

Voices of the North Shore: The Lobster Fishery of Pictou County

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Abstract

Rural communities along the Northumberland Strait are fishing a limited resource: lobster. Since the 1950s the lobster industry in Pictou County has been suffering from a decline in lobster stocks. Environmental, economic and cultural factors, as well as a history of the crisis in the lobster fishery in Pictou County, have been examined to determine the nature of the threats to the fishery and to a traditional way of life from which many fishermen cannot separate themselves. This thesis involves more than an analysis of documentary sources, primary and secondary. By going through interviews, directly to the source, fishermen and lobster fishery workers are given a voice in the interpretation of what has happened to the lobster fishery in the central strait region since the mid twentieth century, how it has affected their lives and rural communities, and whether likely solutions are at hand.

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Introduction

Industries are always liable to rise or decline, especially in the technologically-driven context of the twenty-first century. For the lobster fishery in Pictou County on the northern shore of Nova Scotia, this is how life has been for the communities that make a living from this now very limited resource. As the impact of the economy of the province takes its toll on the small county, there are other factors at work that must also be taken into account. The evolving environmental issues and changing ecologies have been slowly eroding the lobster industry in the Northumberland Strait since the 1950s. Human expansion and development has caused much of the damage that has changed the ecosystems of the strait and raised new environmental issues, which is to be expected with a growing population, even in rural areas. An example is the Confederation Bridge between New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, which many Pictou County fishermen, such as Northumberland Fisheries Association president Ronnie Heighton, have said deters lobster from travelling down the strait towards the Pictou County region because of massive changes in water quality and temperatures, tides and currents. Other examples include pollutants, over-fishing, industrialization and new technological developments that are now overwhelming the industry. Economically, the lobster industry has taken a severe blow along the strait; the demand and prices for lobster have been decreasing each season since the 1980s. Until the Second World War, lobsters were not considered to be a valuable commodity, and lobster stocks were plentiful. But not until the 1960s were regulations were put in place to protect all fish stocks by the newly

formed Department of Fisheries and Oceans.¹ The north shore was able to regulate and continue to provide the amount of lobster exports necessary to ship out to buyers across the province, in the United States, as well as overseas. The abundance of lobsters in the strait, however, would collapse shortly after a final boom in the late 1980s. Fishermen and their families are still seeking answers and solutions nearly two decades later.

This thesis will examine the decline of the lobster fishery in Pictou County, putting it in the context of the earlier days of lobster fishing and paying careful attention to the insights of fishermen themselves, as collected through interviews. The long-term evolution of the local economy was not solely dependent on fisheries. Many of the rural inhabitants of the county were secluded by lack of roads and railways, severely limiting their options for employment. Men worked in lumber camps during winter, and fished and farmed during the spring, summer and fall months of the year. Being self-employed gave these rural Nova Scotians a sense of independence from the outside world; the more centralized and urban areas of the province left them to their own devices. As rural areas became much more involved in fishing in the strait, however, a more systematized form of paid labour, techniques and traditions began to develop. By the 1920s, fishermen were increasing the number of lobster traps they were setting, as well as designing better boats that could hold more traps, but also eventually hold an engine. Previously, fishermen had been using very small boats (some fitted with sails), with limited space that also provided an unlimited amount of hard work. Traps or nets were hauled in and out of the water by hand, and motors were unheard of until the late 1910s. In the 1920s there was a swift

¹ Gene L. Barrett and Richard Apostle, *Emptying their Nets: Small Capital and Rural Industrialization in the Fishing Industry of Nova Scotia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 79.

change, as many fishermen began to see how they could improve their own boats, and would place small diesel engines into their vessels. Fishermen were then able to set more traps, their work became less time-consuming and they began to make more profit off their catches.²

As the 1920s went on, increasing wealth was created by the lobster of the Northumberland Strait. Rural inshore fishermen were now working towards perfecting a form of employment they could rely on instead of constantly searching for any available work; the fishing industry of the strait provided them with the security they needed. These rural fishermen were not the only ones to recognize the profit to be made. With the increase of the population in Pictou County, merchants and large companies identified the wealth that the strait had to offer. Large vessels, known as trawlers or draggers (for this project, they will be referred to as draggers), were introduced to the strait by these corporate owners and became a very present force to be reckoned with beginning in the later 1920s, growing to massive fleets by the 1940s.³ These vessels were extremely large in comparison to the small and out-moded fishing boats that the inshore fishermen were using, could travel at a much faster pace, and could drag and haul substantial amounts of ground fish from the strait. Draggers varied in gear, and could range from hauling large nets behind the vessel for catching ground fish species, or drag sweep chains or rakes along the seabed. As cod stocks dwindled, these companies and their vessels moved on

² Peter Sinclair, "Chapter 6: Atlantic Canada's fishing communities: the impact of change," in *Rural Sociology in Canada*, eds. David S. Hay and G. S. Basran (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992), 90.

³ Gary Burrill and Ian McKay, eds. *People, Resources and Power* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1987), 63.

to schools of herring and lobster.⁴ Dragging vessels became a very real threat not only to the Northumberland Strait fishermen, but to the ecosystems as well.⁵ By 1929, these large draggers were eliminated from the Northumberland Strait by local opposing politicians because of the damage they had been doing to the seabed and to fish stocks in the strait, and their “opposition to modernization.”⁶ Fishermen were hopeful that with this ban in place stocks would make a turnaround and their literal “safety net” in what the strait fish stocks could provide would remain intact and profitable for many decades hereafter.

With the purging of draggers from the strait, inshore fishermen were able to continue to fish without the threat of further losses to fish stocks or damage to the various ecosystems. After the Depression hit, the Second World War “transformed the industry,” intensifying the drive to industrialization because of the increasing need to feed those serving overseas, and as a result the late 1930s and 1940s were booming decades in the Northumberland Strait fishery.⁷ With the establishment of many locally owned fish processing plants, canneries and factories in Pictou County, as well as all along the north shore coastline, such as William Broidy’s Maritime Packers Ltd., profits were readily accessible. The drive to succeed in the fishing industry was felt by every fishing family along the strait. Pictou County began to rejuvenate after the Depression and gain a profitable economy during the war years. Gene Barrett and Richard Apostle have noted

⁴ Department of Fisheries & Oceans and Fisheries Research Board of Canada, *The Commercial Fisheries of Canada* (Ottawa: Royal Commission on Canada’s Economic Prospects, 1956), 4-6.

⁵ A. C. Parks and Atlantic Provinces Research Board, *The Economy of the Atlantic Provinces 1940-1958* (Halifax: Atlantic Provinces Economic Council, 1960), 50.

⁶ DFO, *The Commercial Fisheries*, 4-6.

⁷ Burrill and McKay, *People, Resources and Power*, 63.

that the fishing industry had been a seemingly “shining example of capitalist development” since the 1920s, and the small plants of rural Pictou County revitalized the rural economy, so that “post-1945 modernization broke a vicious cycle of poverty and debt, increasing competition, incomes and prices.”⁸ This misconception of plenty would soon be brought to a halt, as the large, corporately owned fish factories would begin to devour all of the smaller, locally owned plants to eliminate the competition and control pricing of the fish products being bought and distributed.⁹ By 1957, fishermen had been granted extended periods of employment insurance by the federal government because of their dire financial situations, whether caused by competition from corporations, being secluded in winterized regions, or “fishing with restricted seasonal access to fish stocks.”¹⁰ With large fishing fleets taking over the fishery, rural inshore fishermen were left to watch as their livelihoods were undermined and the stocks were slowly diminishing once again. It would not be until 1977 under Fisheries Minister Romeo LeBlanc, two decades after employment insurance became a viable option, that the DFO would take action and respond to the need to stabilize Nova Scotia’s fishery, with new conservation measures in place (such as licensing, restricted boat sizes and gear classes), that would ensure that fish stocks had a chance to re-establish themselves in the Northumberland Strait.¹¹ Until the late 1960s, there had been no restrictions in place to

⁸ Barrett and Apostle, *Emptying their Nets*, 5, 315.

⁹ Rick Williams, “The Restructuring That Wasn’t: The Scandal at National Sea,” in *People, Resources and Power*, eds. Gary Burrill and Ian McKay (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1987), 80-2.

¹⁰ Barrett and Apostle. *Emptying their Nets*, 78.

¹¹ Gene Barrett, “Capital and the State in Atlantic Canada: The Structural Context of Fishery Policy Between 1939 and 1977,” in *Atlantic Fisheries & Coastal Communities*, eds. C. Lamson and A.J. Hanson, (Halifax: Dalhousie Ocean Studies Programme, 1984), 85.

protect lobster or other fish species. There was no limit on the number of inshore fishing licenses, or to the amount of fish caught.¹² With these changes, the DFO assumed that lobster and ground fish stocks could slowly recover. Unfortunately, with industrialization and the expansion of the population in Pictou County, the environmental problems affecting the strait had intensified dramatically. Pictou County's lobster fishermen would once again be battling for the security of their traditional livelihood and the resource on which they depended. However, assistance from the DFO remained minimal.

The pressing issue of the decline in the lobster industry in the Northumberland Strait warrants a fresh discussion, which must include all partners involved in the industry if there is to be any hope in restoring the population in the stocks. As one fisherman eloquently put it, "Culturally, economically and socioeconomically, the lobster fishery is the life blood of many of our coastal communities in Nova Scotia. So it's not to be dismissed as a small issue."¹³ Unfortunately, for many citizens of Nova Scotia, the situation of the lobster industry on the north shore arouses no sense of urgency. Considering that much of the marketing of tourism depends on Nova Scotia's fisheries, the lack of interest is disturbing.

For over a century, the lobster industry of the Northumberland Strait has been providing this resource to the United States, and exporting as far overseas as Japan. Investigation into the decline of lobster stocks in the Northumberland Strait has been neglected for decades, and although there has been research into the region, the north

¹² Barrett and Apostle, *Emptying their Nets*, 79.

¹³ "Fishermen, communities struggle amid sharply lower lobster prices," *CBC News*, December 24, 2008, accessed November 15, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/story/2008/12/24/ns-lobster-fishermen-struggling.html>.

shore has been largely untouched by academics. Residents of the north shore in Pictou and Colchester counties, such as Mona MacDonald and Stephen Leahey, have written books based on the stories and histories of fishermen and fish factory workers, but research of any depth done by outsiders is non-existent except for a handful of DFO and Environment Canada reports, or those prepared by independent scientists, such as J. D. Pringle and D. J. Scarratt, investigating pollutants in the area (as at Pictou Harbour and Boat Harbour in relation to the paper mill, Northern Pulp). Oral histories from individuals in Pictou County who had been employed or involved with the lobster fishery will attest to the importance that the fishery has played not only in their lives, but also in the life of the province as a whole. The participants interviewed for the oral history aspect of this research will provide excellent data that can be compared to DFO reports, as well as provide specific insights into the issues affecting the strait and the lobster stocks from the 1950s and onwards. Oral histories represent a very crucial aspect of preserving history; without the stories, traditions and values contained in them, Nova Scotians would have only fragmented pictures of their past. These histories will also provide a basis on which to understand how fishing families and communities have struggled, coped and continue to survive in an industry that is neglected and severely decaying in the Pictou County region. The Northumberland Strait deserves study and recognition, to further expand on the available information on this region for the benefit of future academics, for the preservation of a unique and traditional way of life through the voices of those involved in the lobster fishery of the north shore, but also to fill in the gaps that exist in current research by including this region of the province as an integral part of Nova Scotian history in the lobster fishery.

To have a well-rounded and complete study of the fisheries of Nova Scotia, the north shore needs to be included in the discussion, the research and the literature because of the important resource the area provides within Atlantic Canada, as well as internationally. What literature is currently available is limited to the few reports completed by the DFO, Environment Canada or independent scientists, or the research of a small number of academics such as Gene Barrett, Richard Apostle and Peter Sinclair. Examining the fishing industry more broadly, these researchers illustrate how the economy and other external influences on the Atlantic region have affected the fishery as a whole. Their findings have shown that there are much broader issues at hand in the province's economy that are causing the hardships many fishers face today, such as the operations of large-scale corporate fish processors that are key competitors taking profit away from the rural inshore fishery. Meanwhile, a large percentage of the scientific reports were based on experiments and research involving environmental factors, such as major pollutants from the industrial sectors of Pictou County. These enquiries have raised major environmental concerns, and yet the lobster fishery in the strait continues to weaken and its issues are disregarded.

One of the difficulties with the available literature is that it is very broad, and the focus is on the fisheries of Newfoundland, New Brunswick, or the southwestern and eastern shores of Nova Scotia. Gene Barrett has done extensive work on the fisheries of Nova Scotia, independently and collaboratively, but it does not touch on the specific issues in the lobster fishery on the northern shores of Nova Scotia. Fortunately, the work that he has done provides an excellent background and wealth of information and analysis of what is occurring in other fishing grounds of Nova Scotia so as to provide a basis for

comparison with the Northumberland Strait fishery. Barrett's work has been extensively focused on fishermen's unions in the province, as well as the socio-economic problems that have plagued the fishing industry of the province. He has noted, "fisheries have been locked continually in the throes of one economic crisis after another." This is also after Nova Scotia's fishery had received substantial financial aid from the federal and provincial governments and their agencies – such as the Department of Regional Economic Expansion (DREE) – for the past century.¹⁴ While Barrett and Anthony Davis' report for the Task Force on Atlantic Fisheries from 1983 yields important insights pertinent to the investigation of the lobster industry in the Northumberland Strait, there is no mention of the hardships that fishing communities in the Pictou County region had been enduring. It is also important to note that when Barrett and Davis wrote this report, they counted four previous Task Force reports completed on this issue, as well as numerous Royal Commission investigations. Yet the problem remains unsolved.

The socio-economic well being of the north shore lobster fishery continues to decay at an alarming rate, and any literature that states changes need to be made for the fisheries to survive has been ignored. Substantive studies include Barrett and Richard Apostle's co-authored book, *Emptying their Nets: Small Capital and Rural Industrialization in the Nova Scotia Fishing Industry*, with contributions from other colleagues researching in this field, which was a useful tool for gathering historical background and comparing the economic issues of the southwestern and eastern shores of Nova Scotia with those occurring in the strait. *People, Resources, and Power: Critical*

¹⁴ Gene Barrett and Anthony Davis, *Floundering in Troubled Waters: The Political Economy of the Atlantic Fishery and the Task Force of Atlantic Fisheries* (Halifax: Gorsebrook Research Institute for Atlantic Canada Studies, 1983), 1.

Perspectives on the Underdevelopment and Primary Industries in the Atlantic Region, edited by Gary Burrill and Ian MacKay, as well as *Restructuring and Resistance: Perspectives from Atlantic Canada*, edited by Bryant Fairley, Colin Leys and James Sacouman, provide essays with a similar overview and tone on the state of the fisheries. What subject matter is examined within these books is also quite broad and does not touch on any environmental or cultural factors affecting the lobster fishery in the strait, nor on the strait region at all. Another gap in much of the available academic literature is that the studies are focused primarily on fish canneries or factories that are owned by very large corporations, fishermen's unions, or capital gains from the fishery. A final, overarching topic is the analysis of the province's political economy and its effects on the fishing industry as a whole in Nova Scotia. Through these few examples, it is very clear that the Northumberland Strait, a major supplier of lobster and other fish species, is receiving very little specific attention despite its commercial importance provincially and globally.

The Northumberland Strait has also suffered from human expansion and industrialization within Pictou County, which is now becoming very visible. The toll that has been taken on the ecosystems of the strait by pollutants was little-known until 2005 when a team of scientists examined the effects of the Pictou Landing pulp mill (formerly Scott Paper, now Northern Pulp), on the town's harbour and the strait intersecting at its mouth. The effluent seeping into the harbour caused varying degrees of leukemia in different types of aquatic species, specifically (in this study) mussels.¹⁵ Also examined

¹⁵ S. St-Jean, R. Stephens, S. Courtenay, and C. Reinisch, "Detecting p53 family proteins in haemocytic leukemia cells of *Mytilus edulis* from Pictou Harbour, Nova Scotia, Canada," *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences* 62 (2005): 2056-57, 2061.

by D. J. Scarratt for Environment Canada and the Fisheries Research Board of Canada, were the effects of the effluent along the coastline outside of Boat Harbour and Pictou Harbour – on all life forms, but especially on lobsters and scallops. The lobster population had decreased in the strait in the fishing areas surrounding Boat Harbour where the pollution from Northern Pulp had decimated most of the pre-existing ecosystems.¹⁶ A second report by Scarratt focused on the effect that dragging had had on the seabed in the strait near Pictou, and upon observation it was confirmed that draggers, and even moss raking, were becoming detrimental to the health of the lobster habitats of the area. The few lobsters that were observed to inhabit these areas had suffered serious damage, some to the extent that their carapaces were cracked. Fishermen had suggested to the scientists observing underwater that lobsters were very fragile at this time of season as they had recently molted their older shells, and their new ones were still soft, leaving them very susceptible to damage. It was also suggested by these fishermen that the season for moss raking as well as scallop dragging be changed so that the lobster either had a chance for their carapaces to harden, or before they shed the older shells.¹⁷

A 1997 thesis by Holly Buchanan cited oral history evidence in which fishermen in Caribou had mentioned that run-off from farms, as well as when paved roads began to be salted, were affecting the sections of the strait that were in the path of the run-off.¹⁸

Again, the literature that is based on oral histories with the people directly involved in the

¹⁶ D. J. Scarratt, *Bleached kraft mill effluent near Pictou, N.S. and its effect on the marine flora and fauna with a note on the Pictou Co. lobster landings* (Ottawa: Fisheries Research Board of Canada, 1969), 3-5, 7-8.

¹⁷ D. J. Scarratt, *Observations on Lobsters and Scallops Near Pictou, N.S.* (St. Andrews: Biological Station, Research and Development Directorate, 1975), 1, 3-5.

¹⁸ Holly R. Buchanan, "Sea Heritage: Oral Histories from Caribou" (MA thesis, Concordia University, 1997), 9, 15.

fishing industry provides some of the most important insights on the strait in this regard. The oral histories that are gathered through the present research project also provide interesting and reinforcing qualitative data so as to establish a base on which to build upon and compare with other reports (such as those carried out by the DFO), to determine how the lobster fishery in Pictou County has reached its current low point. One such report from the DFO, prepared in collaboration with GTA Consultants, *Consultations on Ecosystem Overview and Assessment Report (EOAR) for the Northumberland Strait*, is based on the Confederation Bridge and the consequences of its construction. It discusses much of what fishermen had feared would happen to the Northumberland Strait fishery, especially with regard to the lobster stocks that travel towards the Pictou County region from the northern tip of PEI and southeastern region of New Brunswick. With the construction of the bridge, the report stated, came “a wide range of issues related to the environmental health of the Northumberland Strait.” Examples of the stresses placed on the strait were decreased water quality, and the damage caused to ecosystems and fish populations by silt, suspended solids and sediment that travelled down the strait. This report also noted that the consultants “...also believe that the health of the Northumberland Strait ecosystem is failing rapidly and that meaningful and prompt intervention is essential.”¹⁹ This report was published in 2006, but seven years later there has been no follow-up, no environmental research or solutions put forth as viable options to resurrect these failing ecosystems. No further research on a

¹⁹ Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, *Consultations on Ecosystem Overview and Assessment Report (EOAR) for the Northumberland Strait*, last modified March 28, 2012, accessed October 2011, <http://www.glf.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/e0006778>.

comparable scale has been carried out in the Pictou County region by any institution, government or otherwise.

The cultural dimension of the lobster fishery in Pictou County, meanwhile, has not been explored at all, even though relevant general studies exist. A sociological theory that may also hold some as yet unexamined relevance is one advanced by William F. Ogburn: cultural lag. For Ogburn, cultural lag "...is defined as the time between the appearance of a new material invention and the making of appropriate adjustments in a corresponding area of non-material culture,"²⁰ combined with, "...the notion that culture takes time to catch up with technological innovations, and that social problems and conflicts are caused by this lag."²¹ This theory can be applied effectively to the culture of the rural fishing communities of Pictou County. These communities can be seen as lagged because of their inability to adjust or adapt to new innovations, such as technology in the fishery, and because of their status as a non-materialistic culture. As a result, rural communities in Pictou County focus on tradition, or "ways of doing things," and therefore suffer a delay in obtaining new innovations, which keeps the communities and the lobster fishery from progressing forward.²²

Ogburn discussed the inability of rural areas to utilize new, more efficient technologies because they were small, non-materialistic societies and hypothesized that urban areas of a society could adapt more rapidly to keep in tune with the technologies and inventions that were arising throughout the decades as the population increased and

²⁰ "Cultural Lag, Basic Concepts of Sociology Guide," accessed February 3, 2011, <http://www.sociologyguide.com/basic-concepts/Cultural-Lag.php>.

