what’s going on. How can you play the game if they keep changing the rules?*
- *The sheer volume of paperwork associated with government regulations makes it difficult to read, let alone comprehend what the laws are and what loopholes exist.*
- *Every year the council changes the mesh size. What do you do with the old net? They’re expensive.*
- *Farmers get billions of dollars of subsidies when the government takes something from them. The government does not do the same with fishing. [Actually,] we don’t want subsidies; we want to catch fish.*
- *The government low-interest loans for capitalizing of fishing in the past were taken advantage of by investors who didn’t fish.*
- *All the public knows about fishing is the bad press. We’d like 60 Minutes or Dateline to come out with us and so we can show what it’s really like.*
- *Fishing is new money. It doesn’t come from somewhere else; we take it out of the ocean and put it into society.*
- *There is more fluke today than there was in the ‘50s.*
- *Party boats (recreational fishing) fish right over the wrecks where the cod live. Commercial fishermen can’t get there and have less impact.*
- *Commercial fishermen never blame the recreational fishermen, even though annual recreational catch is higher than commercial catch. The recreational fishermen blame the commercial fishermen.*
- *As it is now, we (fishermen) could survive the next five years. If they move up to 13”*

*flounder we can't.*

- *Looking at the stocks species by species is not working because as you raise one species it lowers the stock of its prey. You need to look at them together to find the best level of balance.*
- *Nuclear plants dump hot water into the ocean and that has an unknown effect. But they're a multi-million dollar company so the government won't chase them. It's easier to go after fishermen.*
- *In the past, technology limited fishermen to 70 fathoms. Therefore, a given species was only taken when it came inshore seasonally. The natural system allowed pressure to change from species to species by season. With today's technology you can learn to captain a fishing boat in two months, and catch fish at all depths – they get no rest.*

### **Economic Change**

Evaluating changes in fishing conditions, key respondents perceive that current conditions in the fish populations and environment are good to average, and in fact have improved over the last five years. This reflects the abundance of scallops, monkfish, and fluke that are being caught. Fishermen believe that regulations have had a conservation effect, but also that a decline in catch effort and numbers fishing has also contributed.

<b>Period in Time</b>	<b>Poor (1); Fair (2); Average (3); Good (4) Excellent (5)</b>
Ten years ago	Average (3) – Excellent (5)
Five years ago	Average (3) – Good (4)
Today	Average (3) - Good (4)
Five years from now	Good (4)

Despite their difficulties, most fishermen consider themselves fortunate to be working out of Stonington. In response to the question, "Is anyone going under?" the reply was: "No, as long as you're fishing you're making money." Because of the high product value, scallopers are generally the best paid fishermen, with a scallop captain earning 80-90k/yr and crewmen about a third of that.

### **Changes in fishing effort**

The most important or controversial recent regulations reported by key respondents to affect fishermen in Connecticut are (1) fluke quota, (2) days at sea, (3) gauge increase for lobster traps, (4) vent increases, and (5) trap limits. The pessimism of fishermen towards the management process is tempered by an understanding of the need for conservation and of putting limits on fishing effort:

*"We know conservation needs to exist, but not so drastic it puts us out of business; fishermen are independent, greedy and their own worst enemies"*

Fishing gear and effort have changed in the last ten years, with some fishermen cutting costs by going with smaller crews (or no crew), cutting back on maintenance and working longer hours when fishing to make the most of their DAS.

In Western Long Island Sound, there has been a collapse of dragging and gillnetting for finfish, although some gillnetting still occurs out of Old Saybrook (6), and Stonington (3).

The 43% decline (from 37 in 1998 down to 21 in 1999) in gillnetting is attributed to changes in water quality and decreased abundance of nearshore finfish populations. However, in Stonington several fishermen have been experimenting with trap technology for scup and blackfish, and others fish part time and seasonally for conch. Fishermen see conservation of stocks as a societal issue that encompasses wider environmental problems that go mostly unaddressed.

