FISHERY

Treat Industry like a business, says seafood association

By Alisha Morrissey

THE TELEGRAM

The fishery is a business and should be run like one, says Derek Butler.

The executive director of the Association of Seafood Producers spoke to the St. John's Rotary Club Thursday about public policy and its effect on the fishery.

He says the goal to save fish plants and jobs is a noble one, but in industry, if those things aren't viable, perhaps they shouldn't be saved.

"You can only judge a policy by its actual outcome, not by the intended consequence," Butler said to the crowd.

Questions about whether there is a workforce or capacity need to be asked before a whole cast of characters decide to save a particular plant.

"Is it working? Are our young people staying around because things are so good? Are our towns repopulating because the fishery is providing opportunities?" Butler asks.

Perhaps, he says, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians shouldn't be so proud that the fishery is "surviving. We're not living on the entrepreneurial merit of the fishery. We're living off the natural abundance and wealth of our location ... our proximity to the fish."

Government's recent decision to no longer create new fish processing licences is a step in the right direction, Butler says.

"Our problem is we have chosen to dissipate the wealth among as many participants as possible," he says, adding that the industry has been overregulated for more than 30 years.
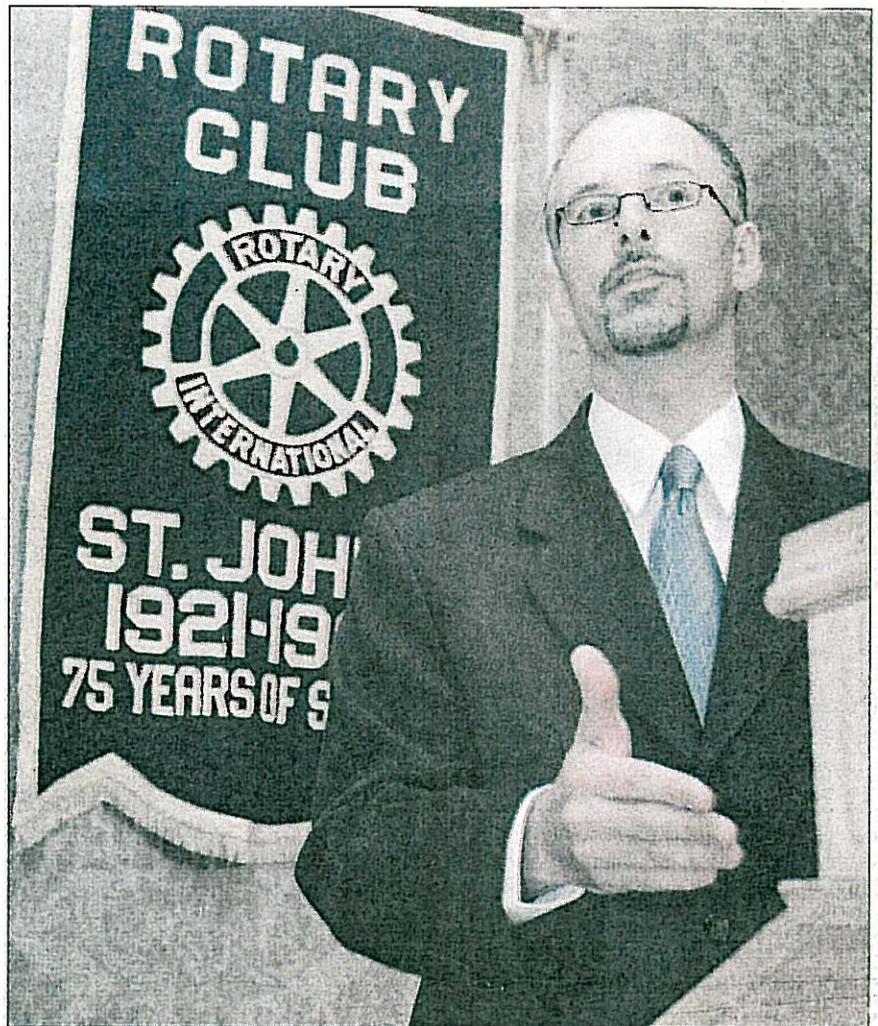
Derek Butler, executive director of the Association of Seafood Producers, was the guest speaker at the Rotary Club of St. John's luncheon at the Fairmont Newfoundland hotel Thursday. — Photo by Rhonda Hayward/The Telegram

"Asking the consumer to pay more money for those products is not the solution," he says.

Goods and services are only worth what people are willing to pay and industry needs to be competitive.

"Every public policy decision is a tradeoff. There are consequences to every action and the intended consequences don't count for much."

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