²¹ "The Cultural Lag Theory: The Sociology of Educational Technology," accessed March 24, 2011, <http://sites.google.com/site/etec511/the-cultural-lag-theory>.

²² William F. Ogburn, *Social Change* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1964), 271, 389.

supply and demand grew.²³ Sinclair assessed this notion of lag in rural communities in Atlantic Canada, arguing that the inshore fisheries were losing their “homogeneous character” beginning in the later 1940s and into the 1950s.²⁴ This was a real fear for many of the rural fishermen in the strait region, as exemplified throughout Stephen Leahey’s book of oral histories from Cumberland County. Many of the fishermen were either afraid of their future generations losing valuable fishing skills and techniques, or simply did not have the funds to purchase the newest fishing technologies, such as mechanical haulers, nylon netting, or later on, computerized scanners that displayed the seabed.²⁵ Again, oral histories can provide profound insights on matters such as traditions and skills that younger generations may have never known unless told or recorded. There is a very small amount of literature available on Nova Scotian fishing culture and rural communities, outside of the work done by Sinclair, Ogburn’s early theories on cultural lag, and what can be derived from oral histories. It is important to also investigate how rural fishing communities, such as those in Pictou County, may have hindered themselves by their inability to move forward technologically or to adapt to new ways of thinking and fishing.

Thus, in summary, most of the literature to this point has been very broad, and it is focused primarily on the eastern and southwestern shores of Nova Scotia. The Northumberland Strait has been neglected. It is a region that has dealt with serious economic strife, but other devastating causes have played their role in the decay of the

²³ Otis Dudley Duncan, ed., *William F. Ogburn on Culture and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 95.

²⁴ Sinclair, “Chapter 6: Atlantic Canada’s fishing communities,” 92.

²⁵ Stephen Leahey, *Stories from the Lobster Fishery of Cumberland’s Northern Shore* (Lockeport: Community Books, 2005), 13-15.

lobster industry in Pictou County. It is the role of this thesis to fill in the gaps that previous literature and research has left, and to provide an accurate picture of how and why lobster stocks in the Northumberland Strait have declined, and how the fishing communities in Pictou County have survived for over a century on an industry that was taken advantage of and is now quickly deteriorating.

Cultural studies of Pictou County have tended to concentrate on its historical memory of being the birthplace of New Scotland. Yet in heritage terms, the lobster fishery is also vital to the county. Pictou itself celebrates an entire festival dedicated to the lobster; hosted in July, the Lobster Carnival draws in tourists worldwide. On the waterfront of Pictou Harbour, there is a new hatchery dedicated to reestablishing the lobster stocks in the Northumberland Strait. Tourists and locals are encouraged to adopt a lobster seedling to be released once it is large enough to survive in the strait. A dedication to the lobster fishery is engrained into Pictonians, but there have still been no major efforts made by outside partners (such as the DFO) to facilitate the lobsters' ability to survive and develop a healthy population. The economy of the north shore fishery has been in relentless decline – the hatchery notwithstanding – with no current signs of improving. Fishers in the county are, for the most part, realistic in believing that one day there will no longer be a strong lobster-based fishery in the Northumberland Strait unless it is taken seriously on all fronts – economically, environmentally and culturally. This thesis will provide the how and why of the lobster fishery in Pictou County. Through extensive investigation and oral histories, answers will be found, and a basis from which solutions can be made will be established. It is time for positive and progressive changes in the lobster fishery of Pictou County.

Chapter 1: The Historical Crisis of the Lobster Fishery of Pictou County and the Resulting Socioeconomic Impacts

Concerns continue to mount among those within the lobster industry, such as fishermen and scientists, as to whether this specific fishery of the Northumberland Strait has been held within a cyclical pattern of prosperity and decline since the 1950s. Many fishermen see this industry stamped with an expiration date unless serious changes are made, and many scientists, such as J.D. Pringle, would agree. By the 1970s, lobsters were being overharvested in Nova Scotia's north shore region. Pringle's 1983 study, *An Overview of the Management of the Lobster Fishery in Atlantic Canada*, argued that "it is unlikely that the catches could ever return to previous maximums," and that "the lobster fishery has collapsed in the Northumberland Strait."¹ Given that the lobster fishery is an important part of the economy in most coastal communities in Pictou County, further setbacks or fluctuations in the industry will have drastic consequences. As the lobster stocks have shifted from bountiful to dwindling, many families within this region are struggling to maintain a way of life that hitherto has satisfied their needs, financially, economically, and culturally. Employment insurance (EI) for these seasonal workers has aided both fishermen and fish plant workers, and helps to make up for the lack of other work opportunities in this area during the off season. With recent changes in EI becoming a very real threat, many fishermen, especially on the north shore, are truly beginning to feel pressure from the slowing local economy as well as the uncertainty of policy changes.

¹ J.D. Pringle, *An Overview of the Lobster Fishery in Atlantic Canada* (Halifax: Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Research and Resource Services, 1983), 1, 73.

Current international demand for lobster is higher than has been seen in decades. However, fishermen of the central Northumberland Strait are not profiting from this demand because of depleted stocks in comparison to other regions of the province, and outside of the central strait region itself.² As a CBC news item noted in 2008, “Industry consultant Bob Fraser said the current situation is bad news for fishing captains, crews and communities... ‘It’s quite different than in a previous era when it [getting into the lobster fishery] was a much smaller capital investment.’”³ Fishermen throughout Atlantic Canada also shared the fear of the removal of fleet separation and owner-operator policies, hitherto included in Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) documents that had reportedly been under active review since the spring of 2012, and which protect the inshore fishery from corporations and offshore fleets.⁴ Fleet separation and owner-operator policies require the fishing license holder to be an active fisherman, preventing corporate companies from entering and buying these licenses.⁵ Pictou County’s lobster industry has dealt with corporate company buyouts since the 1940s, but a strong sense exists amongst fishermen that the outcomes resulting from the removal of these DFO policies would be very destructive to both fishing communities and the local economy of the county.⁶

² “Fishermen faring well,” *The News*, May 30, 2012, accessed May 30, 2012, http://www.ngnews.ca/News/Local/2012-05-30/article-2992225/Fishermen-faring-well/1?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter.

³ “Fishermen, communities struggle amid sharply lower lobster prices.”

⁴ Tony Charles, “Government threatening fishery,” *The Chronicle Herald*, April 11, 2012, accessed April 2012, <http://thechronicleherald.ca/opinion/83423-government-threatening-fishery>.

⁵ Paul MacLeod, “Fishermen cast scorn on reform,” *The Chronicle Herald*, September 17, 2012, accessed September 2012, <http://thechronicleherald.ca/novascotia/136718-fishermen-cast-scorn-on-reform>.

⁶ MacLeod, “Fishermen cast scorn on reform.”

With an increase in lobster sales world wide, Canada's lobster industry is at a high, with "roughly 140 million lbs last year [2012] and 125 millions lbs the year before that," but with little return to rural Atlantic Canadian fishermen.⁷ Lobster fishermen in Pictou County have been making little profit for decades, and with the push towards shellfish since the late 1980s, the stocks have been declining in the strait. The industry in Pictou County in the 1930s and 1940s lagged because of the inability of rural processors to ship fish products out to the United States and worldwide. Innovations lagged in areas such as filleting and freezing fresh fish, which severely limited where fishermen and their buyers could ship their products.⁸ With no mass market close at hand due to the rural isolation of the area, high rates on railways, and a conservative business community in these rural areas that was fearful of investing in expansion, the Pictou County lobster industry was at a standstill unless there was a change in how the products were packed and shipped.⁹ Another obstacle was the tariffs introduced periodically by the US, which restricted trade. From 1930 to 1936, the tariff restricted trade to chilled, fresh fish only that required a shift to ground fish species – a requirement that demanded larger processing plants that only Halifax and Lunenburg could support.¹⁰ This would mark the beginning of larger competition moving into the industry to take advantage of the missed opportunities to ship to the US and to the mass markets worldwide. Gene Barrett has investigated the socioeconomic effects upon coastal communities throughout the Atlantic region, and has found that rural communities have their futures closely bonded and linked to the future of the industry. The coastal offshore fishery emerged after the Second

⁷ Ronnie Heighton, Interview, December 7, 2012.

⁸ DFO, *The Commercial Fisheries*, 6-9.

⁹ DFO, *The Commercial Fisheries*, 6-9.

¹⁰ Parks, *The Economy of the Atlantic Provinces*, 51.

World War with large fleets of draggers, while individually owned plants within rural communities were stabilizing and revitalizing rural economies.¹¹ During this era the industry intensified, which resulted in larger companies such as National Sea Products playing a more significant role. The small, independently owned factories and plants were no match for these new corporations that sought to buy out the industry, one privately owned plant at a time. In 1964, National Sea Products acquired three of the largest lobster companies in the region, including Maritime Packers Ltd. of Pictou, NS, E. Paturel Ltd. of Shediac, NB, and Conleys' of St. Andrews, NB.¹² This came as a shock to the communities who survived off the work the plants provided. Such plants formed the backbone of the fishing industry in rural Pictou County, and were slowly disappearing.¹³

Thus, larger companies such as National Sea Products moved in seeking to take over small fish plants in the county, such as William Broidy's Maritime Packers Ltd., throughout the 1950s. The late 1950s was also the last time that lobster landings peaked as most of the stocks had been over-fished and had exploitation rates of 70-90% beginning in the 1960s, and studies conducted in the 1970s suggested that there were more lobsters being harvested from the strait than was sustainable. Within the central region of the Northumberland Strait, stocks had collapsed and the catches were at less than 5% of the historic maximum catches in the decade's prior when Pringle conducted his study in 1983. Yet in the early 1980s, the industry had been valued at \$120 million in Atlantic Canada alone, with 80% of that value earned internationally.¹⁴ With an industry valued in the hundreds of millions, lobster fishermen and fish factory workers have not

¹¹ Barrett and Apostle, *Emptying their Nets*, 5, 270.

¹² Barrett, "Capital and the State in Atlantic Canada," 89.

¹³ Rick Williams, "The Restructuring That Wasn't," 80-1.

¹⁴ Pringle, *An Overview of the Lobster Fishery*, v, 1, 15.

seen a return on their hard work, investments and livelihood that have been put wholeheartedly into this industry. With *Canadian Fisheries Statistics 2008* stating that higher contributions originate from the Atlantic northwest of Canada than the Pacific northeast, as well as Nova Scotia having the greatest total landed value of lobster in Canada, at 54% of the \$677 million made, it is evidently visible from these figures why many fishers today are concerned with the future of their livelihoods.¹⁵ To increase profit, Ottawa, Nova Scotia and the lobster industry came together within the past decade to “thrust into the U.S., Canada, China, Europe and beyond...” and as a result exports and demand have slowly increased through improved marketing of this valuable resource.¹⁶

Communities in Pictou County have had two choices as a result of the decline in the lobster fishery, combined with loss of significant other industries in the county: suffer through and hope for a revival in one or more of those industries, such as Trenton Works, or look for work elsewhere throughout Canada. Unfortunately there is little employment to keep the younger population in rural areas of Nova Scotia, such as Pictou County, in comparison to urban centers, such as Halifax, which are experiencing growth in population as shown within recent census years.¹⁷ For fishing communities this is a very severe blow not only to community sustainability but also economically, as the majority of fishermen are in a much older age demographic and there is low appeal to the younger generations to take over fishing licenses from their parents, especially with the decline in

¹⁵ Department of Fisheries and Oceans, *Canadian Fisheries Statistics 2008* (Ottawa: Fisheries & Oceans Canada, 2011), 2, 6.

¹⁶ Ralph Surette, “Lobster fisheries: Economic struggle on the high seas,” *rabble.ca*, May 24, 2010, accessed June 2012, <http://rabble.ca/columnists/2010/05/lobster-fisheries-economic-struggle-high-seas>.

¹⁷ Statistics Canada, “Population, urban and rural, by province and territory (Nova Scotia),” last modified September 22, 2009, accessed September 2012, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/101/cst01/demo62d-eng.htm>.

fish stocks province-wide, not just within the lobster fishery. The majority of fishers and fish plant workers are seasonal, full-time workers and claim employment insurance for a large portion of the remaining year. This is not a path to which most young people are willing to commit as a lifelong career choice.¹⁸ Since lobster fishing became a prominent form of employment along the strait by the 1920s, fishermen have had to deal with the seasonality of the job – “...the isolation, primitive equipment and uncertainty of catch and income” – and this is an issue that continues and becomes aggravated in today’s economy.¹⁹ With the decline in the lobster industry in Pictou County, the effects are taking their toll on the lives of fishing communities. The “inadequate prices and unstable markets” in past and present decades of Atlantic Canada’s fishing industry have affected the domestic lives of these rural industry workers as shown by essays in the collection, *Restructuring and Resistance*.²⁰ The struggle to make ends meet has become a natural way of life for these fishing families along the strait.

Unemployment insurance (UI, now titled EI) was extended to self-employed, seasonal workers, such as those in the fishery, by 1957 in the Atlantic Provinces.²¹

Towards the end of the Second World War, many believed that this new, post-

¹⁸ Lois A. Jackson, E. Anne Marshall, Susan Tirone, Catherine Donovan and Blythe C. Shepard, “The Forgotten Population?: Power, Powerlessness, and Agency Among Youth in Coastal Communities,” in *Power and Restructuring: Canada’s Coastal Society and Environment*, eds. Peter Sinclair and Rosemary Omner, (St. John’s, NL: ISER Books, 2006), 237-38.

¹⁹ DFO, *The Commercial Fisheries*, 121.

²⁰ Rick Williams and Gilles Theriault, “Chapter 5: Crisis and Response: Underdevelopment in the Fishery and the Evolution of the Maritime Fishermen’s Union,” in *Restructuring and Resistance*, eds. Bryant Fairley et al. (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1990), 106.

²¹ Cynthia Lamson and Arthur J. Hanson, eds., *Atlantic Fisheries and Coastal Communities: Fisheries Decision-Making Case Studies*, Halifax: Dalhousie Institute of Resource and Environmental Studies, 1984, viii.

modernization era to come was breaking the “circle of poverty and debt, increasing competition, incomes and prices...”²² In the years following, this circle was still intact and fishing communities in rural Nova Scotia were suffering. The issue that many fishermen have run into is that although the industry is profiting provincially, fishermen have seen little of the revenue from their catch return to their own pockets. As previously noted, the *Canadian Fisheries Statistics for 2008*, distributed by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, showed that Nova Scotia had the greatest total landed value of lobster in all of Canada at 54% of the \$677 million dollars made in 2008 by the Canadian fishing industry.²³ By 2010, fishermen in Atlantic Canada landed \$396 million in lobster.²⁴ Fishermen in the Pictou County region over the past few decades have been offered in the range of as low as \$2.25/lb,²⁵ to most recently, \$3.25/lb to highs of \$4.75/lb for their catch.²⁶ The greatest landed value of lobster continues to originate from the southern gulf of the St. Lawrence.²⁷ With lower market prices being offered at the wharf by buyers, lobster fishermen are not receiving an income from which they can sustain themselves or their families. After paying out of pocket for fishing license(s), paying deck hands, bills for gasoline or diesel, bait and other unforeseen expenses for repairs, lobster boat captains are left with little to bring home at the end of the week.²⁸ Those that have been working part time or full time in the lobster industry, whether deck hands or

²² Barrett and Apostle, *Emptying their Nets*, 315.

²³ DFO, *Canadian Fisheries...*, 2, 6.

²⁴ “Response of Atlantic Canada’s Independent Core fleet sector organizations to ‘The Future of Canada’s Commercial Fisheries,’” March 20, 2012, accessed June 2012, http://www.curra.ca/future_of_the_fishery.htm.

²⁵ Robert Johnson, Interview, August 28, 2012.

²⁶ “Fishermen faring well.”

²⁷ DFO, *Canadian Fisheries Statistics*, 6-7.

²⁸ Ronnie Heighton, Interview, December 7, 2012.

boat captains, therefore end up having to claim EI later on in the season to ensure that they can provide for their family for the remainder of the year.

The seasonal rotation between EI payments and lobster fishing has been ongoing since the benefits were introduced to the fishing industry of Nova Scotia in 1957.²⁹ With one quarter of Nova Scotia's total population living in small, coastal communities with little access to year-round work, there are few options for families with one or more seasonal fishery worker in the household other than to apply for EI.³⁰ Over the years, the changes to the requirements necessary to make a valid claim for EI benefits range from payments based on a percentage of earnings during the fishing season, how many weeks were worked, and your seasonal status (part time or full time). Service Canada states:

A fisher is a self-employed person engaged in fishing. If you are a fisher, you may be eligible to receive EI fishing benefits if you are temporarily not earning money from fishing. Your eligibility also depends on how much you earned from self-employment in fishing during your qualifying period, and what you did during your labour force attachment period. Note: Unlike EI regular benefits, EI fishing benefits are based on earnings, not hours of employment.³¹

This is the most current EI policy for self-employed fishermen throughout Canada. All fishery workers soon will see the end of this ability to draw funds from EI with the upcoming changes put forth by the federal government. Interviewed in late 2012, Northumberland Fisherman's Association president Ronnie Heighton discussed the EI

²⁹ Lamson and Hanson, *Atlantic Fisheries and Coastal Communities*, viii.

³⁰ A.J. Hanson, L. Kasdan and C. Lamson, "Atlantic Coastal Communities: Problems and Prospects," in *Atlantic Fisheries and Coastal Communities*, eds. C. Lamson and A.J. Hanson, (Halifax: Dalhousie Institute of Resource and Environmental Studies, 1984), 235.

³¹ Service Canada, "Employment Insurance Benefits for Fishers," last modified January 11, 2013, accessed June 2012, <http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/ei/types/fishing.shtml>.

changes due to take effect following this spring: “I had a meeting with them [DFO] a couple, three weeks ago, and it seems like, what they told us was that you would have to actively seek work. And if you do that, and if you don’t find a job then everything is fine, and if you find a job that is suitable to you and the money is within reason then you have to take that job.”³² Service Canada has listed conditions on its website as part of the new initiative to encourage those who have previously claimed EI fishing benefits:

You cannot work full time and receive EI fishing benefits. However, you can work part time while receiving fishing benefits. Normally, you can earn up to \$50 per week or 25% of your weekly benefit, whichever is higher. Any money earned above that amount will be deducted dollar for dollar from your benefits.

However, effective August 5, 2012 until August 1, 2015, a new pilot project is in place to encourage workers to accept all available work while on claim. Under the Working While on Claim (WWC) pilot project, once you have served the waiting period, if your earnings are equal to or less than 90% of your weekly earnings that were used to calculate your benefit rate, your benefits will be reduced at a rate of 50% of your earnings each week. Any earnings that exceed this 90% threshold, will be deducted dollar for dollar from your benefits. You must report all gross earnings—that is, earnings before taxes and deductions—during the week you earn them, as well as any other money you receive while collecting fishing benefits.³³

As a result, seasonal fisheries workers became and continue to be uncertain about their futures in the industry. Gaining access to EI benefits had become much more difficult, and with the possibility of no EI benefits being received, workers within the seasonal fisheries in Pictou County would have less money to spend within their

³² Ronnie Heighton, Interview, December 7, 2012.