Key respondents see less fishing effort overall, across all commercial fisheries. The possible exceptions are scallop fishing and lobstering. Taking an historical perspective one respondent noted that as regulations moved fishermen from stock to stock, *“they beat down each one, but the other doesn’t come up. Stocks won’t rebound with big ships fishing.”* When there was a change from side to stern trawling, boats went from 2-3 men, father/son crews on 25-35 foot boats to electronically sophisticated 60-80’ stern draggers (Western rigs) boats with a 5-men crew. Many of these had never fished before and were hired by investors outside the community. As the respondent put it: *“Electronics took farmers and made them fishermen.”*

### **Effects of recent management**

An important issue in Connecticut has been the competition for fluke. Key respondents indicated that the fluke quota unfairly limits Connecticut fishermen’s catch. They also believe that the fluke quota of 250,000 pounds/year is too small for the stock size resulting in too many discards. Fishermen also complain that they were not adequately warned when they were approaching their annual quota. Thus the sudden closure for fluke was hard to adapt to.

Overall, the increasing paperwork associated with new regulations is difficult to keep up with. Increasing restrictions on fishing activities, such as the call in system quotas, and reduced DAS have made it riskier to stay in business while dealing with increasing costs of insurance, fuel, and license fees.

### **Characteristics of local fishermen**

*“What makes a good fisherman? A ‘capable’ fisherman is one who can support himself and make a living, even though one year may be better than another. You don’t have to be the best at what you do as long as you make enough at what you do to support your family and you like to do it”.*

#### *Safety*

When asked how life is better than it was five years ago, respondents replied that “fishing is safer.” However, recent deaths from drowning in Rhode Island, groundings in Rhode Island and southern Massachusetts, and dangerous offshore winter ventures by inshore (40-foot) vessels to George’s Bank from Gloucester belie this perception.

Fishing is viewed as safer with the change in gear technologies because *“Nothing handled overhead (above ship deck) anymore- it becomes safer each year.”* The decrease in number of DAS means there are fewer opportunities for accidents to occur, and the new safety gear and technologies make it safer still. At the same time, decreases in crew size have altered the work schedule of those at sea, who must work longer hours with less help, and thus are more prone to accidents due to work-related fatigue. Even though such efforts are made to reduce costs and increase profits, the decrease in DAS has put some scallopers in a “less-than-break-even situation”: *“Lack of production and overhead (maintenance costs) with 120 days at sea (for next year) means you can’t break even. Need to have another permit for other species for the rest of year to pay bills. That’s why my boats go groundfishing and fluking in other seasons.”*

#### *Job satisfaction*

Key respondents indicated that overall the fishermen in Stonington are satisfied with their work (have high job satisfaction). Moreover, what keeps them fishing is a love of the lifestyle, not the economic rewards: *“A guy who fishes does so because he wants and loves to fish, and a successful fishermen is a person who’s fishing for fish and for whom the money is a fringe benefit.”*

### **Fishing families**

Typically, many fishermen in Stonington were trained by their fishermen fathers, and began their careers helping out at the dock and going on short trips to “learn the ropes.”

In Stonington, those who are fishing can be viewed as selected survivors of a difficult period of increasing fishing costs and regulations, offset to some extent by better prices for fish products, new markets (monkfish, monkfish livers), and the recovery of local stocks such as fluke. Fishermen in Stonington and the CSSR are generally middle-aged, local, professionals, with no plans for changing their jobs or lifestyles: *“All the day- fishermen are from the area. They all went to school together in the borough.”* The youngest fishermen encountered in Stonington was 32 years old, and he claimed that *“no new folks are coming in - kids just think the work is too hard and risky- they would rather work in the service industry or with computers”*.

Because many permits are expensive and require some history of landings, it is difficult to expand the present fishing capacity and population. This is consistent with the survey conducted with the lobster fishermen under the Western Long Island Sound disaster assessment. In that sample, the youngest fisherman was 26, and the mean age was 45 years, indicating a stable but aging fishing population. Survey respondents (n =31) indicated they began fishing at an early age (10-19 years old), and had fished an average of 23 years.

Asked if spouses/companions are working more outside the home than five years ago, the modal response was “No,” indicating a degree of economic stability for local fishing households. This is in contrast to fishing households in Norwalk, Greenwich, and other sites affected by the lobster disaster in Western Long Island Sound.



