Scientists study 'human dimensions' of sectors, IFQs, catch shares; industry participation needed

WOODS HOLE, MA – Are catch share programs such as sectors and individual fishing quotas (IFQs) changing the way fishermen relate to each other? Do fishermen feel more responsible for the resource if they manage their own quota? Are boat owners and captains more satisfied with their jobs under catch shares? How about crewmembers? How are *they* faring?

These are a few of the dozens of questions social scientists are asking as part of an initiative to document the "human dimensions" – both good and bad – of evolving fishery management programs in the Northeast.

"This is all about people," said Patricia Pinto da Silva, a social policy specialist at the Northeast Fisheries Science Center in Woods Hole who has been working with others over the past year to develop a broader program to gather socio-cultural-economic data on fishermen.

The center's Social Sciences Branch, a 12-person team of economists, anthropologists, and social policy analysts, has collected some of this data for years.

But as anthropologist Trish Clay put it, "We've really been limited by the lack of staff and resources."

That should change significantly this year with additional funding through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) budget intended to help the Social Sciences Branch launch a much larger program.

"This is our first big opportunity to really get at some of the social and economic impacts of different fishery management programs in-depth," said Clay. "We'll have a better set of data for our analyses. We want to be able to say, 'Are catch share programs doing what they're intended to do?' And, 'Are people better off with catch shares?'"

While the Social Sciences Branch expects to collect data on numerous fisheries, the early focus likely will be on groundfish sectors, the scallop general category IFQ fishery, and the tilefish IFQ fishery, all of which are new catch share programs in the region.

This socio-economic information is desperately needed as we further develop the groundfish sectors and consider other catch share programs.
—Terry Stockwell

Performance measures

The program development team includes Pinto da Silva, Clay, and economist Drew Kitts. During the New England Fishery Management Council's Jan. 26-28 meeting in Portsmouth, NH, Kitts provided a progress report.

He explained that the Social Sciences Branch came up with five general "performance measure" themes to address economic and socio-cultural impacts: financial viability; distributional outcomes; well being; governance; and stewardship.

Each theme was accompanied by a series of questions. For example, Kitts said, questions under the "well being" theme might be: Are fishermen, crewmembers, and processing plant employees more or less satisfied with their jobs? And, has fishing become safer?

But to actually measure those factors in terms of data points, scientists have to use specific "indicators," explained Kitts.

Potential ways to get at indicators to assess "well being" might include:

- Job satisfaction surveys;
- Accident rate reports; and/or
- Programs to monitor changes in people's social network activities and relationships.

"Theme" questions in the stewardship department might be: Have catch share allocations improved participants' sense of stewardship? And, are discard rates increasing or decreasing?

Kitts said gathering indicators to measure those factors might involve things like:

- Reviewing data on actual discarding and high-grading rates;
- Determining whether fishermen have become more involved in stock enhancement activities; and/or
- Conducting attitude surveys.

Council responds

Following his presentation, Kitts asked the council for input.

While acknowledging that all of the categories were important, Massachusetts council member David Pierce said, "The one that I would like you to focus on is stewardship because, frankly, if we don't get stewardship in catch share management, we will have failed. Stewardship is an integral portion of catch share management."

Maine council member Terry Stockwell voiced support for the science center's expanded program.

"I'm very pleased to see this effort moving forward. This information is desperately needed as we further develop the groundfish sectors and consider other catch share programs," he said. "What I don't see here is the fundamental question of: 'Is there anybody left?' And if so, 'Who is it and why?'"

Stockwell said such information was particularly important "in light of minimizing impacts on small vessels and coastal communities."

The success of the program is completely dependent on people's participation.
—Patricia Pinto da Silva

Kitts responded, "We do have plans to look at things that will help us measure those points, and those generally would be in the category of distributional outcomes."

Under the distributional outcomes category, Kitts said potential questions might be: Has there been a concentration of quota ownership? How have employment opportunities changed? And, are certain groups, communities, and/or regions excluded?

Some already gone

New Hampshire council member David Goethel pushed the point even further. He said people in his state, some of whom had heard an earlier presentation by Patricia Pinto da Silva about the expanded data collection program, wanted to be sure that scientists accounted for "the losers" – people who had already left or been forced out of the fishery.

"They lost a job that was well paying and they've ended up either in a meaningless job or a dead-end job or on welfare. And they're not happy about it," said Goethel. "They want to make sure somebody does a survey about what happened to communities, because some of these communities have been radically changed by catch share programs."