³³ Service Canada, “Employment Insurance Benefits for Fishers.”

communities, thus damaging the overall local economy of the county. With a large portion of Pictou County's residents involved in the seasonal work that the lobster fishing industry brings, the small businesses within the area would soon begin to feel the effects of a cut off from EI payments within a few short years.³⁴ Responding to the DFO's "The Future of Canada's Commercial Fisheries" discussion document, the same concerns have been voiced by the Independent Core fleet sector organizations. The Independent Core fleet sector represents "the vast majority of license holders and harvesting employment in the Atlantic fishery," which is made up of "10,616 individual license holders, each and every one of them a owner-operator, heading up a small local business."³⁵ They have stated, "Most of the hundred of millions of dollars in landed value that we generate... is spent in our communities: buying in our communities, hiring in our communities, and supporting them in numerous other ways. Our independent fishing enterprises create healthier local economies that are diverse and not single industry in structure."³⁶ The Halifax *Chronicle Herald's* John McPhee reported on what many fishery workers consider to be the unsympathetic, new EI rules, quoting one Herring Cove fisherman as saying, "another nail in the coffin," for the inshore fishery.³⁷ Fishermen of Pictou County stop short of saying that the new EI regulations will be the end of the inshore fishery, but do share negative outlooks with regards to the well being of the local economy and rural communities.

³⁴ Robert Johnson, Interview, August 28, 2012.

³⁵ "Response of Atlantic Canada's Independent Core,"

³⁶ "Response of Atlantic Canada's Independent Core,"

³⁷ John McPhee, "EI changes will 'push us out' of fishery," *The Chronicle Herald*, May 24, 2012, accessed May 24, 2012, <http://thechronicleherald.ca/novascotia/99875-ei-changes-will-push-us-out-of-fishery>.

The Atlantic coast fisheries have been considered a unique industry in terms of the large number of communities “largely or completely dependent on the fishing industry,” as Ernie P. Weeks and Leigh Mazany argued in *The Future of the Atlantic Fisheries* (1983). The existence of many rural communities is because of the small fishery based there and as a result that industry has provided the only employment available – one that requires little education and does not require removal outside of the community to find work.³⁸ Weeks and Mazany’s analysis of Michael Kirby’s investigation on the Atlantic Fisheries in the early 1980s expressed their opinions on EI that was touched on within Kirby’s report. Weeks and Mazany’s argument was that many people across the nation perceive the fishing industry to be more profitable than it actually is, being one of the most regulated industries in Canada. This creates a conflict between the economic efficiency, a feeling of social obligation, and a continuing need for government assistance within the Atlantic fishery.³⁹ Kirby, in *Navigating Troubled Waters*, argued that “any industry so economically and socially entwined in the fabric of a region is bound to be extraordinarily complex.”⁴⁰ Pictou County exemplifies this complexity, given that the county as a whole is now largely focused on subsistence through fishing, especially during the lobster season in May and June. These seasonal workers would turn to other employment in the county during the off-season but with many industries in the county closed, or based on contract work, such as the former Trenton Works, such opportunities no longer exist. Kirby’s Task Force investigation into

³⁸ Ernie P. Weeks and Leigh Mazany, *The Future of the Atlantic Fisheries* (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1983), 1, 7.

³⁹ Weeks and Mazany, *The Future of the Atlantic Fisheries*, 26, 29, 46.

⁴⁰ Michael J. L. Kirby, *Navigating Troubled Waters: A New Policy for the Atlantic Fisheries* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1983), viii.

the Atlantic fishery found that fishermen and plant workers should earn incomes “sufficient to ensure that they do not have to depend on social assistance payments or live on the edge of poverty.”⁴¹ Even with the assistance of EI payments throughout the off-season, many involved in the lobster fishery in Pictou County have struggled, to the present day, to make a living. With the decline in the fishing industry as other fish stocks were depleted, such as cod, the move to shellfish is currently thriving economically – for the province. However, as Kirby noted, the recurring decline in the fishing industry of Nova Scotia is a complex phenomenon, with devastating effects on the small, rural communities.⁴²

There is reason to anticipate that the impact that any future loss of EI benefits for fishery workers will have on the communities of Pictou County will be drastic and hard-hitting. As Richard Apostle has argued, Atlantic Canadian coastal communities are very “open and vulnerable, are exposed to forces beyond their control, and without the buffering role of government support systems they will be left to fend for themselves.”⁴³ Weeks and Mazany contended in the 1980s that the federal and provincial policies of that era were meant to “alleviate unemployment in the Atlantic region,” and had instead, “aggravated the problem in the industry by increasing the demand on fish stocks and lowering average returns to fishermen and processors.”⁴⁴ With the focus now directed towards the shellfish industry and gains for the provincial economy, the same issues are

⁴¹ Kirby, *Navigating Troubled Waters*, 61.

⁴² James Sacouman and H. Veltmeyer, *From the net to the Net* (Aurora, ON: Garamond Press, 2005), 152.

⁴³ Richard Apostle et al., *Community, State and Market on the North Atlantic Rim: Challenges to Modernity in the Fisheries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 3.

⁴⁴ Weeks & Mazany, *The Future of the Atlantic Fisheries*, 28.

occurring again. Lobster stocks have been steadily depleting within the Northumberland Strait, but the economic gains for the province are rising and buyers at the wharves across the county are not offering fishermen any increase in prices for their catch. Kirby's Task Force investigation from 1983 was based on the federal government's concern to "preserve jobs with adequate incomes so that people in the fishery could continue to enjoy the unique lifestyle of rural Atlantic Canada."⁴⁵ Since the inception in 1957, EI benefits have aided the rural communities of Pictou County and provided families with stable incomes. Many seasonal workers have interpreted the changes to employment insurance beginning in 2013 as a lethal threat not only to incomes but also to entire communities and to the overall economy of a county such as Pictou. In this view, as a direct result of the loss of EI payments, many families will not be able to contribute to the local economy and in turn many smaller, local businesses will struggle.⁴⁶

Although EI has aided rural communities and individual families within Pictou County for many decades by providing a form of income support, government and the corporate business world have forgotten about their product providers – those working within the fishery, either on the water or on shore – and what else they could be doing to ensure the fishery is successful and maintains longevity. By 1976, the first "comprehensive" fisheries policy document was released, which was considered to be a major advance for Atlantic Canada as it was now gaining not only recognition, but support from the government. This document was extremely significant to the fishing communities in rural Nova Scotia because it was the first clear recognition from the

⁴⁵ Kirby, *Navigating Troubled Waters*, 65.

⁴⁶ "Response of Atlantic Canada's Independent Core."

federal government that rural fishing communities are vulnerable to decisions that were taken by the government(s) and the fishing industry.⁴⁷ Lamson and Hanson had stated that as a result of this fisheries policy document, the federal government committed itself to mitigate and monitor “the potentially negative community impacts associated with industry restructuring and labour displacement.”⁴⁸ Unfortunately by 1981, the commitment to rural fishing communities was dropped when the policy was revised.⁴⁹ However, over the past few decades the government has tried to work its way back into the Atlantic fishing industry to aid wherever and whenever possible, especially when lobster prices plunged at the beginning of this century. Seeing the prices for lobster drop substantially on the international markets prompted the foundation of the Lobster Council of Canada by stakeholders in the Lobster Working Group (which included members of the DFO, the Fisheries Council of Canada, fishing unions, and other various organizations) during the 2007 Atlantic Lobster Summit held in Halifax, NS.⁵⁰ During this summit, it was recognized that lobster was such a vital resource and industry within Atlantic Canada that it needed its own stakeholder organization to move prominent issues in this specific industry forward – the Lobster Council would become this organization.⁵¹ Marketing had a huge hand in redirecting the world markets back to shellfish products such as lobster, and executive director of the Lobster Council of Canada, Geoff Irvine,

⁴⁷ Hanson, Kasdan and Lamson, “Atlantic Coastal Communities,” 236.

⁴⁸ Hanson, Kasdan and Lamson, “Atlantic Coastal Communities,” 236.

⁴⁹ Hanson, Kasdan and Lamson, “Atlantic Coastal Communities,” 236.

⁵⁰ Canadian Centre for Fisheries Innovation, “Atlantic Lobster Summit: Market realities, Market Challenges and Market Opportunities ‘A Plate to Ocean Approach: conference proceedings, Halifax, October 2007,’” accessed December 2012, <http://www.ccfi.ca/pdf/Lobster/Lobster%20Summit%20Report%20English.pdf>.

⁵¹ “About - Lobster Council of Canada,” accessed June 2012, <http://lobstercouncilcanada.ca/about/>.

stated that this would not be the sole challenge to overcome.⁵² An issue that has persisted since the lobster fishery expanded in Atlantic Canada has also been hindering the progression – an unorganized industry. A level of mistrust has built up over the decades that has caused fishermen to be wary of buyers and dealers within the province, and as a result supply and demand for lobster is mismatched, and problems reoccur with quality control from the sea to the store. As a result, buyers, dealers and fishermen become frustrated with one another, as well as the industry and the government. Fishermen believe these larger players in the industry are taking advantage of them through unreasonable pricing while the market reflects that there is a large profit being made – unfortunately, not by them.⁵³

As the province evolved, the fishing industry in Pictou County fell behind the times. As larger companies moved into the area to buy up the smaller, individually owned fish processing plants, another problem arose. As early as the 1920s, large draggers were a threat to the ecology of the strait and the livelihoods of the local fishing communities, with most draggers owned by larger corporations. These vessels involved in the offshore fishery were a force to be reckoned with, and were years ahead of the inshore fishing industry in Pictou County with regards to the technologies they possessed and the economic impact they had on the province. With industrialization in the area at a high as a result of the Second World War, by the 1950s fleets of offshore vessels were booming, and able to haul in substantial amounts of lobster from the strait in comparison to what inshore fishermen could haul. Another advantage these draggers had over the

⁵² Surette, “Lobster fisheries.”

⁵³ Surette, “Lobster fisheries.”

small, inshore fishing boats was the ability to fish for longer periods of time, and “quick freeze” fresh fish and filet them on board.⁵⁴ As the draggers began to haul lobster after the moratorium was placed on many ground fish species, they quickly reduced stocks available to inshore fishermen. As early as the 1970s, fishery biologists had expressed their concerns that the shellfishery of the province was now also overexploited, and that “poor monitoring had led to few (if any) realistic controls of the resource.”⁵⁵

With a huge reliance on the offshore fleets for economic gains and efficiency in the lobster industry well in the 1980s, Weeks and Mazany had agreed with the continuing need for quotas and licensing that former Fisheries Minister Romeo LeBlanc had initiated in 1977. Strong regulations were to be put in place on catch quotas and a complex licensing scheme that involved boat size and gear classes, applicable to both the inshore and offshore fisheries, but in ways that benefitted both while maintaining lobster stocks.⁵⁶ Weeks and Mazany, while critiquing Kirby’s report, agreed that a quota licensing system should be put in place, and that these quotas should be divisible and saleable, and most importantly, these systems should apply to offshore vessels as well. With an already successful licensing system in place for lobster and crab fisheries, the concern Weeks and Mazany voiced was towards the large offshore fleets during the 1980s.⁵⁷ Kirby also reiterated the impact that the offshore lobster fishery had on the economy, and the “tug of war” between it and the inshore that has continued since Romeo LeBlanc’s policy initiatives in 1977. The Task Force saw the inshore fishery as the “social fishery,” while

⁵⁴ DFO, *The Commercial Fisheries*, 4-6, 122.

⁵⁵ Barrett, “Capital and the State in Atlantic Canada,” 91.

⁵⁶ Barrett, “Capital and the State in Atlantic Canada,” 83, 85, 91.

⁵⁷ Weeks and Mazany, *The Future of the Atlantic Fisheries*, 90-1.

the offshore was seen as the economically efficient option.⁵⁸ Richard Apostle's opinion was that the Task Force did little other than to provide a refinancing package for the offshore sector of the fishery and merge the larger offshore companies into two distinct corporations: National Sea Products in Nova Scotia and Fishery Products International based in Newfoundland.⁵⁹ Weeks and Mazany had agreed with the Task Force's stance that the long-term viability of the fishing industry in Atlantic Canada should be the number one priority. However, Weeks and Mazany argued that any quota license system initiated as a result of the Task Force should apply to midshore and offshore vessels, with limited entry into the fishery. In comparison the Task Force recommended authorizing a certain amount of catching capacity, which would instead control fishermen's vessel and gear type rather than limiting the volume of catch, showing the Task Force in favour of offshore and corporate ownership in the fishery.⁶⁰ Today, this ongoing issue of large corporations and the offshore versus the rural inshore is rising again, but with a new twist in fisheries management in Atlantic Canada.

Recently, federal fisheries and oceans minister Keith Ashfield was put in the spotlight after the DFO released a document on modernizing the fisheries of Canada. An area of concern that sparked great interest to those involved in the inshore fishery in Atlantic Canada was that there was no mention of the current owner-operator and fleet separation policies that protect the small, rural inshore fisheries in Atlantic Canada from

⁵⁸ Kirby, *Navigating Troubled Waters*, 14.

⁵⁹ Apostle et al., *Community, State and Market on the North Atlantic Rim*, 108.

⁶⁰ Weeks and Mazany, *The Future of the Atlantic Fisheries*, 57, 84, 88, 90-91.

large companies “buying up and controlling inshore quota, licenses and processing.”⁶¹

The simplest definitions of these policies are as follows: “Fleet separation prevents a company from both catching and processing seafood, while the owner-operator policy requires the fishing license-holder to catch the fish.”⁶² It is through these policies that inshore fishermen are protected from the total domination of the offshore fishery, and the absence of these policies within the DFO’s new modernization document had prompted alarm in rural communities in Atlantic Canada. A change or elimination of these policies would allow big companies to move in, buy and gain control of all inshore quota, licenses and processing. Ashfield stated, “We can’t simply make things better by appeasing one segment of the fishery based on who makes the most noise,” referring to fishing groups within Atlantic Canada who had voiced their concerns over changes they feared would be proposed.⁶³ Yet if Nova Scotia’s fishery history has conveyed anything, from past events, policies and now the current state the lobster stocks are in, it is that allowing large companies to enter into the industry in the 1920s with little to no restrictions had hurt the industry itself as it progressed over the decades.

Over-exploitation of the lobster stocks in the offshore fishery rippled into the inshore fishery, and rural fishing communities have been dealing with the repercussions and very real threat of decline since the 1970s. Fishermen were fearful of the effects the removal of owner-operator requirements would have on their communities, as well as on the lobster stocks. One fisherman voiced his concerns to CBC news when Ashfield

⁶¹ “Fisheries minister tries to calm industry fears,” *CBC News*, March 7, 2012, accessed March 8, 2012, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/story/2012/03/07/ns-keith-ashfield-fisheries.html>.

⁶² “Fisheries minister tries to calm industry fears.”

⁶³ “Fisheries minister tries to calm industry fears.”

visited Halifax in March 2012, stating that with the removal of owner-operator requirements we will see the lobster fishery “go the way of other fisheries.”⁶⁴ Tony Charles, a joint professor in Management Science and Environmental Science with Saint Mary’s University, voiced his concern over the issue through an op-ed piece in the *Chronicle Herald*: “That should matter to us all because rural life in Atlantic Canada depends on the fishery. Wise use of the wealth we get from the fishery makes the economy healthier and supports many coastal communities. If the government disregards all logic and cuts the most crucial of fishery rules, we may well see communities decimated...”⁶⁵ With a fishery that balances on a thin line of decline or recovery, the future of the lobster industry for many rural communities remained with government officials as they debated the protection of fleet separation and owner-operator policies provided for the inshore industry against the supposed betterment of the Nova Scotia economy as a result of their elimination.

Previously, Ashfield had stated that the discussion on the role of fleet separation and owner-operator policies in the lobster industry had not advanced to a decision. By September 2012 the elimination of these policies was decided against because of the very strong lobbying from fishermen and fishermen’s organizations within Atlantic Canada.⁶⁶ With the elimination of these rules in the Nova Scotia fishery, corporate companies could overrun the fisheries, and similar to how the industry is currently run in British Columbia,

⁶⁴ “Ashfield talks fisheries modernization in Halifax,” *CBC News*, March 9, 2012, accessed March 10, 2012, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/story/2012/03/09/ns-fisheries-ministers-meeting.html>.

⁶⁵ Charles, “Government threatening fishery.”

⁶⁶ MacLeod, “Fishermen cast scorn on reform.”

would leave the rural areas of the province resembling “fishing boat graveyards.”⁶⁷

From the perspective of fishermen, eliminating fleet separation and owner-operator policies would have allowed non-fishermen and corporations the right to own and control licenses and quota, move in to the industry, and take advantage of the recovering lobster stocks and vulnerable coastal communities while endangering or eliminating the livelihoods of rural fishery workers, as has been seen in British Columbia.⁶⁸

With fishermen already fearing for the lobster stocks in the strait, allowing corporations the opportunity to buy up quotas and licenses along the north shore would have been devastating for the industry and the rural communities within Pictou County. With resistance from fishermen across the province, as well as organizations such as Environment Canada and the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council, warnings have been constantly reinforced since the 1970s. A statement from the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council in 2007, cited in a CBC news article, read, “The continuing poor fishing on the Northumberland Strait comes as a report from the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council... warns that serious change is required to protect the remaining lobster resource.”⁶⁹ From the *Chronicle Herald*, Nova Scotia Fisheries Minister Sterling Belliveau was quoted responding to Ashfield, the DFO and the omission of protection policies for inshore fishermen, “This is important to Nova Scotians, this is important to

⁶⁷ Charles, “Government threatening fishery.”

⁶⁸ “Response of Atlantic Canada’s Independent Core.”

⁶⁹ “Another poor year for lobster fishing on the strait,” *CBC News*, July 4, 2007, accessed March 2012, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/story/2007/07/04/lobster-strait.html>.

Atlantic Canada and we need to take the time to make sure things are done right to protect the fishermen and our coastal communities.”⁷⁰

Many believe that coupled with environmental issues, industrialization, globalization and the inability to progress technologically and in tune with the needs of the international markets, the fear is that the lobster industry of the Northumberland Strait could soon become extinct if precautionary measures are not taken up immediately. Despite having been culturally embedded into rural communities, especially within Pictou County, the acceptance of the disintegration of lobster fishing and its importance is a very common and realistic attitude from fishermen that reverberates throughout interviews and secondary sources, which will be examined in the final chapter of this thesis.

In Pictou County, the industrialization of the area prior to, and directly after the Second World War, increased the market for lobster which helped spring the fishery forward to becoming a profitable industry itself, along with the establishment of steel works at Trenton Works, the Pictou shipyard, as well as Michelin Tires in Abercrombie, as key examples. Combined with the environmental issues, as well as the cultural lag and traditional techniques bound to these rural communities, the Pictou County lobster fishery continues to deteriorate. With unstable lobster prices each passing year, and especially so between 1990 and 2012, those involved in the industry in this small part of the north shore have been struggling to make ends meet. Lobster prices at the wharves have varied between \$2.00/lb and \$6.00/lb from buyers over the past three decades – which, compared to the retail value that dealers are marking lobster up to (\$8.00-15.00/lb) in

⁷⁰ “Ashfield talks fisheries modernization in Halifax.”

store, is astounding.⁷¹ Fishery workers are only receiving a small percentage of the \$396 million dollars of landed lobster value that has helped the province's economy. Furthermore, as the Independent Core fleet sector organizations make clear, the main problem inshore fishermen face is the price they are offered for their product, and the main factors affecting that price is "the rise in strength of our dollar and the weak state of the economies of our main export markets - the U.S., Japan and the EU – which account for 78 percent of the value of our exports."⁷² Interviewee Ronnie Heighton expanded on the issue dealing with price:

I'd say catches are going to improve but I don't know if the price is going to improve because we are producing as a whole too many lobsters. And I don't mean in our area but if you look, in Canada alone, we produced roughly 140 million lbs last year [2012] and 125 millions lbs the year before that. So you're looking at 15 million more lbs that went on a market that was depressed by too many lobsters, so unless we can somehow get more people to eat lobsters and create a demand we're gonna be faced with a crisis in price.⁷³

Quoted in a CBC article in 2008, industry consultant Bob Fraser stated, "the current situation is bad news for fishing captains, crews and communities. Culturally, economically and socioeconomically the lobster fishery is the lifeblood of many of our coastal communities in Nova Scotia. So it's not to be dismissed as a small issue."⁷⁴

The last peak period for the fishery of Atlantic Canada was in the late 1950s and early 1960s, following which the slow descent in both ground fish and shellfish stocks

⁷¹ "Fishermen, communities struggle amid sharply lower lobster prices."