Community profiles  
New London County, CT  
Connecticut Seacoast Region

### 5.1.1.2. New London/Groton

#### *Fisheries Profile*

New London/ Groton represents a fishing enclave consisting of a small finfish fishery and a relatively substantial lobstering fleet without any central docking facility for fishing vessels. The New London docks for lobster fishermen are fairly concentrated, but the facilities are old and crowded, with access to dock space along narrow walkways, and intermediate areas littered with old gear, boats, and other remains of a more productive fishing past.

#### *Harvesting Structure*

New London has two gillnetters (1998-99) and has one additional lobster boat (from 16 to 17), but has had a decline in rod and reels (4 down to 2) and trawl fishing vessels (5 down to 3). Total decline in commercial licenses for New London, then, is slight (27 down to 24 for 1998-99, only a 12% decline).

There are three large whiting boats in New London, which fish out to Georges Bank. Fish are boxed and put directly on trucks for Fulton's market in New York. The three vessels (F/V Provider, F/V Mystic Way, and F/V Lady Lynn) are owned by one company and fish George's Bank on 3 to 4 days trips. They bring in 150-200 pieces (totes) per trip per vessel, with the price in 1999 of \$.30/lb. The catch is iced and boxed on board, picked up at the dock and transported to a dealer at Fulton's (New York). They work on a 24-hour schedule; rotating crew through sleep breaks. The steam time to Georges is 12 hours each way, with approximately 36 hours spent on the Banks. The crews consist of 5 to 6 fishermen per boat (for a total of 18 employees). The whiting boats have a private dock at their own facility in New London.

The Groton fishery consists of one trawl fishing vessel and clusters of lobster boats scattered around the port area, with individual fishermen working out docking arrangements with local recreational facilities, resulting in a mix of recreational and lobster boats at small docks up and down the Thames River. In 1998, there were 32 lobster boats in Groton, though only 27 in 1999. There were also 7 rod and reel licenses in 1998, but only 3 in 1999, for a total decline from 40 to 31 commercial licenses, or a 22% decline in one year.

New London and Groton have yet to be impacted by the 1999 lobster die-off affecting the western coast of Connecticut. The lobster fishery here is reported to be fairly new, with most fishermen having come into the area in the last ten years. Two-man crews consist of a captain and sternman, with sometimes an additional crewmember (a "bander") added during the height of the summer season.

All lobstering is nearshore with day boats, going out a maximum of eight miles from shore. Key respondents complain that overfishing of lobster has reduced catch per unit effort. Even though the total lobster catch is stable, it takes more effort (more traps) to maintain the landings as they have been in the past, meaning that for the majority of producers each is landing fewer lobsters per unit catch effort. Even though the stocks of legal sized lobsters are down, the perception is that there has been an increase in number of juveniles and egg-bearing females.

Fishermen in Groton fish from 800 – 1500 traps. In Long Island Sound fishing 2,500 traps is not uncommon. The days the traps are out is referred to as the 'soak'. Generally, a haul is brought in once every five days, so to get the number of lobsters per unit fishing effort, you use five-day blocks. Longer soaks increase the number of the traps in the rotation.

Competition for lobster can get fierce, and territories, while unofficial and unmarked, are common throughout coastal Connecticut. "If you put traps in someone else's area, they will cut your traps." Since traps range from \$30-\$50 apiece, plus line and floats, such a loss is not cost effective. Thus, as in Maine and other lobster fisheries, territoriality is an adaptive feature that tends to disperse fishermen along the coast. For example, a core of five families has been fishing off the Thames for over three generations, and they hold most of the prime fishing grounds. Newcomers learned by getting their trap lines cut that they needed to find their own territories, even if such territories were not in the best fishing areas. The number of fishermen may in fact be limited by the amount of territory available to fish. The die-off of lobsters has put pressure on fishermen in places such as Norwalk and Bridgeport to find new fishing grounds but the territoriality lays the groundwork for potential conflict. Even though the ownership of specific areas (ownership of the sea) is not legal, southern coast fishermen actually advertise their grounds for sale with their vessel.