After expressing concern that New England has already repeated mistakes

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—David Pierce

At-a-glance: Social Science Initiative

- **Program purpose: To collect socio-economic data on all Northeast Region fisheries with an emphasis on new catch share programs;**
- **Who's heading it: The Social Sciences Branch of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center;**
- **Who will be surveyed: Vessel owners, captains, crewmen, dealers, processors, shoreside support service employees, people no longer in the business, and other stakeholders; and**
- **How to get involved: Post comments, questions, and offers of assistance at <www.nefsc.noaa.gov/read/socialsci/catchshares/>.**

Social science

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made in catch share programs in other regions, Goethel concluded, "So yes, it's important to survey the people who are still in the fishing industry, but this country needs to know, 'What is the cost associated with this? What happened to those other people?'

"If the government is supporting them now through some massive subsidization program and welfare, wouldn't we have been better off keeping more people employed in the fishing industry and operating in a more inefficient manner? Those are the types of questions that need to be asked," Goethel said.

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>
> **—Glen Libby**

Job loss

Numerous others had comments, including council Executive Director Paul Howard.

Howard pointed out the government's current emphasis on creating jobs during the ongoing recession.

"As you look at how polarizing catch share programs are, I think you're going to have to pay close attention to reconciling consolidation and job loss vs. the long-term benefits of economic and social viability," he said.

Maine council member Glen Libby, who is actively involved in the Port Clyde groundfish sector, as well as community supported fisheries for groundfish and shrimp, said, "I think there should be a way to track consumer perception of catch shares.

"Buying choices are ultimately what's going to drive this fishery and determine whether the smaller operations can survive or not," he said. "If people are choosing to buy the fish because of the way it's managed instead of possibly stock status, then that should promote the stewardship we're trying to get through. If fishermen can get more money for catching fish a certain way, they'll do it."

Mary Beth Tooley, another Maine council member, cautioned that those involved in this expanded socio-economic data collection program may need to be creative in winning industry support for supplying information.

Gilbert Weed photo, courtesy NEFSC

Gloucester, MA, 1955, men and women separating undersized whiting at converyors that remove heads of fish.

Fishermen and processors already are required to supply an enormous amount of data on all kinds of fronts, she said, "And from a business perspective, it's often seen as intrusive."

Tooley emphasized the importance of explaining to fishermen the need for the data and the value of participating in the effort.

"You need to get people to voluntarily supply you with information, and I think that's a pretty big challenge," she said.

Two groups

Using groundfish as an example, Rhode Island council member Mark Gibson urged the involved science center staff to collect information on noncatch share fishermen, too.

"For better or worse, we've going to have a dual system out there in terms of a common pool and a sector program," he said. "Fishermen have been forced to make decisions about sectors and the common pool, and some would argue they haven't had sufficient information to do so.

"Nonetheless," Gibson said, "they've had to make decisions, and those decisions will have consequences. So I'm thinking that some sort of tracking analysis of those two collective groups might give insight into the decision-making process – and the outcomes and implications of those decisions – that might be valuable."

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> **—Paul Howard**

Kitts said that social scientists intended to compare catch share fishermen to nonshare fishermen and regularly funnel information back to the council, other policy makers, and stakeholders.

Furthermore, he said, the science center's economists and anthropologists who serve on plan development teams for fishery management plans would use the information to produce better socio-economic impact statements.

Hearing the message

Pinto da Silva said later in February that the Social Sciences Branch was keenly aware of everyone's desire to know more about "the losers," those who, for whatever reason, were no longer part of the industry.

"That point has come up numerous times, and we have taken it very much to heart," she said.

Pinto da Silva also acknowledged the need to properly survey crewmembers, recognizing that this will be one of the program's challenges.

"It's very difficult to monitor a population we don't even know the size of," she said. "But we need to know about job losses. We're really trying to find out about that segment of the population."

GMRI, RI CFRF, URI

To that end, the science center has turned to the Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI) and the Rhode Island Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation (CFRF) for help.

GMRI was contracted to identify and communicate with a broad range of industry members – crewmembers, dealers, shoreside infrastructure employees, auction house workers, and others – who don't typically go to management meetings or attend seminars, forums, or other gatherings.

In mid-February, the GMRI effort was well underway, and the science center was working on setting up a similar initiative for the Mid-Atlantic.

CFRF and the University of Rhode Island (URI) were working with the science center on a study called "Well-being, Job Satisfaction, and Change in New England Fishing Communities."

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—David Goethel

CFRF issued a grant to URI to set up the study in Rhode Island. Then, additional NOAA funding made it possible for URI to expand the study to Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts.

According to the science center, the study will evaluate the impacts of changing regulations on captains, crewmen, and other stakeholders and serve as "a baseline from which to monitor and evaluate rapid changes in the fishing industry." Investigators also will attempt to reach former fishermen.