⁷² "Response of Atlantic Canada's Independent Core."

⁷³ Ronnie Heighton, Interview, December 7, 2012.

⁷⁴ "Fishermen, communities struggle amid sharply lower lobster prices."

began.⁷⁵ Researchers from various backgrounds blamed this on the over-exploitation caused by the offshore fleets, unregulated fishing well into the late 1960s by the inshore and offshore fisheries, ecosystem damage caused by pollutants and large vessels, and the cultural lag found within Pictou County and across Atlantic Canada. As ground fish stocks became exhausted, there was a shift towards previously “under-utilized species such as herring, lobster and scallops.”⁷⁶ Over-fishing of lobster stocks within the Northumberland Strait was unavoidable once ground fish stocks, such as cod, were placed under a moratorium. As a result, present day fishermen and plant workers along the Northumberland Strait are having a foretaste of their future economy and lifestyles without sufficient incomes from lobster fishing.

During the Kirby Task Force investigation more than two decades ago, the Atlantic Canadian region was in a financial crisis, a trend that seems to have stuck and flowed in to our present day provincial economy. Kirby emphasized that no enterprise was left untouched by the negative economic developments in the fishing industry since 1979. He was also distressed to find that his conclusions from the Task Force investigation were “substantially similar” to those of a Royal Commission report from 1928, displaying that very little had been done over that period to improve the fishery in this region, specifically referring to sales of fish products, an issue that continues today and remains a significant contributor to the current problems the fishery is encountering. Regarding the role the government should play in the fishery, which the Task Force believed should be as a manager of the resource, again the issue that has carried over into present day. The Task Force’s final recommendations centered on the issue of income.

⁷⁵ Pringle, *An Overview of the Lobster Fishery*, v.

⁷⁶ Barrett, “Capital and the State in Atlantic Canada,” 88.

A major recommendation set forth by this Task Force was the “need to preserve jobs with adequate incomes,” as most of the fishermen in Pictou County had incomes near or below the poverty line set for rural Canadians. At a Task Force meeting, one Northumberland Strait fisherman was quoted, “There is no way I could fish if my wife didn’t hold a full-time job.”⁷⁷

Three decades after Kirby’s Task Force recommendations were published, fishermen in Pictou County are at a standstill in what they can do to improve the lobster stocks and increase their profits on their own. Peter John Nicholson, one of the members of Kirby’s 1983 Task Force, remarked, “the fishing industry is ‘the quicksand of the intellectual,’ the more you become involved in attempting to analyze its labyrinth ways, the deeper you become drawn into it.”⁷⁸ Although reports are stating that catches were up in 2012 along the Northumberland Strait, the cost of fuel, licensing, bait and other expenses were also increased, leaving fishermen, especially boat captains, with little income left in their pockets for their families.⁷⁹ With biologist J.D. Pringle stating that it was highly unlikely that catches could ever return to previous maximums in the strait, fishermen may need to seek other forms of employment beyond the seasonal fisheries they are currently involved in.⁸⁰ With the local economies trying to survive throughout this prolonged hardship in Pictou County, fishermen are looking for answers from the DFO, and the provincial and federal governments. Outlooks are grim along the strait with

⁷⁷ Kirby, *Navigating Troubled Waters*, 35, 49, 63, 65, 115.

⁷⁸ Stephen Kimber, *Net Profits: The Story of National Sea* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing Ltd., 1989), 11.

⁷⁹ “Northumberland lobster season ends Saturday,” *CBC News*, June 27, 2012, accessed June 28, 2012, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/story/2012/06/27/ns-lobster-update.html>.

⁸⁰ Pringle, *An Overview of the Lobster Fishery*, 73.

the loss of access to EI benefits, and it will be interesting to see how things continue to progress for the county and the industry, and if the government will react to the feedback they will be receiving from rural Atlantic Canadians over the next several years.

The economy is one of few factors affecting a fisherman's future in the strait. There is also the slow decay that has been occurring within the environment and ecosystems that, at this point, may not be salvageable. The changing environment has taken its toll on the lobster stocks on the north shore, and Pictou County, a region filled with remnants of past industrial booms, is a prime example of how pollutants and over-exploitation can destroy rural coastal communities. The subsequent consequences of the abuse on the ecosystems and the overall environment of the strait in the Pictou County region will be examined in the next chapter. Evidence of pollutants, contamination, disruption in habitats, tides and currents will be discussed, and will unveil how they have impacted the lobster stocks in the strait. When combined with a faltering rural economy, the environmental degradation has eroded the lobster industry in Pictou County and the Northumberland Strait, and continues to do so

Chapter 2: Environmental Impacts on the Central Northumberland Strait and Pictou County's Lobster Industry

The environmental factors that have hindered the growth and progression of the lobster industry in the Northumberland Strait on Nova Scotia's north shore range from pollutants deriving from various industries and from agriculture to over-fishing and the construction of a fixed link between Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. Environmental concerns began to intensify during the 1960s throughout the province, as communal awareness rose among fishermen of the damage being done by point-source contaminants.¹ With a serious decrease in lobster stocks beginning in the late 1980s and continuing well into the 1990s, investigation of the Northumberland Strait and its ecosystems intensified. Scientists began to research how habitat destruction, pollutants in the water and changes in tides affected different species in the central strait region, such as the lobster. As populations increased in Pictou County and as industries grew, such as mining, pollutants began to seep into the strait, contaminating the water, and damaging entire ecosystems and habitats.² These environmental changes that began half a century ago are still affecting the lobster stocks in the present day. A prime example is Northern Pulp, formerly known as Scott Paper, located at Abercrombie Point. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has also conducted its own surveys and assessments of the health of the strait, such as the 2006 EOAR report examining the impact of the Confederation Bridge. The construction of this link was only one factor, as was found in the EOAR report through consultations with stakeholders in the industry throughout Nova Scotia and

¹ Ralph Brinkhurst and H. H. V. Hord, *Canadian Maritime Fisheries: A review to Jan. 1976* (Victoria, BC: Institute of Ocean Sciences, 1976), 14.

² DFO, *Consultations on Ecosystem Overview*, "Points of Broad Agreement or Concern on Issues and Action Priorities."

Prince Edward Island. Earlier decades of human expansion, pollution and growth of industry, as well as over-fishing have played major roles in the deteriorating health of the fish stocks in the central strait region.

Recent reports from both fishermen's unions and associations in the central strait region have observed that the catches are beginning to show signs of improvement. "The centre part of the strait seems to be suffering from a decline that has been impacting them [fishermen] for the last 20 years..." Ronnie Heighton, president of the Northumberland Fisheries Association reported on May 30th, 2012 to Pictou County's, *The News*.³ However, Heighton also expressed some optimism. The repeated urgings of fishermen were finally acted upon in the strait to increase lobster yields and replenish the stocks. Heighton stated, "...a combination of license buyouts, conservation, fishing fewer traps and seeding the lobster grounds are paying off."⁴ With the recovery of lobster stocks a main priority for both fishermen and the DFO, moving forward towards a more productive and revitalized fishery is key, although fishermen will likely never see catches as plentiful as they had been prior to the Second World War. This chapter will investigate the toll that previous decades of disrespect for the health of the strait have taken on the lobster stocks within Pictou County, and how regulations and enforcement have been put in place to slowly revitalize this inshore fishery, as well as the rural communities that rely upon it.

As the lobster fishery struggles to progress in Pictou County and remain a sustainable industry, the accumulation of decades of damage and neglect of the ecosystems within the central Northumberland Strait region have been large contributors

³ "Fishermen Faring Well."

⁴ "Northumberland lobster season ends Saturday."

to the decline in lobster stocks. The explanation lay in part within the fishery itself. For decades, as the population of Pictou County grew and industries began to boom, such as mining, shipbuilding, lumber, and pulp and paper, the drive to feed and support more families grew as well. By the early 1990s, over-fishing had led to an unhealthy over-dependence on the resource. The DFO defined over-dependence as “more people and capacity than the fishery can sustain, meaning high levels of employment and generally low levels of income.” The DFO regarded this over-dependence as being caused by three issues: a social and historical tradition of a “right to fish” among Atlantic Canadians; a lack of economic alternatives; the use of the fishery as the employer of last resort.⁵ In Pictou County, this over-dependence on the resource still exists today, as it did when Gene Barrett and Richard Apostle’s *Emptying their Nets* depicted in 1992 why such dependence developed in small, rural communities. “The districts in Cumberland, Colchester and Pictou on the north shore... all got more than half their income from lobsters.”⁶ With continuing population growth in this rural area during the era following the Second World War, and with employment opportunities currently continuing to decrease, the inshore fishing industry is considered to be a “complex phenomenon,” Sacouman and Veltmeyer argue, because of the devastating effects such small communities encounter in an industry that thrives temporarily, but also declines in a continuous cycle.⁷

⁵ Department of Fisheries and Oceans, *Charting a New Course: Towards the Fishery of the Future: Report of the Task Force on Incomes and Adjustments in the Atlantic Fishery* (Ottawa: Fisheries & Oceans Canada, 1993), 14-15.

⁶ Barrett and Apostle, *Emptying their Nets*, 70.

⁷ Sacouman and Veltmeyer, *From the net to the Net*, 152.

Over-fishing is a significant contributor to the current state of the lobster fishery in the central strait region but this is not without historical precedent. A previous example is the cod fishery, which began to dwindle in the strait by 1926, leading to a move towards other species of ground fish and pelagic species, such as herring, which in turn were also subjected to over-fishing. This resulted directly in the move towards the shellfishery, and more specifically, lobsters.⁸ Lobsters were abundant around the coastlines of the province, and fishermen and companies within the inshore and offshore fisheries began “clear-cutting” these stocks as well.⁹ National Sea Products (NSP) was a prime example of a large, local company making the switch from ground fish to shellfish in Pictou County. As mentioned in Stephen Kimber’s book, *Net Profits*, the company had thirty-eight trawlers in their fleet by 1965, with six more on the drawing board for the future.¹⁰ As the pressure increased on shellfish, NSP’s fleet grew from two trawlers in 1945, to no fewer than forty boats by 1968.¹¹ The federal government did step in during the 1960s and impose quota and sizing restrictions on lobsters that could be caught and sold, but it was too little too late.¹² Thus, the depressed lobster populations in the 1970s would be linked to these vessels and drags by scientists, such as D.J. Scarratt in 1973, through underwater observations.¹³ The management of the fisheries, the resources and the environment, through various forms of conservation on the part of the DFO and rural fishermen, became much more effective during the 1980s, after the Kirby Report made it clear that the previous decades of over-exploitation of fish stocks had had far-reaching

⁸ DFO, *The Commercial Fisheries*, 6.

⁹ Burrill and McKay, *People, Resources and Power*, 63.

¹⁰ Stephen Kimber, *Net Profits*, 132.

¹¹ Brinkhurst and Hord, *Canadian Maritime Fisheries*, 8.

¹² Barrett and Apostle, *Emptying their Nets*, 79.

¹³ Scarratt, *Observations on Lobsters*, 1-2.

consequences.¹⁴ Lobster fishermen in Pictou County still feel the effects of these consequences in the industry today as conservation measures continue to take effect.

More specifically, dragging had long damaged the ecosystems of the strait, even though their impact became critical during the 1960s and 1970s. These techniques were severely destructive ways of fishing that “retarded the growth, productivity, and individual incomes” of the fisheries in the strait.¹⁵ With the introduction of the gasoline engine to rural fishing communities by the early 1910s, draggers were a serious competitor because of their size and their newly increased speed.¹⁶ These vessels were strongly opposed by inshore fishermen and as a result restrictions were placed on their heavy gears. Most were eliminated from the strait in 1929 as a result of the critical damage they had caused to the habitats of various species of shellfish and ground fish.¹⁷ Prior to their expulsion, the vessels were primarily seeking their profits from cod and other pelagic fish stocks within the strait. By the 1930s, the vessels were forced to expand into “under-utilized species,” such as herring, lobster and scallops.¹⁸

Although large dragging vessels outfitted with damaging gear were expelled from the strait’s inshore fishing grounds by the beginning of the Great Depression era, certain dragging gear types remained intact in the inshore fishery, most specifically when scalloping. Gregory Johnson fished lobster in his youth throughout the 1950s and 1960s with his grandfather and later on in adulthood became an avid diver, and had seen for

¹⁴ Barrett, “Capital and the State in Atlantic Canada,” 82-3.

¹⁵ DFO, *The Commercial Fisheries*, 5.

¹⁶ Parks, *The Economy of the Atlantic Provinces*, 50.

¹⁷ DFO, *The Commercial Fisheries*, 6.

¹⁸ Barrett, “Capital and the State in Atlantic Canada,” 88.

himself the damage that had been caused by the larger vessels from decades past along the southern shores of the province:

You can tell where a dragger's been. Fifteen to twenty years would have gone by and maybe even longer than that. I dive, ok, and I've been down, just after draggers have gone by - this is off the south shore - and I've also been down in areas that were dragged years before that ... I don't know how many years, but the local fishermen said around fifteen to twenty years ago... but they even take up the rocks. They just destroy everything; that's going to be lobster habitat, scallop habitat ... and there's just nothing. And it doesn't recover fast. My observation is that draggers should be banned from the face of the world.¹⁹

Similar findings were reported to the DFO during EOAR consultations with central Northumberland Strait region communities in 2006. A diver from the eastern strait region attended a meeting and stated that most sandy areas along the inshore were like "a desert," as no life whatsoever was evident.²⁰ The DFO continued to hear similar reports from other participants during the consultations throughout the central strait region, and the rising concern over present-day scallop dragging. It continues the legacy by destroying lobster habitats through what is called, "flattening out the bottom" with unregulated, very heavy gear types used by larger, more powerful inshore boats.²¹ Even with the elimination of the large draggers fifty years ago, the present day lobster fishery in Pictou County continues to suffer from the activities of fishermen trying to supplement their incomes by also fishing scallops.

¹⁹ Gregory Johnson, Interview, October 19, 2012.

²⁰ DFO, *Consultations on Ecosystem Overview*, "Appendix A."

²¹ DFO, *Consultations on Ecosystem Overview*, "Appendix A."

In the mid 1970s, an investigation by scientists based at the St. Andrews Biological Station in New Brunswick found that lobster populations had been depressed because of the scallop fishing in the inshore area in Pictou County. D. J. Scarratt observed in this specific region of the strait that lobsters were “susceptible to damage from the drags.”²² He recommended that the only form of dragging permitted should be sweep chain, as it could not be operated on rough, rocky bottoms which lobsters prefer and are most commonly found. As he continued his underwater observations, Scarratt also examined the seabeds to compare lobster and scallop populations. The findings stated that the scallops were much more predominant than lobsters, which were extremely scarce, and in areas high in abundance of scallops, no lobsters were found. The few lobsters in these station areas were observed to have their carapaces severely damaged (cracked) from the drags. Scarratt concluded that the extremely poor lobster catches over the past ten years were tied to the scallop dragging that was occurring along the inshore region of Pictou County.²³

Stephen Leahey’s collection of interviews throughout Cumberland County revealed a strong belief among fishermen that a cycle of growth and decline occurred in lobster stocks because the fishery had been so unrestricted and no form of permanent governance or conservation policies existed, for both inshore and offshore fisheries, prior to the Great Depression.²⁴ Fishermen from Pictou County share similar views on the cycles of lobsters, as Jackie Johnson explained:

²² Scarratt, *Observations on Lobsters*, 1.

²³ Scarratt, *Observations on Lobsters*, 1-5.

²⁴ Leahey, *Stories from the Lobster Fishery*, 38.

Lobster are like any other species, there's cycles, and there's humps and hollows in the cycles, and you don't know whether the low part of it is due to man made effects or whether it's just nature. And of course the weather has an awful lot to do with it, and water temperatures. So ...combine it all and it's quite a mixed bag of whatever could happen. But see, I'm trying to think here, probably three times in my lifespan there has been the up and down cycle.²⁵

Cycles in the fishing industry are normal, but in this instance, when combined with over-fishing, with no regulations or conservation measures and steady mass pollutants, it is hard to discern, as Jackie Johnson states, whether or not the "humps and hollows" in lobster stocks are man-made or represent nature taking its course. Harold Elliott from Cumberland County stated, "over-fishing in the 1800s led to a scarcity of lobsters and happened again in the 1920s and later in the 1930s. The 1940s and 1950s were good years for the most part with the lobsters peaking in 1959."²⁶ As the demand for lobster increased during the Second World War, any governance that had existed in the lobster fishery was disregarded. Participants from Leahey's interview collection stated that as a result of this high demand, fishermen began taking berried (egg-laden females) and undersized lobsters. Fortunately, the government had stepped in before the end of the Second World War to place a ban on harvesting berried lobsters and impose size regulations, thus ensuring with this act of conservation that the lobster industry in the central strait region did not disappear altogether.²⁷

William Broidy, owner of Maritime Packers for forty-three successful years before selling the business to National Sea Products in 1966, was also concerned with the

²⁵ Jackie Johnson, Interview, November 1, 2012.

²⁶ Leahey, *Stories from the Lobster Fishery*, 38.

²⁷ Leahey, *Stories from the Lobster Fishery*, 77.

direction the lobster industry was headed. A prominent businessman and significant public figure in Pictou County's lobster industry and overall local economy, Broidy was a member of a government and industry panel that reviewed the lobster industry. He suggested that lobsters were over-fished, and that both the industry and the government should "give the situation serious consideration and endeavor to devise effective measures of conservation to correct the situation."²⁸ As the industry entered the 1970s, fishery biologists felt that the shellfishery had also become overexploited: "poor monitoring led to few (if any) realistic controls of the resource."²⁹ By the 1980s, the fishing industry in Pictou County had seen the collapse of many vital fisheries. Pringle's 1983 report boldly concluded, "...the lobster fishery has collapsed in the Northumberland Strait."³⁰ Inshore fishermen had differed in opinion from DFO scientists, claiming that the resource had been over-estimated; the fishermen were now shown to have been right. To move forward in today's lobster fishery, a healthier relationship needs to be established between the inshore fishermen, and scientists from the DFO. For scientists to gain a systematic way of attaining accurate and reliable data on lobster stocks and other species of fish, this relationship needs to be upheld on both ends: from the inshore sector, and the government.³¹

Thus, over-fishing has played a key role in the decline in lobster stocks.

However, the stress on the environment from pollution and industrial growth has also taken its toll. With new and diverse types of industry developing and formerly established industries expanding throughout Pictou County prior to, and after the war, the

²⁸ *The Lobster Industry: William A. Broidy* (Pictou: Hector Centre Trust, 1980), 17.

²⁹ Barrett, "Capital and the State in Atlantic Canada," 91.

³⁰ Pringle, *An Overview of the Lobster Fishery*, 15, 73, 80.

³¹ DFO, *Charting a New Course*, 16.

accumulation of toxins and pollutants from these sites were making their way to the Northumberland Strait. Whether through run-off, airborne, or dumping pollutants, lobster became susceptible to the bioaccumulation of such chemicals in their bodies and their habitats.³² The continued issue of major pollutants entering the water systems in Pictou County through industries in the area, such as Northern Pulp, represented only one part of the problem. Fishermen in the rural areas of the county have also claimed that a combination of smaller (and unexpected) factors have contributed to the poor health of lobster stocks. Farming and septic run-off are two major contributors to the environmental damage caused to the Northumberland Strait.³³ These concerns evolved quite rapidly throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, with “awareness of damage done by ‘point-source’ contaminations of industrial/domestic waste effluents plus the total effects of land use (i.e.: farming) on water systems.”³⁴ Each of these factors will now be examined more closely in relation to Pictou County’s lobster stocks, with a view to also investigating whether there are any current plans to aid in recovery.

Although Pictou County is known for many forms of industry, there are a few companies that are well known across the province. Northern Pulp, formerly Scott Paper, was established in 1967 at Abercrombie Point, and has been recognized across the Maritimes for more than just producing pulp and paper. The mill has been seen negatively throughout the north shore of the province since its inauguration, and especially within Pictou County. Although the enormous mill presented a prime employment opportunity for some, as well as bringing a new, industrial contributor to the

³² Pringle, *An Overview of the Lobster Fishery*, 18.