*"We were making good money the first few season (8-10 years ago), but now there is no peak season with increased earnings anymore. Those who bought boats ten years ago can't afford to get out now, and keep hoping things will get better. Mostly we just break even. A lot of the guys that came here ten years ago want to get out of fishing- including me."*

Lobster fishermen in Groton/New London note the higher degree of uncertainty and fluctuations in income that go with lobster fishing than in the past, creating a problem with their cash flow management. For example, one fisherman has had his boat for sale for two years, but has had no takers. Buying into the fishery is difficult, for a permit that allows fishing in both state and federal waters costs \$50,000.

#### *Marketing sector and support industries*

The major buyer for Groton/New London lobsters is "T and S Lobster," in Waterford. They provide bait as well, which is stored near docks in a cold facility. They mostly sell to other lobster companies (wholesale), such as "T.A. Scott Fisheries," Waterford, who also buys directly from lobster fishermen. Bait comes from "Canal Bait," Sandwich, MA and "Channel Bait," East Boston, and consists of herring or skate.

#### Economic Change

According to key respondents, the local fishery does not satisfy demand of local market, so lobster is bought in from Maine and imported from Canada, while prior to the lobster die-off, lobsters from the western sound went to Maine. The 1999 ex-vessel price for lobster out of Groton was \$3.25/lb. At the time, the New Bedford price was \$.50-.75/lb higher, but it is reported that the monopolistic initiative of buyers mostly works to control prices at convenient sale points (within \$.10 of each other). Lobster fishermen thus are working on a cost/benefit margin that can only be manipulated by increasing the number of lobsters or increasing the average size of lobster caught. Increasing costs make it difficult to fish. With an increased number of traps reducing individual catch, increased costs make it impossible to abandon vessels at docks, so most lobster fishermen are staying in, even though they describe themselves as just "getting by", or "no longer doing well."

The two small day draggers in Groton fish for fluke and flounder but are finding it difficult to earn a living with the number of restrictions on ground fishing regulations. In Connecticut, they can keep up to 150 lobsters on board a dragger, which provides some economic relief, but nearby New York allows no lobster bycatch on draggers.<sup>16</sup>

#### Fishing families

There are four long-term, trans-generational families in fishing in Groton.

<sup>16</sup> Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's lobster fishery management plan requires a 100 lobsters/day and 500/trip limit on non-trap landings (*Commercial Fisheries News*, April 2001).

Community Profiles  
Fairfield County  
Connecticut Seacoast Region

## 5.1.2. Southwestern Coast Fishing Clusters

### 5.1.2.1. Bridgeport

#### *Background*

Bridgeport is a small city (population of 142,000 in 1990) on the coast of southern Connecticut that has undergone significant urban decay, and whose waterfront is poised for significant gentrification in the near future. Bridgeport is the most southwestern fishing cluster identified in this report. Located equidistant from the Rhode Island border and New York City, Bridgeport is a true city as is Boston or Portland. Unlike in Portland and Boston, the fishing industry presence in Bridgeport is well camouflaged within a decaying port riverfront consisting of a mix of industrial business, abandoned buildings, and marinas. Middle-class expressions of cultural capital including boardwalks, boutiques and tourism override the values of the NRC community in Bridgeport. Because the waterfront is economically depressed and characterized by industrial decay, it is only partly gentrified, but at the same time it lacks significant facilities for commercial fishing. There is little local support for the fishing industry; instead, increasing gentrification is more highly valued.

No dock space exists that is exclusively devoted to commercial fishing. In Bridgeport's six marinas, lobster and oyster craft intermix with recreational craft. There is one small facility for oyster boats, and the oyster company of Tallmadge Brothers, Inc. with the parent offices in Norwalk, is the single most prominent oyster harvesting business of its kind in New England. Tallmadge Bros. owns about a dozen boats used to work oyster-leasing grounds in the adjacent Bridgeport Harbor and Housatonic River.

#### *Demography*<sup>17</sup>

##### Population

According to the 1990 Census, Bridgeport had a population of 141,686 with 67,140 males and 74,546 females organized in 52,531 households.

##### Age Structure

There were 26,423 children (through 11 years); 17,079 teens (12-20), 78,924 adults (21-64) and 19,260 seniors in 1989.

