



Fisheries Forum

Setting the Record Straight

*Editor's Note: In the May issue of **The Navigator**, we featured a story and a forum piece about similar topics that caught the eye of the Association of Seafood Producers' (ASP) executive director Derek Butler. Instead of splitting up the two letters he penned in response to the two articles in question, we figured we'd simply run them together here.*

Dear Editor,

In the May edition **The Navigator** ran a story headlined "Goose, meet gander" on federal fisheries policy and the questions of fleet separation policy. The headline should have read 'pot, meet black.'

The guts of the story featured Federal MP Gerry Byrne wondering if changes to processors being able to invest in the harvesting sector would be matched, academically (he wasn't supporting changes to fleet separation), by harvesters being able to own processing companies.

The funny thing is, harvesters can currently invest in processing enterprise, and in fact own processing plants. There are a couple of co-ops around the island, and other harvester-owned plants, as the article even noted.

The story went wrong when it posited that the limited entry nature of processing licenses (set by provincial policy) kept harvesters out of processing plants by design of the processors. That is wrong, because processors do not control the limited entry aspect of provincial processing policy, as the article incorrectly stated. It is wrong because harvesters do own plants, and can do so quite legitimately under current policy.

And it is wrong because the flipside of the proverbial coin to ending fleet separation is not removing limited entry licensing in either harvesting or processing.

Limited entry policies in either harvesting or processing have nothing to do with it. No one is suggesting — apart from Mr. Byrne apparently — that this industry needs more boats and more plants. That is what ending limited entry does.

And limited entry does not say "who" can own a fish plant, but limits the number of fish plants, just as federal limited entry policies limit the number of fish licenses.

The contradiction in current fisheries policy is harvesters can invest in and own plants — and do — but processors cannot do the same with harvesting.

If what is indeed good for the goose is good for the gander, than harvesters should be asked to divest of investments in processing, and leave processing to processors, and harvesting to harvesters.

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Or the 30-year-old anachronisms of fleet separation and owner-operator (who out there thinks the latter is still in this real world?!) should be done away with.

As it now stands, the one way street all one way for one side of the equation. Is that fair?

Forum Article Requires Fact-Check

Also in the May 2012 edition of *The Navigator* ("What kind of sustainability do we want? Pages 11-12) Paul Edwards writes that by taking a few unrelated factoids and wrapping them in ideology, many have been specialists in regards to fishery sustainability, prosperity and stability.

Then he himself proceeds to string together a series of innuendos, unrelated factoids on market and current impacts in the fishery before closing with accusations of rapacious and monopolistic corporate interests. And who is guilty of ideology in all this?

The information on export values and current changes are of interest, but the fact that Atlantic Canadian seafood export values increased in a given period while BC's did not says little to nothing about fisheries management or sustainability as it relates to fleet separation policies. Market prices for salmon and lobster, the most valuable species on our respective coasts, are what have driven returns up and down, not lack or presence of fleet separation policies.

And likewise, his revealing his own returns on a single fishing trip/species and how much he paid on lease fees (his choice, seems like it made sense to conduct the trip for him; otherwise he would

have tied on?) and how much he and his crew made might make for good copy, as they say, but what might be more interesting is what did he and his crew make in a given season? How much resource did they have available to catch? How many days did they fish in total?

Better still, as Mr. Edwards said, he is president of the BC Area A Crab Association, which according to their website is comprised of license holders. So how did crab work out for that fleet?

According to a DFO report, in 2010 there were 53 crab licenses in area A, with between 500 and 1000 pots per license. This is the largest crab fleet by area in BC.

Crew in Area A net 45 per cent of net revenue (i.e. after expenses). The range of crew shares on an annual basis (2007 numbers) in crab Area A ranged from \$29,097 to \$198,072, with the fleet average being \$97,835, for boats with two crew plus captain, on average. Earnings after crew shares, expenses and deductions were as high as \$175,088, and averaged \$66,000 for this fleet (again, after all expenses including captain and crew shares).

I can understand why Mr. Edwards might have preferred the factoids of a single receipt on halibut and cod. It supports more the line he wants us all to swallow.

Derek Butler
Executive Director
Association of Seafood Producers †

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