³³ Buchanan, “Sea Heritage,” 9.

³⁴ Brinkhurst and Hord, *Canadian Maritime Fisheries*, 14.

local economy, the plant has created pollution and effluent wastes over the past four decades that have caused major problems for the county. The mill became a source of frustration for residents of the Pictou Landing area surrounding the mill, and wreaked havoc on all life forms in and around Boat Harbour and Pictou Harbour, as effluent seeped into the environment of the Northumberland Strait. The provincial government had given permission to the former Nova Scotia Water Authority to re-organize the water infrastructure surrounding Abercrombie Point to meet the needs of Scott Paper in an attempt to appease the company in to making the deal. Boat Harbour was turned into a makeshift waste treatment plant for the effluent from the mill, and the Middle River branch of Pictou Harbour was dammed to create a reservoir of water.³⁵ Boat Harbour was soon beyond salvation. Senior figures at the NS Water Authority, such as John Seaman Bates and Armand Wigglesworth, had planned to improve the water treatment but left the company before any changes were made. Those remaining with the water authority, such as Bates' successor E.L.L. Rowe, refused to install aerators to add oxygen to the waste in an attempt to alleviate some of the issues in the settling pond because of costs.³⁶ Demands and investigations throughout the 1990s would force the provincial government to spend millions of dollars on treatment upgrades and environmental consultants, thus highlighting one of the "worst environmental fiascos ever seen in Nova Scotia."³⁷

When Scott Paper first opened its doors in Pictou County in 1967, an agreement was made with the provincial government that it would take responsibility for any

³⁵ University of King's College Investigative Workshop, "Pulp mill's warm welcome to Pictou County sealed fate of Boat Harbour," April 23, 2009, accessed February 2011, <http://boatharbour.kingsjournalism.com/wordpress/welcome-to-pictou-county1/>.

³⁶ University of King's College, "Pulp mill's warm welcome."

³⁷ University of King's College, "Pulp mill's warm welcome."

effluent the mill created for twenty-five years.³⁸ Located on Pictou Harbour, Scott Paper would use up to 25 million gallons of water a day, which then emerged as a waste, or effluent after use.³⁹ Early environmental studies prior to the opening of the mill indicated that there would be little likelihood of “immediate or direct effects of effluent upon lobsters.”⁴⁰ However, soon after the establishment of the mill, complaints began to arise from fishermen that lobsters were leaving the area surrounding the mouth of Pictou Harbour that intersects with the strait, and east towards Boat Harbour. With the rise of concern from fishermen, as well as many other residents living in the area, testing was done in Boat Harbour, Pictou Harbour and at the harbour’s mouth. Samples taken above the dam at Boat Harbour proved to consist entirely of effluent, with no possibility to support flora or fauna.⁴¹ Along the shoreline, dead periwinkles and barnacles were found, and mudflats no longer supported clams or other shellfish species. Effluent was found to be seeping out beyond Pictou Harbour as a thin layer of film into the Northumberland Strait, and beaches were discoloured and stained as a result. From underwater observations, scientists found excellent lobster grounds along the shoreline, but no presence of any lobsters in these areas.⁴² Any environmental assessments made prior to the construction of Scott Paper were seen as flawed by most residents and community representatives (such as district councillors) throughout the county. Boat Harbour was now a waste treatment lagoon, unable to support life of any kind, and Pictou Harbour,

³⁸ Ross MacFarlane, “Way past time to end Boat Harbour’s sorry saga,” *Chronicle Herald*, February 23, 2012, accessed October 2012, <http://thechronicleherald.ca/opinion/66174-way-past-time-end-boat-harbour-s-sorry-saga>.

³⁹ University of King’s College, “Pulp mill’s warm welcome.”

⁴⁰ Scarratt, *Bleached kraft mill effluent*, 1.

⁴¹ Scarratt, *Bleached kraft mill effluent*, 1-3.

⁴² Scarratt, *Bleached kraft mill effluent*, 3-5.

which was supposed to remain unspoiled by effluent, was also to see devastating effects from the mill.⁴³

In 2005, scientists began investigating Pictou Harbour as a prime site for a study on leukemic cells within mollusks and other shellfish species, based on the amount of pollution found within the harbour. The harbour had been ranked as the fourth-most contaminated harbour in the Maritimes in 2005, and was an excellent site to host such an experiment. With health concerns raised by both municipal (sewage) and industrial (agriculture and pulp mill) contaminants, the environment was found to induce leukemia cells in shellfish. Scientists took healthy blue mussels from Malagash and placed them at fourteen different sites around the harbour to determine what diseases the mussels would contract in this highly polluted environment. The results were unmistakable. The mussels at each of the fourteen sites in the harbour developed leukemia cells. After a six-month period, the mussels caged outside the harbour had shown low prevalence of the cancerous cells, and those caged by the sewage and mill pipelines into the harbour had significantly higher levels of leukemia cells. The quick development of disease in these mussels at various areas in the harbour “reflects the overall health of the aquatic environment.”⁴⁴ The waste and mill effluent affected lobsters and other shellfish species as well. High fecal concentrations were found, as were metals and inorganic compounds within the sediment. More specific to lobsters was the discovery of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in their body tissues. This is an atmospheric pollutant that usually stems from burning fuel that can become carcinogenic, mutagenic or teratogenic: a recipe for cancerous diseases. With several types of industrial and municipal wastes being expelled

⁴³ University of King’s College, “Pulp mill’s warm welcome.”

⁴⁴ S. St-Jean et al., “Detecting p53 family proteins,” 2056-57, 2061, 2064.

into Pictou Harbour, major changes did, and can still, occur in the environment, such as an increased possibility of microbial infections among flora and fauna.⁴⁵ Boat Harbour remains to this day a toxic lagoon, with no responsibility accepted by the former owning companies, Scott Paper, Kimberly Clark, or Neenah Paper. This leaves the current owners, Northern Pulp, in a constant state of borderline-bankruptcy while trying to solve forty years worth of environmental problems and salvage the business and relationships with the surrounding communities at the same time. The provincial government has sunk millions of dollars into the mill since the 1970s in attempts to rectify the decades of neglect, while deadlines to clean up or close Boat Harbour as a waste treatment facility are continuously delayed, most recently until 2030.⁴⁶

While the remnants of Scott Paper further compromise the health of the life forms of the strait, it is not the only form of pollution that has damaged lobster stocks. Agriculture and septic waste run-off also plays a very large role. Decades of reports from environmental agencies as well as local residents, especially fishermen, have stated that run-off from farming along the coastline in Pictou County has caused serious issues with lobster stocks. With concerns on the rise since the late 1960s, there has been an increased awareness of the damage that has been done by point-source contaminants such as agricultural land-use and septic run-off into water systems.⁴⁷ Working groups from the DFO had collected substantial information from stakeholders regarding such instances within Pictou County relating to the deteriorating health of the strait. As noted in the

⁴⁵ S. St-Jean et al., “Detecting p53 family proteins,” 2064.

⁴⁶ University of King’s College Journalism Students, “Boat Harbour: On toxic pond,” *The Coast*, April 23, 2009, accessed February 2011, <http://www.thecoast.ca/halifax/on-boat-harbours-toxic-pond/Content?oid=1108487>.

⁴⁷ Brinkhurst and Hord, *Canadian Maritime Fisheries*, 14.

Working Group Report: Northumberland Strait Ecosystem Initiative, Habitat and Resource Protection document released by the DFO in 2007, researchers had “undertaken a reality check against what the concerns are amongst those who actually live and work in the environment in question. Sometimes their perceptions are more intuitive and valuable, especially where there is a lack of historical data upon which to base estimates and projections of change.”⁴⁸ Also, substantial findings from the DFO’s 2006 EOAR report on the state of the ecosystems in the strait reinforce what local fishermen along the strait are seeing, from the central north shore of Nova Scotia as well as PEI.

The EOAR report allowed stakeholders in the inshore fishery to voice their concerns through meetings and consultations held in locations along central north shore Nova Scotia and central PEI, thus allowing the DFO to gain local insight into environmental degradation and declines in shellfish and ground fish stocks in the strait. All groups that voiced their concerns during the thirteen consultations with EOAR noted two key problem areas. The first was related to the impact the Confederation Bridge has had on the ecosystems of the strait and secondly was the concern over an increase of “contaminants in the water column related to run-off and effluent from land-based activities.”⁴⁹ Bruce and Deneen Ferguson stated their concerns to the EOAR over the “negative impacts of sedimentation and eutrophication resulting from nutrient run-off from large-scale agriculture,” while other residents of PEI voiced concerns over pollutants such as pesticides, sediments and herbicides entering the strait.⁵⁰ Overall

⁴⁸ Department of Fisheries and Oceans, *Working Group Report: Northumberland Strait Ecosystem Initiative, Habitat and Resource Protection* (Ottawa: Department of Fisheries and Oceans, 2007), 7.

⁴⁹ DFO, *Consultations on Ecosystem Overview*, “Executive Summary.”

⁵⁰ DFO, *Consultations on Ecosystem Overview*, “Appendix C.”

water quality was a major concern shared by all who attended the EOAR consultations and those who had participated in the Working Group report. Stakeholders listed several causes for the deteriorating water quality in the central Northumberland Strait: “general population growth, inappropriate farming, forestry and road building practices, industrial effluents, and municipal sewage flows and inadequate private septic systems.”⁵¹ The Working Group report found, “Stakeholders from around the Strait reported that the water quality is deteriorating and that this trend is accelerating... Increased contaminants in the water column related to runoff and effluent from land-based activities.”⁵² Run-off is a very urgent issue for residents of the central strait region, and Pictou County’s heavy industrial sector is holding back the recovery of the inshore lobster fishery.

The point is confirmed by the observations of fishermen Robert Johnson and Jackie Johnson. Both have fished out of Toney River over the course of their careers in the fishing industry, and have noticed the severe impact that large-scale farming has had on the ecosystems of the strait region of Pictou County. They offered similar views when asked about environmental trends during their lifetime. Robert Johnson, who also has his own small-scale beef farm (used for self-subsistence), discussed a specific instance of the effects large-scale farming had on the strait, not far from Toney River wharf:

I forget what year it was... well it was the early 2000s. ...Gerald Battist was farming a whole bunch of old farms along the shore, and he used a lot of fertilizer and stuff and as I said, the run off; there was one area where we always used to

⁵¹ DFO, *Consultations on Ecosystem Overview*, “Points of Broad Agreement or Concern on Issues and Action Priorities.”

⁵² DFO, *Working Group Report*, 8.

get a lot of lobsters, and that spring there was absolutely nothing there. One strip of upper bottom, and there was just nothing.⁵³

Concerns about agricultural run-off expressed by a fisherman whose family has also been involved in farming for almost a century, reinforced how important responsible farming is for the benefit of the inshore fisheries. Jackie Johnson, now retired from fishing, reiterated these concerns, but also further emphasized the harm done by spraying agricultural crops and trees in the rural coastal areas of the county, as well by unregulated septic systems:

As far as pollution goes it's hard to follow, but... my personal opinion is that an awful lot of pollutants come from pesticides that are sprayed on the land, and I think that's probably the biggest problem that I can see on the Northumberland Strait here... And another thing there is for years there had been very little restriction on septic systems, along the shore, like cottagers and so on ... I don't want to be picking on them either but it's true. Now there's restrictions, septic systems are modernized and it's a lot better than it once was.⁵⁴

These fishermen highlight two distinct facets of the continuing crisis in the central strait region in Pictou County with regard to pollutants from onshore industries. As fishermen, they have an accurate sense of what is happening to the ecology of the sea, as well as the land, that should be taken into account. Holly Buchanan had also investigated fishing histories in Pictou County in the late 1990s for her MA thesis at Concordia University, and found similar viewpoints from fishermen in Caribou. Buchanan described agriculture and septic run-off as large issues in that area of the strait. She also

⁵³ Robert Johnson, Interview, August 28, 2012.

⁵⁴ Jackie Johnson, Interview, November 1, 2012.

referred to road development, and how fishermen noticed when the roads began to be paved and salted, the fish would become scarce.⁵⁵ Salt from the roads was also mentioned as a cause in water deterioration, as was pesticides and herbicides from forestry, not just agriculture, by stakeholders during the EOAR consultations with the DFO. Stakeholders also mentioned industrial and municipal pollutants, such as mill effluent and sewage waste, during a consultation in Pictou County. At this meeting, the DFO was informed of the waste from Trenton Works, a formerly prominent steel and car works plant, seeping into the East River and making its way through the upper towns to the strait, joining with other industrial pollutants, such as waste from the dump, and discharge from the power plant.⁵⁶ The cumulative effect of these environmental degradations throughout the county is placing the future of the lobster fishery in great jeopardy as the health of the strait continues to deteriorate. Having conducted these consultations and presented the findings in 2006, the DFO found itself to be “in a conflict of interest as both a steward of resources and a revenue generator.”⁵⁷ Solutions offered during the consultations with the DFO for the EOAR report require large amounts of scientific research, and millions of dollars in funding for clean-up that have no obvious sources of revenue to draw upon in the currently constrained economic and fiscal climate. Fishermen and residents are left to cope with continuing deterioration.

As a past president and board member of the Northumberland Fishermen’s Association, Jackie Johnson has heard complaints from fishermen even well beyond the boundary lines of Pictou County. He discussed the issues that many fishermen have had

⁵⁵ Buchanan, “Sea Heritage,” 9, 15.

⁵⁶ DFO, *Consultations on Ecosystem Overview*, “Appendix A.”

⁵⁷ DFO, *Consultations on Ecosystem Overview*, “Appendix A.”

at the western end of the strait, from Tidnish to Pugwash and Wallace, and how they have been hit hard with the decline in lobster stocks in recent years:

I have talked to fishermen buddies of mine up there that say that... 'cause lobster fishing, the further west you go in the strait the worse it is, the spring fishery anyways. They're blaming it on everything from, you know, salt mining to agriculture, pollution... In this here particular area they never went as low as they did in the western Northumberland Strait, so we're seeing a little bit of an increase in the catches in the last few years. Now, they are very slow to rebound in the west in the spring fishery, now in the fall fishery they tell me they are seeing some signs of improvement, and once again they have - the west end of the strait - has the big topic of the fixed link... So, there was a lot of blame put on that at first, but now fishermen that I talked to in the last few years are saying it's kind of reviving itself and things are looking better around the fixed link. Now that's west of it. To the east is the lowest catches recorded in the Northumberland Strait in the last number of years.⁵⁸

As noted by Johnson, the Confederation Bridge occupies a special place in debates about the lobster fishery. When the fixed link was proposed in the 1980s, residents and fishermen from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and PEI were up in arms. The winning contractor, SCI (Strait Crossing Inc.) was required to conduct research and environmental impact assessments prior to the construction of the bridge, and hand over all findings to the government. Residents were afraid of the effects the bridge would have on “employment loss, the environment, negative impacts to the fishery and agriculture...” and had cast strong “NO” votes to the construction of the bridge.⁵⁹ SCI's bridge

⁵⁸ Jackie Johnson, Interview, November 1, 2012.

⁵⁹ Copthorne Macdonald, *Bridging the Strait: The Story of the Confederation Bridge Project* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1997), 14.

developers were aware of the issues that might directly impact the fisheries from the construction and permanent fixture of this massive link, and a ten million dollar fund was “set up to compensate those in the fishing industry whose livelihood was temporarily affected by the bridge construction activities.”⁶⁰ According to many fishermen, such as Robert Johnson, no one has ever seen any compensation from this fund: “At the time there was supposed to be money set aside for, like if it affected the fisheries and all this stuff, but nobody ever saw five cents of that. That just kind of all got forgotten I think.”⁶¹

As SCI readied for construction, groups such as Friends of the Island took the contractor to court, thus slowing the project to a halt in 1992. FEARO (Federal Environmental Assessment Review Office) was hired to review all reports and assessments that had been completed by SCI to ensure that all requirements and standards were met. It listed numerous potential threats to fisheries: “effects on marine and terrestrial plants and animals; changes in tides, currents, and inshore dynamics; changes in ice climate, including formation and break up; physical interference with commercial fishing activities; and socio-economic effects within the region and on particular communities (ex. regional industrial benefits, and effects on ferry workers and fishers).”⁶² Yet, having already evaluated and prepared its own environmental investigations into the effects that the bridge would have on both eco- and socio-economic systems, SCI had fully demonstrated its devotion to the protection of the environment in the view of the

⁶⁰ Macdonald, *Bridging the Strait*, 14.

⁶¹ Robert Johnson, Interview, August 28, 2012.

⁶² Macdonald, *Bridging the Strait*, 51.

Minister of Public Works and received approval to begin construction.⁶³ Friends of the Island had no further leverage in their cause and their appeal was denied.

During and after the construction of the fixed link, a variety of severe problems arose for the fisheries in the Northumberland Strait. Opened in 1997, the bridge still affects the fishing industry today. By 2006, the DFO's EOAR consultations throughout the central strait region had accumulated a vast amount of information regarding the negative effects that fishing communities have encountered since the link was made. The stakeholders were asked to provide insight so that the EOAR and DFO could be made aware of the priority areas for research and corrective action. With regard to the Confederation Bridge, stakeholders from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and PEI all shared the same concerns. Overall, the negative impact on various species of fish is severe from the east side of the bridge (Cumberland County) to the central strait region (Pictou and Antigonish counties), because of removal and displacement of sediment and silt during construction. Water quality, habitat destruction, changes to tides and currents also have become prominent issues which coincide with the construction of the bridge in the early 1990s, and matters have continued to deteriorate.⁶⁴ Action that had been strongly called for during the consultations included ongoing water quality testing and bathymetric mapping throughout the central strait to determine what impact the bridge has had, and if it continues to do so in present day.⁶⁵ Fishermen throughout Pictou County have felt that the fixed link has crippled the lobster fishery, as argued by many at the consultations in 2006, including Robert Johnson:

⁶³ Macdonald, *Bridging the Strait*, 18.

⁶⁴ DFO, *Consultations on Ecosystem Overview*, "Executive Summary."

⁶⁵ DFO, *Consultations on Ecosystem Overview*, "Points of Broad Agreement or Concern on Issues and Action Priorities."

I always blame that for us losing a lot of lobsters. I think it disrupted the tides some how or another, the tides and the ice used to come down through there. They put the bridge in and them big piles in and stuff, to hold it... I think that they shifted the current somehow and it was just about that time that they started getting all the lobsters on the north side of PEI... I think it went around [the current]. And there was an awful pile of silt and stuff come down when they were building that, didn't affect us near as bad as it did up Wallace and Pugwash and that way, but I think it still affected it... Well I'll tell you, I have no idea if this is right or not, seems like the tide hit there [Confederation Bridge], went around the north side [of PEI], down the north side of the island, and then maybe it swirled in, and where they're getting all the lobsters, like Boat Harbour, Lismore, down in the bay, like down around Cape George, maybe that's tides, maybe that's why they're getting so many.⁶⁶

Robert Johnson's concerns regarding negative impacts on the tides and currents in the strait were not speculative. With thirty years of experience lobster fishing, Johnson, as well as most fishermen in the county, feel the same way about the bridge and have an intimate sense of and connection with the ebb and flow of this environment. As mentioned previously, Jackie Johnson spoke of fishermen east of the bridge, from Tidnish to Wallace, suffering from a decline even worse than that experienced by lobster fishermen of Pictou County.⁶⁷ Stakeholders at the 2006 consultations also spoke on changes in tides and currents, and the effects on the lobster fishery. Many people who participated in the consultations spoke of issues with the tides in the Northumberland Strait, and noted that the strait is no longer flushing out effectively, resulting in deteriorating water quality and the accumulation of toxins and sediment. Furthermore,

⁶⁶ Robert Johnson, Interview, August 28, 2012.

⁶⁷ Jackie Johnson, Interview, November 1, 2012.

fishermen near the fixed link have noticed an increase in currents specifically at the bridge, but they are not flowing down into the strait as they used to. It was further emphasized that the water in the central strait region (Pictou County) is too warm, and lobsters that would previously migrate through the strait, from east to west, are no longer doing so because of the temperature changes. Stakeholders insisted that testing on water temperatures be a top priority so that action can be taken before the lobsters no longer migrate through the strait and the fishery collapses.