##### Education

Of those persons 25 or older, 27,510 had a high school degree in 1989, another 15,925 had some college, 10,922 had a Bachelor's degree or higher and 34,618 had not graduated from high school.

##### Housing

Of the 57,224 housing units, 23,104 were owner-occupied, 29,224 were rented, and 4,896 were vacant.

##### Racial and Ethnic Composition

The Census counted 83,124 whites, 37,753 Blacks, 303 American Indian, Eskimo or Aleut, 3,019 Asian or Pacific Islander and 17,487 "other race." Italian and Hispanic origins were most common, followed by Irish, Polish, German, Portuguese, West Indian, English and Slovak.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup/982362493>

## *Economic Context*

### Income

The median household income in 1989 was \$28,704.

### Employment

#### INDUSTRY

Universe: Employed persons 16 years and over

<b>Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries (000-039)</b>	<b>597</b>
Mining (040-059)...	23
Construction (060-099)...	3256
Manufacturing, nondurable goods (100-229)...	4243
Manufacturing, durable goods (230-399)...	11603
Transportation (400-439)...	2834
Communications and other public utilities (440-499)...	1464
Wholesale trade (500-579)...	2397
Retail trade (580-699)...	9117
Finance, insurance, and real estate (700-720)...	4427
Business and repair services (721-760)...	3117
Personal services (761-799)...	1713
Entertainment and recreation services (800-811)...	645
Professional and related services (812-899):	
Health services (812-840)...	6687
Educational services (842-860)...	3930
Other professional and related services (841, 861-899)...	3575
Public administration (900-939)...	2815

#### OCCUPATION

Universe: Employed persons 16 years and over

Managerial and professional specialty occupations (000-202):	
Executive, administrative, and managerial occupations (000-042)...	5447
Professional specialty occupations (043-202)...	6433
Technical, sales, and administrative support occupations (203-402):	
Technicians and related support occupations (203-242)...	1879
Sales occupations (243-302)...	5443
Administrative support occupations, including clerical (303-402)...	11767
Service occupations (403-472):	
Private household occupations (403-412)...	260
Protective service occupations (413-432)...	2072
Service occupations, except protective and household (433-472)...	8568
<b>Farming, forestry, and fishing occupations (473-502)...</b>	<b>562</b>
Precision production, crafts, and repairs occupations (503-702)....	7404
Operators, fabricators, and laborers (703-902):	
Machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors (703-802)...	7336
Transportation and material moving occupations (803-863)...	2476
Handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, and laborers (864-902).	2796

## *Fisheries Profile*

### Community

The attitude towards fishing culture and fishermen was one of ignorance and lack of respect: "fishermen are treated like peasants here" (key respondent, Bridgeport). Fishing culture is devalued and fishermen are "*not treated with the same regard they get in states like Maine or even Massachusetts.*" Fishermen face a combination of ignorance and stereotyping from locals.

### Commercial fishing and fisheries-related employment

#### *Harvesting structure*

Bridgeport had 27 lobster fishermen in 1998, and 24 in 1999, with no other recorded

commercial fishing ventures. The Bridgeport lobster boat cluster is typical of Connecticut second-tier ports having 20 plus lobster vessels. Other lobster ports of similar fishing capacity are Branford (25), Groton (27), with Stonington (36). However, the presence of lobster fishing is not highly valued by local government. At a meeting to decide the development fate of the waterfront, the Mayor expressed surprise when told that Bridgeport had one of the larger lobster fleets in Connecticut.

The 24 full-time lobster boats range from 25-42 feet in length. Lobsters are trapped from close to New York up to areas just south of Stonington. Lobstering has a long history in Bridgeport, and the fishermen are generally content with their present occupation. As in Stonington, most fishermen are of Portuguese descent, with others representing a mix of outsiders with many different backgrounds. The lobster fishermen have, up to this past fall, been "*here to stay*", and described as "*loving their job*." Lobstering is thus not a casual activity practiced by newcomers with little dedication to the fishery. In decades past, lobsters from Bridgeport were highly prized for their quality and size. They were often shipped to Maine for the restaurant business, while many of the Maine lobsters were being used for canned product. Lobsters from here are still shipped up and down the New England coast, with major markets in Boston and New York, and are the source for local restaurants. The three seafood-trucking operations in Bridgeport all ship lobsters, while one also transports clams and another crabs.

