

Common property resource is a 'myth,' conference told

BY MOIRA BAIRD

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The Association of Seafood Producers has a little advice for fishing industry renewal — treat the fishery more like a business.

Derek Butler, chairman and CEO of the association, said countless reports aimed at solving the problems of the fishery have failed over the years.

The reason? The fishery has been treated as a branch of government, a social program or an employment scheme, but not as a business.

The most recent efforts to remake the fishery came during last May's summit aimed at fishing industry renewal.

"Everybody says it: the status quo is not an option," said Butler in an interview. "There's no change yet."

In a speech Thursday, he pitched five "quick principles for a modern and sustainable" fishery during the day-long St. John's Board of Trade Business Outlook Conference.

They are:

- An immediate freeze on new processing capacity until there are additional resources. "This increases the viability of our current processing operations," said Butler.
- Rationalize both the harvesting and processing capacity, bringing them in line with the resource.

through a free-market approach or public policy approach.

- Support a marketing initiative to promote Newfoundland and Labrador seafood.
- Abandon employment-maximization as an objective of the fishery.
- Abandon the notion of a common-property resource for the fishery.

"It's a myth, anyway," Butler said of the common-property resource.

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**Derek Butler, chairman and CEO,
Association of Seafood Producers**

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Butler said over-capacity is one of the biggest

problems. With more than 100 fish plants in the province, he said many operations can't provide year-round work for their employees.

There is some appetite, he said, for reducing that processing capacity.

"With dwindling resource and no plant workers to do the work, plants are going to go under anyway.

"So, do we make the decision before-hand? Manage our chaos and change, and say let's build the fund ... if an individual plant wants to go, here's the retirement package. Here's the fund for the workers, here's the money for the plant owner ... and close that plant."

The other option, Butler said, is to simply let plants go out of business.