Toney River was host to one of the thirteen consultations, allowing many of the rural fishermen to bring their hands-on experiences with these negative impacts to the attention of the EOAR team. One such example is the change in water depths. Outside Toney River wharf at depths of forty to fifty feet there is nothing on the sea floor as a result of increased sedimentation. Statistics from 1997 show lobster landings in Toney River at 30,000 lbs per boat, whereas at the time of the consultations it had significantly, and devastatingly, dropped to 3,300 lbs per boat.⁶⁸ For a report completed in 1996 on behalf of the Marine Environmental Effects Monitoring Advisory Committee, a group made up of independent researchers and consultants hired by the DFO, license holders throughout the strait were interviewed and gave their individual accounts of the issues within the strait since the construction of the bridge. License-Holder No: 160196-21 stated, “My lobster landings increased 400 pounds with 50 less traps from 1993 to 1994, but I had a decrease of 3000 pounds with the same number of traps in 1995.”⁶⁹ License-Holder No: 160196-20 further described the decline: “I found a big difference in the

⁶⁸ DFO, *Consultations on Ecosystem Overview*, “Appendix A.”

⁶⁹ CAFA Fisheries Consultants, Inc., “Impact on Traditional Fisheries by the Rock Infill Temporary Work Surface (TWS) and Bridge Construction, Northumberland Strait Crossing Project,” Report No: BPFA.6.01 (Waverley, NS: The Consultants, 1996), 9.

whole three fisheries (lobster, herring and scallop) due to siltation of the traps and nets. There was also, I feel due to the TWS (Temporary Work Surface), a dramatic increase in the tides and currents from 1994 to 1995.”⁷⁰ With the opening of the bridge in 1997, it is hard to deny the existence of a link between it and the decline in lobster stocks. Over a decade later, fishermen, lobster stocks and local economies are still recovering from the construction of the Confederation Bridge and the long-lasting negative outcomes it has had on the Northumberland Strait.

The ecology and environment of the strait has changed drastically, and its overall health is in dire need of attention and aid. The pollutants that have derived from the heavy industrialism within Pictou County’s economy over the past century are evident as the ecosystems and marine life continue to deteriorate alongside the lobster fishery. With stocks over-exploited, the current lobster fishery suffers from clear-cutting and past over-dependence on the resource, as is shown from the DFO Working Group’s 2007 report, finding that “lobster landings in the central Strait declined by 61% between 1990 and 2004.”⁷¹ Fishermen’s first-hand accounts of the issues they have encountered provide excellent data for organizations, such as the DFO, to further research so that solutions can be proposed to reclaim the lobster fishery for these rural communities. Although the DFO has collected local knowledge from those involved in the fishing industry in the central strait region, deadly toxins continue to work their way into the ecosystems of Pictou County while the DFO leaves communities in the dark about future plans for action. The lobster industry struggles against the present-day repercussions of past negligence from those involved in the inshore fishery, environmental degradation

⁷⁰ CAFA Fisheries Consultants, Inc., “Impact on Traditional Fisheries,” 9.

⁷¹ DFO, *Working Group Report*, 8.

and the construction of the fixed link. Rural communities such as those of Pictou County can greatly benefit from a healthy and strong marine environment as the Working Group observed in noting that, “Beyond its economic functions, a healthy marine ecosystem is an integral support for local culture and identity and for the quality of life in adjacent communities.”⁷² The cultural dimension is crucial, and so the next and final chapter of this thesis will examine the culture of the region in relation to how the decline in lobster has impacted the rural fishing communities of the county, and will consider whether a strong, tradition-based way of life supported by rural fishing subsistence can continue to exist in this small north shore region of Nova Scotia

⁷² DFO, *Working Group Report*, 10.

Chapter 3: The Impact of the Lobster Fishery on the Culture of Pictou County

Tradition and values have shaped Pictou County's fishing communities into a unique region of Nova Scotia, owing in part to the profound cultural influence of the lobster fishery. The lobster fishery is one of the strongest sectors of county's north shore fishing industry and has had a significant impact on the way of life of many of the residents in this rural area of the province. Sociologist Peter Sinclair has examined a frequently reiterated concern many fishermen expressed during interviews carried out in earlier oral histories. Discussing issues pertaining to rural fishing communities throughout Atlantic Canada, Sinclair found that "the inshore fishery itself began to lose its homogeneous character as some fishers acquired more advanced and expensive technologies," beginning in the later 1940s and into the 1950s.¹ The loss of traditions and distinct skills and values is a real threat to many of the rural fishermen in the north shore region of Nova Scotia as the modernization of the 21st century gradually transforms this unique culture that has been built over a century. Furthermore, sociologist William Ogburn's cultural lag theory is examined to determine if a link can be made to the decline in rural Atlantic Canadian fishing communities. As Richard Apostle has argued, "the fisheries are particularly interesting and problematic because they are more than economies. They supply income and employment... but also identities, values and meaning."² The complex fishing communities of Pictou County will be examined in this chapter to determine the effects that cultural lag, ongoing development and integration of

¹ Sinclair, "Chapter 6: Atlantic Canada's fishing communities," 92.

² Apostle et al., *Community, State and Market on the North Atlantic Rim*, 19.

technologies, and the clash of traditions and value systems have had on the lives of rural Northumberland Strait fishermen, their families, and their communities.

As Gene Barrett and Apostle stated, “fishing is the lifeblood of more than 1300 small communities and ‘influences the social fabric of many coastal, rural areas.’”³ In Pictou County, fishing is more than a livelihood and individuals who enter the industry learn not only the work but also other traditions and values. Fishermen have no start or end times to their work day, and although the lobster season in Pictou County begins in May, fishermen work year long preparing their gear, whether that means painting or replacing buoys, checking the boat engine for technical issues, or repairing traps. Fishermen are connected to each other through the many decades of family associations in their communities, and the shared experiences of fishing, both negative and positive. Viewed this way, any disruption to the fishery poses fundamental challenges to both individual families and to their communities. The sociological theory of cultural lag can be applied to the rural fishing communities of Pictou County to explain tensions that have emerged, as well as to determine whether these communities may have used cultural lag as an excuse to delay progress and to uphold traditions.

Sociologist William F. Ogburn introduced the concept of cultural lag in 1922, in connection with his more general theory on technology, inventions, innovations and culture. Cultural lag, for Ogburn, occurred over an extended period, “when one of two parts of a culture which are correlated changes before or in greater degree than the other part does thereby causing less adjustment between the two parts than existed

³ Barrett and Apostle, *Emptying their Nets*, 5.

previously.”⁴ His major contribution to sociology, technological determinism, had four stages: invention, accumulation, diffusion, and adjustment. Cultural lag emerged out of the final stage, adjustment, as this aspect of technological determinism focused on “the process by which the non-technical aspects of a culture respond to invention, and any retardation of this adjustment process causes cultural lag.”⁵ Ogburn declared cultural lag also required the following four steps:

the identification of at least two variables; the demonstration that these two variables were in adjustment; the determination by dates that one variable has changed while the other has not changed or that one has changed in greater degree than the other; that when one variable has changed earlier or in greater degree than the other, there is a less satisfactory adjustment than existed before.⁶

Ogburn also compared materialistic and non-materialistic societies and cultures and their specific group values – an aspect with a great deal of relevance to Pictou County’s rural fishing communities – and found that non-materialistic cultures are slow to change because of their emotional attachment to both their values and traditions.⁷

Wallace argued in his introduction to *Sociological Theory* that “...material culture changes force changes in other parts of culture such as social organization and customs, but these latter parts of culture do not change as quickly. They lag behind the material culture changes...”⁸ Ogburn noted that “the extent of lag will vary according to the nature of the cultural material, but may exist for a considerable number of years during

⁴ Duncan, *William F. Ogburn*, 86.

⁵ “The Cultural Lag Theory: The Sociology of Educational Technology.”

⁶ Duncan, *William F. Ogburn*, 89.

⁷ Ogburn, *Social Change*, 263-64.

⁸ Walter Wallace, *Sociological Theory* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 23.

which time there may be said to be a maladjustment...,” and that, “ a large part of our environment consists of the material conditions of life and a large part of our social heritage is our material culture.”⁹ In relation to the rural communities in Pictou County reliant on fishing, the traditions and values that these small, close-knit communities share are seen as more important than any material objects or progressive technologies that may enter from exterior societies (such as urban areas within the province). Community members in the county try to uphold tradition and are trapped in the mindset of a simpler “way of doing things,” which, according to Ogburn’s theory, keeps these rural members of the county from progressing forward, or, adjusting.¹⁰

In turn, what Ogburn calls the cultural “adjustment” to material conditions (such as inventions and technologies) is much more complex and involves much more than just the traditions and values of rural communities such as those within Pictou County. It also includes the “folk ways” and social institutions that are melded into an individual culture.¹¹ Ogburn argues that the slowness of a culture to change stems from “a traditional hostility, inherent in the mores, towards the new....” and “the phrase ‘ways of doing things’ is a generalized characterization of a large part of non-material culture.”¹² Overall, social organization, customs and morals are the means of a large part of non-material culture.¹³ This body of theory helps to explain the inability of rural areas, such as Pictou County’s fishing communities, to utilize new, more efficient technologies because they are small, non-materialistic societies. Environment Canada also commented

⁹ Ogburn, *Social Change*, 201-02.

¹⁰ Ogburn, *Social Change*, 271.

¹¹ Ogburn, *Social Change*, 203.

¹² Ogburn, *Social Change*, 170, 271.

¹³ Ogburn, *Social Change*, 271.

in 1976 that the status of rural fishing communities throughout Atlantic Canada were characterized by “tradition, a scarcity of choices and opportunities and in some cases, an over-commitment of social resources (that) frequently tend to immobilize fishermen in these places.”¹⁴ Many fishermen throughout various sources of literature and interviews expressed similar sentiments, speaking on the hindrances to the fishery from newer technologies, such as depth readers or sonar devices curtailing conservation measures, the reliance on the traditional ways of fishing, as well as the importance of retaining the unique culture that has existed in these communities for well over a century. Rural fishing communities have hindered themselves through their unwillingness to move forward technologically and methodologically through the adaptation and full integration of newer techniques in fishing, as tradition plays a role in guiding their decisions. Ogburn spoke of this as “resistance of culture to change... caused by habit, love of the past, and various utilities of the old culture.”¹⁵

Ogburn also hypothesized that urban areas of a society adapted more rapidly and accepted and integrated new technologies and inventions that arose throughout the decades.¹⁶ Ogburn argued, “...it is very easy to see how geographical isolation may act as a barrier to the introduction of new cultural ideas. A culture completely isolated would depend for change on inventions within itself.”¹⁷ As Ogburn explains, physical location acts as an invisible barrier, which slows down progress with respect to what inventions, tools and techniques are available to rural areas such as Pictou County, thus causing a

¹⁴ Environment Canada, *Policy for Canada's Commercial Fisheries* (Ottawa: Environment Canada, 1976), 17.

¹⁵ Ogburn, *Social Change*, 259.

¹⁶ Duncan, *William F. Ogburn*, 95.

¹⁷ Ogburn, *Social Change*, 162.

disruption, or what Ogburn calls a lag. “Seasonality, isolation, primitive equipment, uncertainty of catch and income, physical hardship and risk and limited social and other cultural opportunities...” were characteristics listed by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in 1956 as threatening the viability of employment in the fishery.¹⁸ However, the portion of Ogburn’s theory that discusses geographic location as a physical barrier does not correlate well in the case of Pictou County. With an increase in infrastructure and communications today, fishermen with a desire to attain new parts, gear or devices only available outside of their community, can do so much more easily than the previous generations.

As a comparative analysis to Pictou County, Stephen Leahey’s book of oral histories from the neighbouring Cumberland County region (further west on the Northumberland Strait) touches on such examples of cultural lag and technology frequently. Fred Brownell from Malagash recalled that before mechanical haulers were used in that area, boat captains and hired helpers had to haul the traps hand over hand back into the boat. Brownell had a hauler on order by the 1940s, and it arrived while he was out fishing; his helper was ecstatic.¹⁹ Haulers had been invented decades earlier than when Brownell acquired his own in the 1940s, and it continued to be the standard equipment available in rural areas until the 1980s. This exemplifies the reality of how long a technology takes to arrive, and become outmoded in these small fishing communities all along the coastline of the Northumberland Strait. However, in this case, the mechanical hauler was a very simple and useful tool that worked well for fishermen along the Northumberland Strait, and therefore did not require them to seek out a new

¹⁸ DFO, *The Commercial Fisheries*, 121.

¹⁹ Leahey, *Stories from the Lobster Fishery*, 13-15.

way to haul their traps. It was an innovation that would decrease the hard work fishermen had, but unfortunately it did not reach most of the smaller, rural fishing communities along the strait until the Second World War. Several of Leahey's interviewees also mentioned the simple technique of grappling the bottom, long before sounders or sonar were introduced.²⁰ One of the current project's interviewees, Jackie Johnson, also explained the use of grappling the bottom in search of the best lobster grounds. The trick he was taught was to use a grapnel (a long pole with a hook, most commonly used for hooking buoys), and place a greased lead weight on the end. If the lead weight touched a sandy bottom, the sand would stick to the grease and the fishermen would know to move on from that area.²¹ Gregory Johnson also was taught the grappling technique, but the lead weight was covered in bacon fat.²² Although technologies such as sounders and haulers are excellent examples of the lobster fisheries' movement forward, many fishermen did not attain and integrate them immediately, and continued to use simple methods such as the grappling technique. The fishing communities along the strait had begun to see economic gains as a result of the increase in the fishery throughout the county as early as the end of the Great War and well after the 1940s, but would continue to use the tools, techniques and technology they had because, quite simply, they met their needs and worked well for many decades.

Fishermen in the Pictou County region expressed a sense of anguish regarding the integration of, or their constant bombardment by, new technologies. As Ogburn put it many years ago, this "technological assault" on fishermen and rural communities is

²⁰ Leahey, *Stories from the Lobster Fishery*, 15, 59-60.

²¹ Jackie Johnson, Interview, November 1, 2012.

²² Gregory Johnson, Interview, October 19, 2012.

never-ending, and there is no limit to the technologies an enterprise, whether rural inshore or commercial, can use to locate and catch fish.²³ Ronnie Heighton, an interviewee for the current project, did recognize that new technology can be useful when fishing, especially in certain situations. When asked if newer technologies are a hindrance, he answered, “Well no, it’s great help, especially fishing at night for herring, or foggy days, that’s when the technology really shows up, you know. You’re accurate within a few feet.”²⁴ He also commented, however, that he normally relies on the techniques his father taught him in the 1960s because it is quicker for him to look for landmarks than to check his plotter to determine his location on the strait.²⁵ Even though many fishermen in this region feel overwhelmed by the technology that is available to them today, in the future they may have to move past these feelings to ensure that the livelihood they love and respect remains intact. The following quotation from the DFO in 1993 combines Heighton’s comments with a progressive outlook for the lobster fishery, if it is to move forward in the central strait region: “Tomorrow’s fishery will demand a responsible and professional approach to the harvesting of fish that will demand a responsible use of appropriate technology.”²⁶ Fishermen must learn to integrate technology, to a certain degree, to ensure that a prosperous fishery continues.

As Robert Johnson made clear, however, technology is also a primary cause for the decline of lobster stocks in the Northumberland Strait. “Another thing that hurts the lobster stocks is technology, sounders and GPS’s and stuff... there’s not a spot on the bottom where you don’t know if there’s a rock... the lobster doesn’t have a chance. See

²³ DFO, *Charting a New Course*, 63.

²⁴ Ronnie Heighton, Interview, December 7, 2012.

²⁵ Ronnie Heighton, Interview, December 7, 2012.

²⁶ DFO, *Charting a New Course*, 63.

back when I started we had nothing. We had a compass.”²⁷ Holly Buchanan discovered the same sentiments from fishermen in Caribou during her thesis research during the 1990s. The integration of new technology became a problem, with the sounder frequently mentioned as an example: “Lobsters don’t have a chance of hiding anymore.”²⁸ Fishermen in Cumberland County in Leahey’s collection of interviews made essentially identical statements.²⁹ Experienced, traditional fishermen also noted that they prefer the conventional, smaller wooden lobster trap with the arched bows in comparison to the wire traps most commonly used today, because of their simplicity, cost of production, and size.³⁰



Figure 1: Wire and wooden lobster traps. (Photograph by Caitlin Johnson)

The major concern fishermen share over the larger wire traps in Pictou County is that

²⁷ Robert Johnson, Interview, August 28, 2012.

²⁸ Buchanan, “Sea Heritage,” 29.

²⁹ Leahey, *Stories from the Lobster Fishery*, 36.

³⁰ Robert Johnson, Interview, August 28, 2012.

because of the trap size larger lobsters are being caught which would be better left at large for spawning, thus enhancing the lobster larvae populations for the future. A fisherman voiced his concerns over the enormous wire traps to Holly Buchanan during his interview: “What they are doing is killing the goose that is laying the golden egg.”³¹ With a current trap limit of 280 per boat, recently reduced from 300 as an act of conservation by the DFO, the size of traps has grown to the maximum legal limit. Robert Johnson explained the difference between wire and wooden traps used today in the Pictou County region, and how detrimental larger traps are to the lobster population. “Most of them are four feet, but some of them are 27 inches wide and I have 21 inch,” he stated; “the 27-inch ones don’t catch any more lobsters when there’s no lobsters, but when there is more they’ll really clean up. A 21-inch trap will work just as good as a 27-inch trap. You know, it just won’t hold as much.”³² Such examples prove that Ogburn’s cultural lag theory is not fully applicable to fishing communities. Fishermen’s rational skepticism of newer technologies based on these examples of environmental awareness and concern displays that this is not a function of cultural lag.

The integration and development of technologies has had both negative and positive effects for lobster fishermen in Pictou County. Many are willing to incorporate new technologies into their gear and current equipment, but traditionalists, such as Robert Johnson, prefer to use the basic technologies that have been in use for decades (such as depth readers and mechanical haulers), and continue to rely on their fine-tuned instincts and skills that were learned and inherited many decades ago. As Ronnie Heighton observed, “Even with all the electronic equipment we have today there’s... you know, the

³¹ Buchanan, “Sea Heritage,” 17.

³² Robert Johnson, Interview, August 28, 2012.

old ways, you can always just look at the shoreline and know where you are, it's a great reference. You can look at your plotter and it'll tell you where you're at but still, after all the years, you still look at the shoreline for marks... Well there's some things you'll never... the technology will never take over."³³ Jackie Johnson shared similar remarks when discussing technological improvements in the industry, but said he always went back to the "old methods," such as using landmarks as his guide instead of the new methods, which, he pointed out, can fail at any time.³⁴

Unfortunately, the aging generation of fishermen who have worked and spent their entire lives on the Northumberland Strait may be the last to use such traditional skills and methods. With a decline occurring in the lobster industry, future generations are losing valuable fishing skills and techniques. Young people may also lack an interest or desire to make a living in this business. As fishermen have passed on their traditions and knowledge to the next generation of aspiring fishers, they also hoped to pass on emotional values of habit, love of the past, and the recognition that these methods have worked in the past.³⁵ Most youth within these coastal communities are fraught with feelings of powerlessness due to the loss of resources and job opportunities, especially within the fishery. The collapse that many rural communities have seen, especially in Pictou County, has caused a large portion of the younger population to seek jobs elsewhere, and thus the "culture of fishing" that previously existed within the community is gone as well.³⁶ According to fisherman and interviewee Ronnie Heighton, "Big money in Alberta is calling all the younger people and the younger people are not getting into the fishery.

³³ Ronnie Heighton, Interview, December 7, 2012.

³⁴ Jackie Johnson, Interview, November 1, 2012.

³⁵ Ogburn, *Social Change*, 263-64.

³⁶ Jackson et al., "The Forgotten Population?," 237-38.