As in other gentrified and gentrifying areas, such as Kennebunkport, Maine, these communities with their clusters of lobster fishing boats cannot be described as "fishing dependent." Instead, their fishing sectors contribute to a regional fishing network (the sub-NRR of Connecticut) that also interfaces with other regions through the marketing of lobsters and oysters.

Oystering is the other major fishery pursued in Bridgeport. Oysters are cultched in sites up and down the river and in nearshore areas. Tallmadge Brothers harvests these private stocks. Most oysters are shipped to the New York area and points south. Tallmadge Brothers does between \$70-80 million dollars in business, with approximately 20 oyster boats in operation. These range from two large vessels of 75 feet for dredging, with the majority of boats between 50-75 feet, down to 10-foot skiffs that work sites in the nearby Housatonic River and around Bridgeport Bay.

There are an estimated 50 fishermen in lobstering using 24 vessels, and at least that many in oystering, for a total of 100 fishermen directly dependent on the local industry.

There used to be a small dragger fleet out of Bridgeport, but the last dragger went out of business in the early 1990s. A fish market operator claimed that there is "*nothing left to drag for*." Local finfish output includes blackfish (tautog), weakfish, and a few bluefish. There used to be a viable commercial fishery for striped bass, and these fish are doing well locally. However, there is political resistance from the recreational sector to reinstitute a commercial quota for this fish. Other local product includes lobsters, oysters, clams, crabs, and conch.

Any dragging for finfish done locally is from draggers that come down from Stonington. Clamming could be a potential alternate fishery as it is in Chatham, but clam beds are harvested, as are oysters, under a leasing system, and Tallmadge has already claimed the prime beds. Furthermore, leases cost \$100,000. The leased areas are cultched by the harvesters, and Tallmadge helps pay for water quality monitoring by the state DEP.

#### *Marketing structure*

There are three seafood dealers/marketers in Bridgeport. Most buy product throughout the region. For example, Larry and Sam's Seafood buys and sells lobster, finfish, clams, conch, and oysters. Finfish are purchased from Fulton's, Stonington, and New Bedford, and then sold to local customers, while local products (lobster, conch, and clams) are shipped throughout the region south to New Jersey all the way up to Maine. This dealer employs

five, all of Portuguese descent, and all residents of Bridgeport. The dealers used to be lobster fishermen, and still operate two boats. They also buy wholesale from six other lobster fishermen. The company has been in operation only 5 years, and has good relations with the other small local markets. They help each other out when product is in short supply. Product is generally sold wholesale to three independent regional dealers, who own their own trucks.

*Support Services*

Recent plans to develop the waterfront do not include any accommodations for commercial fishing. For example, Hitchcock Marine was a prominent marina and marine supply business that served a dozen lobster boats and numerous recreational craft. Space was made available on the docks for lobster boats and gear, and the marina shop supplied parts for minor repairs and upkeep. Hitchcock was displaced under the development plans and no space was made available for its relocation. Hitchcock moved to Stratford, the next town. There is no diesel fuel facility dockside in Bridgeport, and only one dockside bar/restaurant that specializes in seafood.

Cultural role of fishing

*Ethnicity in the fisheries*

At least half of working lobster fishermen are reported to be of Portuguese descent, many immigrating into the area after having come into the U.S. via New York. Other recent arrivals include Russian fishermen working the oyster leases for Tallmadge Brothers. In addition, there are Yankees and some Italians.

*Species, Seasonality*

Fishermen’s production peaks are in the months of July-August, November-December, and March-April. For 1999-2000, the end of August and the November-December seasons have already been lost. Switching fisheries to adapt to loss of stocks is not an option in the lobster fishery. There was some discussion of opening the striped bass fishery to the commercial sector, but resistance from the recreational sector would make this difficult.