On another front, social scientists have begun a research program to analyze the socio-economic impacts of community supported fisheries (CSF) programs. Investigators were working with the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance to coordinate with several CSFs for the study.

How to help

While many people have applauded this significant initiative to collect more and better socio-economic data, science center staffers say they won't be able to pull it off without industry's help.

"The success of the program is completely dependent on people's participation," said Pinto da Silva.

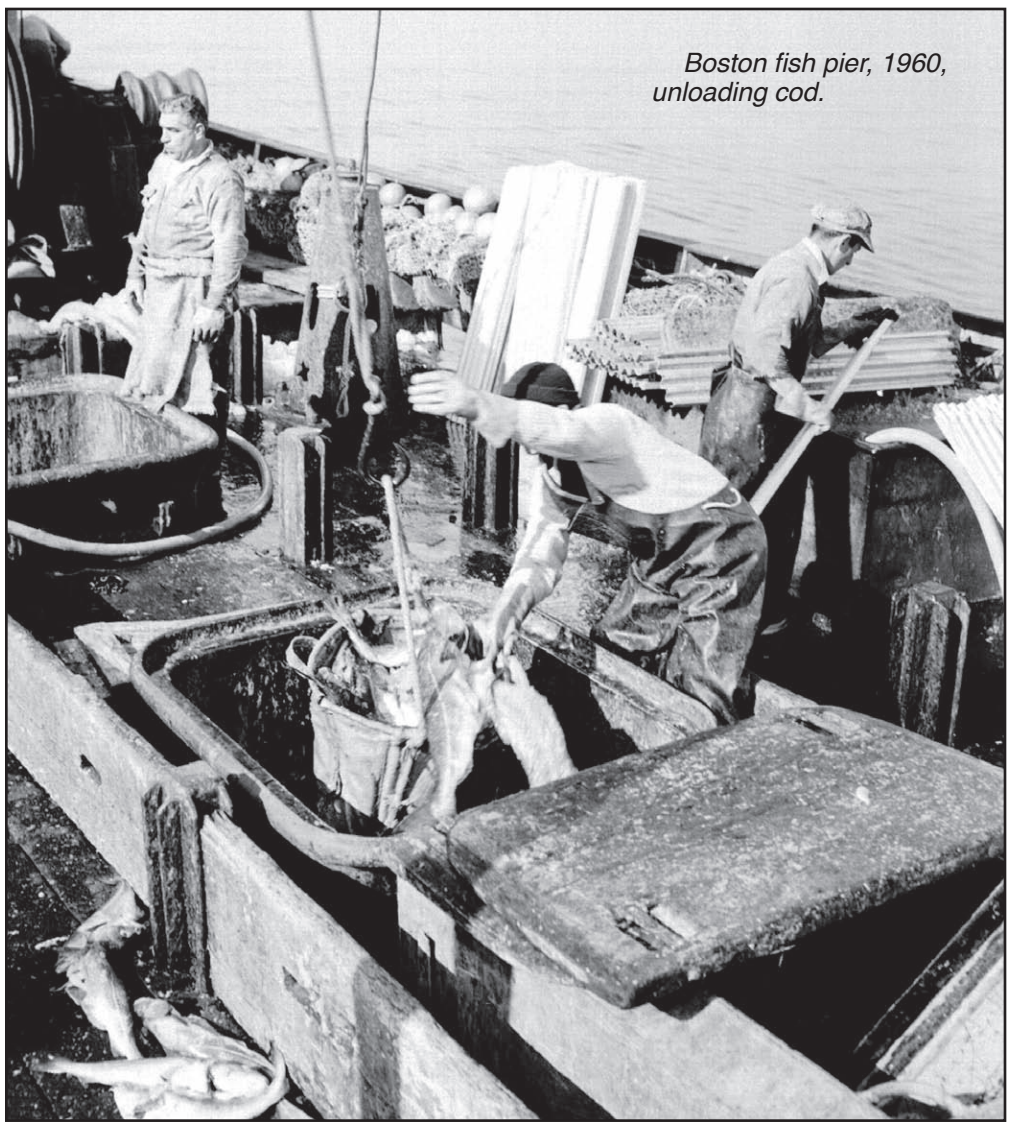
She also said industry members can participate in a number of ways.

"Sometimes we need help with field surveys," she said. "Sometimes we're looking for people to help us out with a straight-face test to be sure we're asking the right questions."

And most of all, the science center team needs to hear from stakeholders about how they, personally, have been impacted – both positively and negatively – by catch share programs, both from the inside and the outside.

Anyone who has comments or wants to offer help can post a message at <www.nefsc.noaa.gov/read/socialsci/catchshares/>.

Janice M. Plante



Boston fish pier, 1960, unloading cod.

Robert Brigham photo, courtesy NEFSC

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