The new entrant today is somebody that is 55 years old, had been out west, made some money and came home and said ‘oh maybe I’ll fish for a few years before I retire,’ and that’s the new entrant today, it’s not a 20 year old that’s coming into the fishery.”³⁷ In 2002, Apostle, Bonnie J. McCay and Knut Mikalsen found from interviews that Nova Scotia fishermen were concerned about these trends. “We’ve lost grip of our heritage,” was one opinion voiced by a rural fisherman, emphasizing that younger generations do not share the same traditional perspectives as the elders within the communities.³⁸ As Apostle and Gene Barrett explained, small rural communities have minimal opportunity for growth, and therefore “their futures are closely linked to the future of the fishing industry.”³⁹ However, very few young people have been able to buy in to the lobster fishery in Pictou County, and they are much less resistant to technology and are major competitors for the traditionalists.

Although traditional methods of lobster fishing are successful for those who have inherited the tricks and techniques of the trade, there is an argument that resistance to change and innovation could be their downfall as well. As technology expands throughout Nova Scotia through younger generations of fishermen seeking larger catches, the traditional subsistence fishermen in rural Pictou County may soon have to look towards integrating new technologies into their current gear or will face being pushed out of the fishery altogether by younger, more competitive generation. All participants interviewed for this project observed similar sentiments throughout their individual

³⁷ Ronnie Heighton, Interview, December 7, 2012.

³⁸ Richard Apostle, McCay, B., and K. Mikalsen, *Enclosing The Commons: Individual Transferrable Quotas in the Nova Scotia Fishery* (St. John’s: Institute of Social and Economic Research Books, 2003), 116.

³⁹ Barrett and Apostle, *Emptying their Nets*, 270.

communities, finding that younger people working in the lobster fishery today are after profit by any means necessary, such as spending large amounts of money on engines, equipment and advanced technologies. For Robert Johnson, "...Everybody got too big. \$200,000 boats... they just have to have the best of everything."⁴⁰ The younger generation is now drawn into the fishery through the rewards of larger catches that technological innovations in equipment and gear promise, not by the traditions, values and sense of community that their fathers and grandfathers cherished.

When asked if there should be concern about the adaptability of younger generations of fishers to new innovations in the industry, Ronnie Heighton explained his thoughts on the issue and whether or not the old ways of fishing were necessary to be successful:

You'll never learn that [fishing instincts and traditional skills] with computer-based electronics. On the other hand, you could likely take somebody who came from Alberta, put 'em in a boat and if he's anyways computer literate, within three days he would be a competitive fisherman... I mean if he's got the willingness to learn there's an awful lot of electronic equipment that will make him a very good fisherman in a very short period of time... We can't really stop technology, it's ... that's the way the world is. So, I guess if you can't fight it you might as well embrace it.⁴¹

As an aging fisherman himself, Heighton fully realizes that his own position in the lobster fishery is in jeopardy. Many older fishermen are reluctant to change their ways since it has been all they have known and relied on throughout their lives in the industry.

⁴⁰ Robert Johnson, Interview, August 28, 2012.

⁴¹ Ronnie Heighton, Interview, December 7, 2012.

Heighton brings to the table experience and perspectives from varying positions he has held over the years, as a fisherman with more than four decades on the water, twenty years in the role of the Northumberland Fishermen's Association president, as a board member for the Lobster Council of Canada, and as the current vice president of the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters.⁴² Through these positions Heighton can look beyond his role as a fisherman and see that if his future is to remain intact in the lobster fishery in the strait, he, and those of his generation, will have to embrace the changes necessary to maintain a successful lobster industry in Pictou County.

Aging fishermen within Pictou County continue to struggle with the apprehension of integrating new technologies into their gear. There is a fear among older fishermen in this region of plunging the lobster fishery back into the serious decline that had been seen in the 1980s and early 1990s as a result of the over-fishing, environmental damage and an overall lack of conservation measures and set regulations prior to the mid 1970s. However, the younger generation of fishers who have managed to enter this fishery readily accept new technologies, which may pose a threat to the future of the industry, giving the older generations of fishermen cause for their concerns. As a result, older fishermen in the Pictou County region may be more easily persuaded to retire their licenses and gear by volunteering their license to the DFO to eliminate another fisher from entering the fishery and increase the chances for lobster stock recovery. A distinct inequality exists among these age groups of fishers in Pictou County, as the younger generation wishes to enter the fishery and utilize all tools available to them to increase their yields, whereas experienced fishermen continue to hold on to traditional ways of

⁴² Ronnie Heighton, Interview, December 7, 2012.

fishing, and encourage use of such practices so as to increase the resource and protect the future of the fishery.

Having experienced the collapse of the lobster fishery in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the aging generation of fishers have a deeper understanding of the state that the fishery is in and the importance of its recovery for the Pictou County region. With innovations constantly becoming available and being marketed to younger fishers, combined with the fear of the potential loss of the protective owner-operator and fleet separation policies, fishermen in Pictou County's rural inshore lobster fishery see the possibilities for corporate takeovers and imposed pressure on the resource. Traditional ways of fishing have ensured that the resource has not been fully depleted, and as technology continues to develop in this industry, older fishermen will remain concerned that the innovations will only replicate the problems that caused the serious decline of the 1980s and 1990s.

As Rick Williams argued in 1987, citizens, such as federal officials and journalists, living far outside of the fishing industry, had placed a stereotype on these rural communities, with the overarching sentiment being that there are "too many backward fishermen," with the inshore fishery itself considered to be "traditional semi-subsistence production."⁴³ Fishermen are said to live a "romantic way of life," which in reality is untrue.⁴⁴ As Michael Kirby discussed in his 1982 report, *Navigating Troubled Waters*, the complexity of such a niche industry is extraordinary because it is "economically and socially entwined in the fabric of a region."⁴⁵ The lobster fishery of

⁴³ Williams, "The Restructuring That Wasn't," 74.

⁴⁴ Williams, "The Restructuring That Wasn't," 74.

⁴⁵ Michael Kirby, *Navigating Troubled Waters*, viii.

Pictou County is such a case, as the region has been built upon only a few primary industries, and so has evolved into a collection of small rural communities that base their identity on the fishery, and continue to place their futures in the hands of an unstable industry on a daily basis. Kirby elaborated on the typecast of romanticized rural fishing communities, citing “the rural romantic school of thought that tends to view fishing communities as unspoiled paradises whose very existence justifies their permanent survival.”⁴⁶ A tourist, for example, may see a small fishing community as such an idyllic place. In reality, fishing communities are not paradises, as this thesis has explored through the socioeconomic, environmental and cultural issues that they have struggled with. Kirby also explored the notion that tourism has caused a “mummification of coastal communities as quaint tourist attractions.”⁴⁷ Sacouman and Veltmeyer similarly found that “small coastal communities have been forced into decline as active production sites... ‘development’ is being redefined as the tourism of the ‘quaint.’”⁴⁸ Likewise, Ian McKay’s *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-century Nova Scotia*, discusses the perceived “rural backwardness” of Nova Scotians, especially of the fisherfolk, which are seen to live a “picturesque” and “quaint” lifestyle.⁴⁹

As the fishery has declined, rural communities, such as those in Pictou County, have attempted to boost the local economy through tourism and what can be offered to visitors seeking such “paradises” and old-world charm. Tourism, while stabilizing the

⁴⁶ Kirby, *Navigating Troubled Waters*, 6.

⁴⁷ Kirby, *Navigating Troubled Waters*, 6.

⁴⁸ Sacouman and Veltmeyer, *From the net to the Net*, 56.

⁴⁹ Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-century Nova Scotia*, “Chapter 4: ‘O, So True and Real Like the Sea and the Rocks’: The Folk and the Pursuit of the Simple Life” (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 226.

local economy, can be seen as stalling or hindering the development and progression of the local lobster fishery in order to maintain the pristine old-fashioned look and feel to the “paradises” that travelers seek in Nova Scotia. Thus, while tourism is not central to the themes explored in this thesis, the perception of the romantic, backwards fisherman has become intertwined with the fishing culture of Pictou County. Such examples are the tourist attractions within the town of Pictou, which are entirely focused on the traditionalist ways of lobster fishing. While an important part of the county’s past, institutions, such as the Northumberland Fisheries Museum, are also trapped within the past through their outdated displays and exhibits, which further navigates tourists’ perception of a fisherman as someone with a tranquil lifestyle, outmoded and unperturbed by the changes occurring around him in the 21st century. Thus the paradox that, although there is such strong resistance from fishermen and their communities to adapting to the 21st century, the culture that bonds them is dissolving.

Cultural disintegration in Pictou County has increased since the turn of the 21st century, and the boom conditions of western Canada continue to call the youth away from the region, and the fishery. Ronnie Heighton was asked whether or not the breakdown in traditions and values has affected the lobster fishery. “Certainly,” he responded, “and I mean with the way the fishery is now, there’s, you might as well say, there’s lobsters and a little bit of herring, and none of the younger people can afford to buy in and participate in the fishery at the same time trying to maintain a house, and children and so on, and a lifestyle for themselves. There’s so much more money elsewhere that can be had...”⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Ronnie Heighton, Interview, December 7, 2012.

With regards to the culture of the county itself, Heighton commented that the sentimental value attached to fishing is fading:

From what I see, it's moved away. At one time, like, right now it's more competitive than it ever was before. At one time if somebody was broke down everybody at the wharf stopped and helped him get going, whether they needed parts, pieces, whatever he needed to get going, and then they went fishing, and now they just come down, get in your boat and go fishing, and if a guy's broke down, then you just keep on going. The old way is gone.⁵¹

Heighton explained that the tight-knit communities of Pictou County are dissolving, as they are no longer bonded by the same traditions and values that once existed in the region. He spoke of the only other place in the Maritimes, in his mind, that such closeness in the fishery could be found. "The only place that I ever seen in Canada that you can go and get that same feeling is Newfoundland, they've never lost it... yet. But I think they will..."⁵² Jackie Johnson also mentioned the loss of culture and kinship, and the lack of anticipation and excitement for opening day of lobster season among fishermen in comparison to decades past. The initial burst of coming out of the long winter months to begin getting ready for the season ahead and the renewed camaraderie at the local wharves after many months apart is diminishing.⁵³ As the fishery moves forward, rural fishing communities in Pictou County will have to look to each other for support and to ensure that the skills, values and traditions of the past century of lobster fishing in the region remain intact and are not lost.

⁵¹ Ronnie Heighton, Interview, December 7, 2012.

⁵² Ronnie Heighton, Interview, December 7, 2012.

⁵³ Jackie Johnson, Interview, November 1, 2012.

Pictou County's fishing culture is not fully diminished. The seasoned fishermen of the area continue to uphold their traditions and customs across the county and in their own communities. Technology and modernization can be seen as hurdles that the traditional lobster fishery must overcome, or work with, to create a progressive and essential fishery that benefits rural fishing communities and the local economy of the county. Lobster fishing is still a vital part of Pictou County's identity and customs. For example, the conclusion of the lobster season is still celebrated with the annual Pictou Lobster Carnival in early July. A ritual that began in 1934, the carnival displays the impact and significance that the lobster has on the county. Gregory Johnson, whose father, like himself, had worked for Bill Broidy, the owner of Maritime Packers Ltd., commented on Broidy's impact on the county as a major figurehead in the fishery. "First, Mr. Broidy was a great person, OK, personal opinion here obviously... He didn't start it [Lobster Carnival], he revived it. It existed before the war, stopped during the war, and he started it again."⁵⁴ Bill Broidy played a significant role in re-establishing the carnival, ensuring that the tradition was not lost. The carnival represents more than a time to celebrate the end of another season of hard work, but the successes, or losses, that the county has shared in together during that time, as well as the coming together to celebrate fishing heritage. The photograph shown below represents this sentiment. Albie (Albert) Johnson fished consecutively for 59 years out of Toney River, Pictou County. For his hard work and contribution to the industry, he was awarded the Maripac trophy and the title of "Admiral of the Lobster Fleet," at the 1963 Lobster Carnival, as the caption indicates. The trophy remains in the Johnson family today.

⁵⁴ Gregory Johnson, Interview, October 19, 2012.



Albert (Albie) Johnson of Toney River, holding the beautiful Maripac Trophy won at the 1963 Lobster Carnival as the oldest active lobster fisherman. His 59 consecutive years of fishing out of Toney River gave him the trophy and the title of "Admiral Of The Lobster Fleet." (R. H. Sherwood photo)

Figure 2: Albie (Albert) Johnson with the Maripac trophy. Photo courtesy of Janice Johnson- Wolchuk.

Pictou County's traditionalist views and beliefs, combined with aspects of cultural lag and the misplaced label of the romanticized "backwards fisherman" has hindered growth and evolution to maximize yields in lobster catches and enhance community outlooks on new trends and technologies in fishing.⁵⁵ Ogburn's cultural lag theory examined the maladjustments of non-material cultures to new technologies and innovations, and Pictou County's lobster fishing industry is a key example. Through the retardation of their growth and of their ability to successfully use the tools developed to increase their yields during lobster season, Pictou County's fishermen remain hesitant to adapt and integrate new innovations in fishing technology into their current equipment, although this is not always caused by lag but by concerns for the environment or the

⁵⁵ Williams, "The Restructuring That Wasn't," 74.

satisfaction with simplistic methods and tools. However, with such resistance, lobster yields suffer, as does the local economy, and individual fishing families.

Technology and tradition also clash in the fishery. With many traditional fishermen apprehensive of letting go of the old methods and skills passed down from the previous generations, development and growth in a positive, forward direction in the lobster fishery is a struggle. Technology itself also hinders the success of the lobster population within the Northumberland Strait, as its sophistication can give the lobster little hope to survive in such a competitive market. With the next generation of fishers readily adapting to what technology is being produced to enhance their catches, traditional fishermen must evolve or be pushed out of the lobster fishery.

The culture of Pictou County is still present, and will take many years, or perhaps decades, to dissipate. The lobster fishery, being such a strong sector of the industries in Pictou County, will continue to resist the total modernization of the fishery. The residents of the county will ensure that the old methods, traditions and values of the culture that has been molded from this industry do not simply fade away amongst technology. The fishermen and rural fishing communities along the Northumberland Strait will hold these sentiments and ideals closely, but must also work towards a responsible outlook for the lobster fishery if they are to maintain their livelihoods and a successful fishery for the present and future generations.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored three major issues encountered by the lobster fishery of Pictou County, and their impacts on rural fishing communities of this small, north shore region of Nova Scotia since the 1950s. Decades of constant socioeconomic problems, toxic environmental issues, as well as crises surrounding culture and tradition, have been factors in the instability of the lobster industry, the decades of hardship forced on the local economy and its communities, and the dilution of the unique culture of the county. The local economy has suffered from the socio-economic effects of over-fishing and depleted stocks, recent changes to access of employment insurance (EI), modernization of the industry, and increased expenses for fishermen. As Gene Barrett and Anthony Davis noted, “fisheries have been locked continually in the throes of one economic crisis after another.”¹ As for environmental issues that have plagued the industry in Pictou County, fishermen have dealt with decades of build-up of pollutants, expansion and growth throughout the county (through the development of other vital industries, such as coal), and the exploitation of the resource that is so highly valued along the north shore. The final chapter of this thesis examined issues surrounding the dilution of the fishing culture in Pictou County, the importance that lobster fishing has maintained in the traditions and values cherished by rural fishing communities in this region, and whether these communities can uphold their ways of life while progressing alongside the lobster fishery.

The steady decline of the lobster fishery in Pictou County since the 1950s, which has been affecting the fishing communities dependent on the industry has been examined using different approaches: to discover why the lobster fishery in the Northumberland Strait has not been adequately researched (in comparison to the work done on the south

¹ Barrett and Davis, *Floundering in Troubled Waters*, 1.

and eastern shores of the province); to discover what is specifically causing the decline in the lobster industry (whether it be environmental, economics, culture, or a combination of factors); to fill in the gaps that current literature and research has not covered in this region; to create an awareness of the Northumberland Strait fishery, its decline, and its importance to Nova Scotian culture and history. As Rosemary Ommer and Dianne Newell expressed, “the social, cultural and economic significance of Canadian small-scale, sustainable fishers consequently has been grossly underestimated,” as has been demonstrated throughout this study.²

The first chapter revealed the toll taken by socioeconomic factors on the lobster fishery and thus on the rural fishing communities of Pictou County. Since the Second World War, Pictou County has struggled economically to survive in a rapidly changing society. It was also during the war that the lobster fishery began to see drastic increases in the amount of fish pulled from the strait, from both the inshore and offshore sectors. With no real restrictions in place until the 1970s, both of these sectors had unlimited access to ground fish and shellfish. The threat posed to the Northumberland Strait and its ecosystems significantly increased in the late 1940s and into the early 1950s as the offshore boats modernized, grew into fleets, and were able to catch extraordinary amounts of fish. As a result, a moratorium was placed on ground fish stocks, such as cod, and the switch to the shellfishery, mainly lobsters and scallops, began. With fishery biologists concerned with the overall health of the shellfishery within Nova Scotia by the 1970s, it was evident that “poor monitoring [had] led to few (if any) realistic controls of the

² Dianne Newell and Rosemary Ommer, eds., *Fishing Places, Fishing People: Traditions and Issues in Canadian Small-scale Fisheries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 4.

resource.”³ Lobster stocks needed to be controlled before they were over-exploited and beyond hopes of recovery, as was the case with cod in this region. Restrictions, licensing and policies were put in place in 1977 to conserve and regulate the fishery.⁴ As a result of the move from ground fish to shellfish, the lobster stocks within the strait had suffered. The regulations and policies put in place did slow the decline in lobster stocks in the Northumberland Strait. Subsequently, however, the local economy continued to lag as a result of low catches, and since the 1990s Pictou County’s lobster stocks have dwindled and bring in little profit for fishermen.

Issues concerning Employment Insurance (EI), formerly Unemployment Insurance (UI), have also caused serious concern for the rural fishing families of Pictou County and continue to do so. The local economy in Pictou County continues to decline, and fishermen have long looked to EI as a way to ensure that they can support their families throughout the off-season (for most fishermen in the county, this falls between September and April). From the spring of 2013, many fishermen will no longer be able to supplement their earnings from the lobster season with EI benefits. In 1957, UI was offered to most self-employed fishermen within the Atlantic Provinces because of the extreme seasonality of their work.⁵ EI benefits for fishermen differ from other EI recipients, as the existing policy based the benefits on individual total earnings from a season, not hours of employment.⁶ However, the changes enacted with effect in 2013 make it much harder for fishermen to attain their benefits, requiring them to search actively for alternative employment in the off-season, and report in to the DFO on a daily

³ Barrett, “Capital and the State in Atlantic Canada,” 91.

⁴ Barrett, “Capital and the State in Atlantic Canada,” 83, 85, 91.

⁵ Lamson and Hanson, *Atlantic Fisheries and Coastal Communities*, viii.

⁶ Service Canada, “Employment Insurance Benefits for Fishers.”

basis.⁷ This is done as a deterrent from claiming EI benefits, causing too much “red tape,” as Robert Johnson explained, and requires a person to find work within their community.⁸ A major concern among fishermen in Pictou County is that the local economy will suffer, as there will be no money being spent within the community because of the lack of EI benefits. As the Independent Core Fleet sector explained, “Most of the hundred of millions of dollars in landed value that we generate... is spent in our communities: buying in our communities, hiring in our communities, and supporting them in numerous other ways. Our independent fishing enterprises create healthier local economies that are diverse and not single industry in structure.”⁹ The combination of over-fishing in previous decades with Pictou County’s dire need of the investment the lobster fishery and its workers contributes, has caused a slump in the volume of lobsters brought in, as well as in the profit realized. Thus the serious impact of losing EI benefits that have stabilized family incomes for decades will be felt this upcoming spring as the fishing seasons begin. How heavy this weight will be on individual families and on the county as a whole, only time can tell. However, with less investment in the local economy, small businesses will most certainly feel the effects, as will rural communities.

Chapter 2 considered how environmental degradation of the Northumberland Strait has seriously affected the lobster fishery. Over-fishing and the move into the shellfishery had caused severe damage to stocks, as well as habitats within the Northumberland Strait. Pollution and the creation of the Confederation Bridge have seriously damaged the health and population levels of lobster within the strait, which are

⁷ Ronnie Heighton, Interview, December 7, 2012.

⁸ Robert Johnson, Interview, August 28, 2012.