Although there are no finfish being caught out of Bridgeport at present, the fish that are still marketed here include: weakfish, blackfish (some are caught in lobster traps, and there is an Asian market for live blackfish in Hartford), bluefish, clams, oysters, conch, lobsters, and crabs. Striped bass are caught recreationally, even though they used to be commercial and their present abundance might warrant a commercial enterprise. The marketing of fish and lobsters is done locally, and product moves up and down the coast depending on the season and the market. For example, lobsters sold in the fall to Maine may be penned and then used in the restaurant trade in the summer. Restaurants in other areas may then receive previously caught lobsters from Connecticut via Maine.

**Perceptions of the Fishing Community<sup>18</sup>**

**Boundaries**

Bridgeport is close to New York, being only an hour and a half from the city. The influence of the city is seen in the urban character of Bridgeport, including the presence of run-down neighborhoods and signs of urban decay. Businesses up and down the waterfront are fenced and many have barbed or ribbon wire as well. Practically all contacts are local. The community that people have the most contact with outside of Bridgeport is New York.

Community Contact- Where do people go to do the following things?

Sell Fish	Bridgeport
Offload Fish	Bridgeport
Sell anything else	Bridgeport

<sup>18</sup> Based on key informant interviews

Buy fishing gear	Bridgeport
Buy Ice	Bridgeport
Buy boat fuel and oil	Bridgeport
Haul out for repairs	Bridgeport
Go for bookkeeping	Bridgeport
Go to bank	Bridgeport
Go shopping	Bridgeport
Go to church	Bridgeport
Go for retraining	(none presently available)
Go for health care	Bridgeport
Go for childcare	Bridgeport
Visit relatives	New York/ Bridgeport
Visit friends	Bridgeport
Go for vacation	Florida/Canada
Go for recreation	Bridgeport
Go to socialize	Bridgeport

### **Communication Issues**

Lobster fishermen in Bridgeport are generally dissatisfied with the communication between themselves and their local representatives. On a one to five scale, they rate local communication as "poor," particularly with city officials who seem to know little about the fishery and who plan to convert the waterfront to a gentrified space only for tourism. This plan does not presently include any dock space for commercial fishery operations. One suggestion made to the city government was to create a "fishing village" that would serve as a tourist attraction but also meet the needs of the commercial fishery.

State managers are rated as having "excellent" communication with fishermen. Fishermen are very satisfied with the state DEP and their efforts to assist them in their recent crisis.

Communication with federal fishery managers is rated as "good."

### **Assessments**

Fishermen generally agree with the stock assessments of state and federal managers. This differs from fin and scallop fishermen in Stonington, who are dissatisfied with the extensive regulations they face in pursuing groundfish, fluke, scallops and monkfish.

### **Economic Change**

On a five-point scale, ten years ago the fishery was rated as *average* and five years ago *excellent*, with many lobsters to be taken. This differs from the conditions noted for New London/Groton on the Thames River, where fishermen note a steady but consistent decline in the fishery over the last ten years believed to be due to over fishing. Before the die-off, the fishery was also rated as *good*. However, the uncertainty of the fishery disaster is such that the biologists and fishery specialists cannot state when they expect the lobster population to recover.

Besides fishing, there is little else for fishermen to do in the off season or as alternate jobs. Possibilities include construction work and carpentry, but little else. There are no retraining programs for fishermen as there are in Massachusetts. Thus, most fishermen are locked into what they do, and given Bridgeport's depressed waterfront economy, finding other work could mean leaving the community all together. A lobster fisherman expressed confusion as to what he could do to earn money after the fall die-off of lobsters. He said he would "look around," but had no options immediately at hand.

**Changes in fishing effort**

The decline in finfish fishing along the southern coast is seen as having contributed to the healthy lobster stocks. Most dragging stopped 12 to 15 years ago, and lobster fishermen think this allowed lobster habitat to improve, while also eliminating the illegal take of lobsters by draggers.

**Characteristics of local fishermen***Job satisfaction*

When asked if most fishermen were satisfied with their work, the response was “yes”: “Everybody loves fishing, but it doesn’t put any food on the table, and we are all uncertain about the future after the die off.” The uncertainty created by the lobster die-off has created anxiety and stress in local fishing households. The lobster fishermen are described as dedicated to their profession, and most would like to remain in it.