⁹ “Response of Atlantic Canada’s Independent Core.”

only now beginning to show signs of possible recovery. More than a century of industrialization and expansion in Pictou County has caused pollutants to seep into the strait and severely affected its ecosystems. In particular, since its establishment in 1967, the pulp and paper mill at Abercrombie has been using Boat Harbour as a settling pond for the effluent and waste from the mill and the toxicity of the waste has affected all life forms in the harbour and at its mouth into the strait. Both the paper mill and Pictou's municipal sewage and waste have drastically altered the landscape that once was Boat Harbour. It is now an uninhabitable environment for marine plants or creatures, and can no longer be fished out of by the Pictou Landing First Nations reserve that has primary rights to the land.

Agriculture and human expansion along the strait have also taken a toll on the lobster population by harming the lobster in its most vulnerable stage: the larvae, or seedling. Run off and point-source contaminants from farms and septic systems all along the Northumberland Strait have entered water systems. Fishermen are seeing the effects that several decades of run-off from cottages and smaller farms along the strait have had. DFO had also reported findings through the EOAR report in 2006 that confirm the observations of fishermen and other rural residents of both Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island with regards to point-source contaminants and effluent pollutants in the strait. Fishermen Robert Johnson and Ronnie Heighton both discussed during their interviews the impact these pollutants are having on the lobster. Robert Johnson mentioned sections of rocky bottom in front of farmland that were devoid of lobster during heavy farming¹⁰, while Ronnie Heighton stated that lobster larvae are killed off

¹⁰ Robert Johnson, Interview, August 28, 2012.

during the summer months of July and August when they float to the top of the water because of their vulnerability to the septic run-off pollutants, which is heaviest because of the influx of cottagers.¹¹ Combined, pollutants from industries, agriculture and point source contaminants are extremely environmentally damaging. However, what has been most detrimental to the recovery of the lobster in the Northumberland Strait has been the erection of the Confederation Bridge.

When construction of the fixed link began in the 1990s, contractor SCI (Strait Crossing Inc.) met all requirements and had completed all necessary environmental impact assessments, which meant that all resistance from fishermen, local residents in the surrounding areas and environmental groups was in vain. The link began to cause unseen problems immediately after construction was under way, with many issues still present today. In 2006, the DFO released its EOAR report findings regarding the negative effects that fishing communities encountered since the link was made. Throughout the central strait region (both PEI and north shore NS), the main complaint found at each consultation with DFO was that silt and sediment was collecting throughout the strait from removal and displacement during bridge construction, thus damaging overall water quality and habitats.¹² Stakeholders who attended the consultations for the EOAR report, as well as Pictou County fishermen expressed grave concerns over changes in the tides and currents within the strait, having been drastically altered by the bridge. They reported that because of the large pillars now in place across the strait, the tide no longer flushed out toxins and the build-up of siltation, and that disrupted currents were causing a change in migration patterns in lobsters because water temperatures in the central strait region are

¹¹ Ronnie Heighton, Interview, December 7, 2012.

¹² DFO, *Consultations on Ecosystem Overview*, “Executive Summary.”

too warm. Fishermen in the area surrounding the bridge have also noticed shifts in the main current, as it is not flowing as freely into the strait as it once did. The EOAR consultation at Toney River in Pictou County released striking data on siltation directly outside of the wharf at depths of thirty to forty feet. What had been a rocky bottom prior to 1997 was now barren and sand-covered. Lobster fishermen at Toney River wharf had landings of 30,000 lbs per boat when the bridge was opened, but a decade later the weight had fallen dramatically to 3,300 lbs per boat.¹³ Lobster stocks have declined because of the accumulation of pollutants and other forms of destructive factors over a period of 100 years, but the most potent damage has been much more recent. Environmental impacts on lobster represent a physical threat, but one that also has a profound cultural significance.

Chapter 3 dealt with the cultural and sentimental importance of the lobster fishery to the traditions and values of Pictou County as a whole. It also examined the issues of cultural lag and the clash of technology with these traditions, and how such factors have affected the progress and productivity of the lobster fishery. William F. Ogburn introduced his cultural lag theory in 1922, a final stage to his theory of technological determinism.¹⁴ To reiterate, cultural lag is “when one of two parts of a culture which are correlated changes before or in greater degree than the other part does thereby causing less adjustment between the two parts than existed previously.”¹⁵ Ogburn also looked at how societies viewed progress depending on whether they were materialistic or non-materialistic. Many rural societies may be considered non-materialistic and to have

¹³ DFO, *Consultations on Ecosystem Overview*, “Appendix A.”

¹⁴ “The Cultural Lag Theory: The Sociology of Educational Technology.”

¹⁵ Duncan, *William F. Ogburn*, 86.

emotional attachment to their beliefs and values, explaining apprehension when adapting new technologies or ideas that, in this case, would better their way of life through increased lobster yields.¹⁶ Ogburn noted that, “a large part of our environment consists of the material conditions of life and a large part of our social heritage is our material culture.”¹⁷ Pictou County’s rural communities depend on lobster fishing and are very non-materialistic, however, as seen through various examples in Chapter 3, such as fishermen’s concerns of environmental degradation caused by technological innovations, it is apparent that Ogburn’s theory of cultural lag is not always applicable to such a complex culture.

Coupled with cultural lag theory is also the question of what is and is not considered to be too much technology. DFO asserted some twenty years ago that, for the future of the lobster fishery or of any fishery, there must be some level of technological advancement to ensure that the industry survives: “Tomorrow’s fishery will demand a responsible and professional approach to the harvesting of fish that will demand a responsible use of appropriate technology.”¹⁸ Aging fishermen who cling to tradition and the techniques that have been passed down through the generations of fishermen in their community may be hesitant to accept such a definition of progress, but may also have their reasons. Through the influence of leaders in the community, such as Northumberland Fisheries Association president Ronnie Heighton, methods and techniques used in the past will remain intact well into the future, to be used in combination with innovations to improve catches and simultaneously conserve stocks.

¹⁶ Ogburn, *Social Change*, 263-64.

¹⁷ Ogburn, *Social Change*, 202-3.

¹⁸ DFO, *Charting a New Course*, 63.

Although many outsiders look upon fishing communities as old-fashioned or backward in comparison to more urban societies within the Atlantic region, members of the rural fishing communities in Pictou County do not see themselves or their culture that way. Lobster fishing has bonded many of the residents in the county, as has been illustrated in the final chapter of this thesis. The lobster fishery that has upheld a large portion of Pictou County's local economy has been built on the traditions and values that are now slowly disintegrating in the 21st century. If the lobster fishery in Pictou County continues to decline as a result of cultural lag or the resistance from fishermen to adapt, the unique culture that has emerged as a result of 100 years of fishing in this region will fade as well.

Pictou County's lobster industry has suffered a serious decline in stocks throughout the past twenty years, caused by a combination of socioeconomic, environmental and cultural influences on the Northumberland Strait. Today the fishery is improving, with conservation measures continuously being put in place to protect the fishery, and progress is being made to ensure that the culture of the area is not lost while the pursuit for a responsible level of advancement in the industry continues through the influence of older community members. As a direct result, lobster yields are very slowly growing each season. With the accumulation of environmental issues over the past century, the lobster fishery in Pictou County endured serious damage from the decay of the central strait region and has only recently begun to show signs of recovery. Importantly the DFO has taken notice of declining lobster catches, and has worked with fishermen and fishermen's associations and unions along the strait to correct these problems. Fishermen in Pictou County, such as Jackie Johnson, emphasized factors such as over-fishing, pollutants and technological advancements had created long-term issues

from which lobsters have had difficulty recovering.¹⁹ Ronnie Heighton expressed the hope that lobster yields will continue to climb, but forewarns that fishermen will have to face a serious economic problem in the forthcoming seasons: “We’re hoping they will but at the same time we’re being faced with lower and lower prices and higher costs of doing business, such as fuel, bait and labour. So it’s offsetting any increase we have.”²⁰

The current low prices offered to fishermen for their catch are not enough to sustain a family, let alone a community or a county in which a large population of its residents are dependent on this specific industry. If the environment of the central Northumberland Strait continues to be disregarded as it has been in the past, then it too will falter with the falling price of lobster, as will the cultural importance that has been placed on this industry. A ripple effect occurs in the lobster fishery, and if one aspect is weakened, whether it is by environmental damage, losses in the local economy, or the slow crumbling of such a unique culture, the futures of fishermen, communities and lobsters become endangered. Pictou County still displays remnants of the importance that lobster fishing has in this region of Nova Scotia, both through the young people who work extremely hard and very far away from home so they may return one day to follow in family traditions, and through the retired and aging fishermen, their families and rural communities who still hold this livelihood dear.

¹⁹ Jackie Johnson, Interview, November 1, 2012.

²⁰ Ronnie Heighton, Interview, December 7, 2012.

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**Voices of the North Shore: The Fishing Communities of the Northumberland Strait
REB File # 12-061**

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INTRODUCTION

I'm Caitlin Johnson, a graduate student at Saint Mary's University in Halifax in the Atlantic Canada Studies program, doing a thesis-based Master of Arts degree. For my masters thesis, I am researching under the supervision of Dr. Peter Twohig and Dr. John Reid.

You are invited to take part in my study on the fishing communities in Pictou County along the Northumberland Strait.

PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

The purpose of my study is to determine what types of issues have risen since the 1950s in the rural fishing communities along the Northumberland Strait (such as environmental issues, economics, over-fishing, etc.) and how these issues have and continue to effect families that live off of the fishing industry in this specific region. Specifically, I am looking at the lobster industry, and coming from a fishing family in Caribou River, I am aware that it has been slowly decaying over the past few decades. I believe that there has not been a sufficient study conducted on the lobster industry in the Pictou County area, nor on the reasons why it has been deteriorating in the strait. The fishing industry is a huge contributor to Nova Scotia's economic prosperity and is part of our heritage and culture, so why has one of the formerly richest areas of ground fish stocks been ignored? Are the issues that are arising along the strait not as important as those of other regions of the province based on this industry? I believe this needs to be addressed and my thesis will do so through thorough basic research, oral histories from these interviews, primary sources such as diaries, and records and reports from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, as well as other government institutions. Overall, my major research question is: Why has the fishing industry, specifically that of lobster, been slowly deteriorating in the Northumberland Strait since the 1950s and how has this decline effected the rural fishing communities that live off this industry?

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO TAKE PART? (OR WHO IS BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?)

The invitation for this study is being sent to 10-15 possible participants in the Pictou County region, male and female, 50-75+ years of age that have worked within the fishing industry in Pictou County (as either as boat captains, boat hands, factory workers, wharf workers, etc.).

WHAT DOES PARTICIPATING MEAN? (OR WHAT WILL I HAVE TO DO?)

Participants will be asked first, to return this form if they wish to be involved in the study. Secondly, beginning in December of this year, participants will be interviewed on a one-

on-one basis, in their own homes (if permitted). The interview will last a minimum of one hour, and depending on the flow of the interview, may proceed longer. The interview will be recorded, and as the interviewer, I will also take notes. Once the interview has concluded, participants' involvement in the research will be concluded.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THIS RESEARCH?

There will be little to no benefit to the participants of this study except that their own personal stories will be preserved, and any useful data recorded can be used for future study within my thesis. Preserving the histories of the region is a very important way to ensure that historical importance of the lobster fishery is not lost. This study will benefit the both society and the scientific community through the preservation of the individual personal histories that originate within these north shore communities within Pictou County that may have been lost in decades to come without this research project. The knowledge, community and industry of the fishery along the Northumberland Strait will persevere through the research that will be done, and the unique culture that these communities bring to Nova Scotia and diversify our heritage. This research will provide a unique opportunity to study the transition in the fishing industry (during the late 1950s and into the early 1960s) along the north shore during the implementation of new regulations and technologies, and demonstrate the diversity and adaptations necessary for these small, rural communities to survive in a rapidly changing industry.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS FOR PARTICIPANTS?

The risk to participants is minimal. The only possibilities to be considered as a risk to the participants could be discussion of topics such as poaching, fishing out of season, not following fishing regulations set forth by the Department of Fisheries & Oceans, or any inter-family conflicts that could arise. Therefore, participants could be placed at risk of becoming involved in legal issues, or develop poor relationships with fellow members of the communities that may or may not also be involved in the study. If such situations arise, I would minimize the risks to participants by anonymizing any data having to do with these topics, or deleting the data from recordings/transcripts. Participants will be told during their interview (at the beginning and again at the end) that such topics, should they arise, will be deleted from recordings/transcripts, and that anonymity would be provided to protect them from any risk(s).

HOW CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY?

All applicants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the study again at the beginning of the interview itself, and again after the interview concludes as a final verbal reminder. There will be no consequences for participants who wish to withdraw, however any recordings of their interview, any notes taken, and any record of their participation will be deleted. If a participant wishes to withdraw from the study prior to the interview itself, please feel free to call or email me directly.

WHAT WILL BE DONE WITH MY INFORMATION? (OR WHO WILL HAVE ACCESS TO IT?)

All data from my interviews will be kept confidential if you, the participant, wishes for your name and information to remain anonymous. You may verbally agree from the two types of consent (described above) at the beginning of our interview, and it will be recorded for future reference when I begin to compile the information given into my thesis. The privacy and well-being of all participants is extremely important, and

therefore any information that may put any participant at risk will not be used within my research. Those who will have access to the information collected from these interviews will be my thesis supervisors (a minimal possibility), as well as myself. All data acquired through these interviews will be kept with me, or in a locked storage area in the Gorsebrook Research Institute at Saint Mary's University. Any further use of data from my interview findings would be minimal, as the data itself will be destroyed after my thesis is complete. The possibility of someone from the general public using my thesis for their own research is a possibility, but the participants that have selected anonymity will already be protected within my thesis.

HOW CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION? (OR HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS STUDY?)

For more information, feel free to contact me at (902) 471-3405, or through email at cate.johnson11@gmail.com. To contact my thesis supervisors for more information on my research or any other issues, please call Dr. Peter Twohig at (902) 420-5447 or at peter.twohig@smu.ca, or Dr. John Reid at (902) 420-5760, or at john.reid@smu.ca. Both would be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding this study.

Certification:

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns about ethical matters, you may contact the Chair of the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board at ethics@smu.ca or 420-5728.

Signature of Agreement:

I understand what this study is about and appreciate the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can end my participation at any time.

Participant Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Please keep one copy of this form for your own records.

Examples of some of the questions that may be asked during our interview:

What types of techniques did you use for fishing lobster (ex. grappling the bottom)?

Who did you learn these techniques from?

How long have you been using them/fishing this way? Why?

Do these techniques work much better than any newer technologies that are available to you, or do you use them because of an attachment to the past? (Ex. use of older wooden traps vs metal traps)

When did you first notice or hear of any changes occurring in the Northumberland Strait?

Were these changes environmental (caused by pollution, industry, etc.)?

How has the economy effected you, your family and community over the years?

Were there years in the industry that were beneficial, and years that were much harder?

How do you see the lobster fishery in 5 years? 10? 20?

Do you see a successful future for the lobster fishery in the strait?

How could a successful lobster fishery be re-established on the north shore, in your opinion?

These are of course examples, and many other questions may be asked of each participant depending on the flow of the conversation.



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The Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board has issued an REB certificate related to this thesis. The certificate number is: 12-061 .

A copy of the certificate is on file at:

Saint Mary's University, Archives
Patrick Power Library
Halifax, NS
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Email: archives@smu.ca
Phone: 902-420-5508
Fax: 902-420-5561

For more information on the issuing of REB certificates, you can contact the Research Ethics Board at 902-420-5728/ ethics@smu.ca .

ACST MA Thesis Interview Transcript:
Robert Johnson, August 28, 2012

Q: Interviewer, Caitlin Johnson (Question)

A: Interviewee, Robert Johnson (Answer)

Q: When did you begin fishing? And with who?

A: Well I started fishing with other people I guess in 1980.

Q: Ok, who were those people?

A: Clinton MacKeil and Bill MacKenzie.

Q: Did you learn anything from them while you fished with them? I know I've read about different people using different tricks or techniques when they're lobster fishing, specifically.

A: Yep, oh yeah, I learned a lot from both of them.

A: What did you learn?

A: Oh learnt tides, landmarks, and bait, and what to use, what not to use, types of traps, different types of gear and stuff.

Q: I read in one book about up in Pugwash area they would use poles and they'd grapple the bottom and they could tell that way better than any technology today that scan the bottom that told them where would be better grounds for lobster and that kind of thing?

A: No we never did that.

A: No? Ok.

Q: When did you start to notice any kind of changes in the strait, environmentally, or if there was any pollution or if any type of industry was disrupting anything in the strait?

A: Well you just noticed it if anyone was farming...

Q: Ok.

A: Big scale farming along the shore and they used a lot of fertilizer, and in the spring with the run off, heavy rains and stuff.

Q: I read in one book again too, about when they started salting the roads, and all the run off from that also kind of-

A: Well the road isn't too handy where I fish.

Q: Yeah. Did you ever hear anything about Scott Paper, if that ever had any impact on anything out in the strait or?

A: Well that's funny, where the water comes out of Boat Harbour that's where they're catching the most lobsters along the strait here now.

Q: Oh, ok. Why do you think that is? That the lobsters like-

A: I dunno, maybe the water is warmer, I'm not sure.

Q: Were there any specific times or dates that you can remember you had a really bad year because of farming or anything like that?

A: I forget what year it was, well it was the early 2000s. It was only like, one instance. Gerald Battist was farming a whole bunch of old farms along the shore, and he used a lot of fertilizer and stuff and as I said the run off, there was one area where we always used to get a lot of lobsters, and that spring there was absolutely nothing there. One strip of upper bottom, and there was just nothing. I can't remember what year that was.

Q: Oh ok, no that's fine. So you think that probably that's where the run off came right out and the lobsters just didn't-

A: Well just that one area, there were fields along the shore and it did rain quite a bit that spring, using fertilizer and spray and you know, that stuff...

Q: Oh, not like just, regular fertilizer...

A: No, chemical fertilizer.

Q: Yeah.

A: The stuff you get in bags.

Q: Is that up along where Big Johnson used to have all that land?

A: Yeah, straight from Maryann Elliott's up to the church kind of.

Q: Oh ok.

Q: Did you ever have the DFO ever say anything about environmental problems in the strait or anything like that?

A: No.

Q: What about when the bridge went in to PEI?

A: I always blame that for us losing a lot of lobsters.

Q: What do you think it did, disrupted their pattern of migration?

A: I think it disrupted the tides somehow or another, the tides and the ice used to come down through there. They put the bridge in and then big piles in and stuff, to hold it, they aren't very big compared to you know.. I think that they shifted the current somehow and it was just about that time that they started getting all the lobsters on the north side of PEI.

Q: Yeah, it didn't come down through the strait it just went around.

A: Yes I think it went around. And there was an awful pile of silt and stuff come down when they were building that, didn't effect us near as bad as it did up Wallace and Pugwash and that way, but I think it still effected it.

Q: If you think the tide went up around the north side of PEI, then do you think when it came back down towards Cape Breton, that end of the strait, did they have anything, more lobster coming that end of?

A: Well I'll tell yah, I have no idea if this is right or not, seems like the tide hit there, went around the north side, down the north side of the island, and then maybe it swirled in, and where they're getting all the lobsters, like Boat Harbour, Lismore, down in the bay, like down around Cape George, maybe that's tides, maybe that's why they're getting so many. I have no idea, that's just ... they didn't start getting them right away or anything.

Q: That would have been built up now after-

A: Well, over time. Maybe that has nothing to do with it either, I don't know.

Q: I had another professor talk to me too, that when they put the Canso causeway in that disrupted something, but I don't know if he meant more for that end of it or altogether.

A: Well cause they blocked it right off there.

Q: I've never really heard anything about that until he told me, that the Canso Causeway really messed up the lobster migration down there.

A: Yeah.

Q: But I don't know if that would effect here, not really?

A: Maybe, I don't know. Could very well have.

Q: When they put the Confederation Bridge in did you have anybody come from Environment Canada... **[shakes head]** No? To ask any concerns or anything like that?

A: No.

Q: There was a report that I found that said that they met with fishermen from each-

A: I'm not saying that they didn't. At the time there was supposed to be money set aside for, like if it effected the fisheries and all this stuff, but nobody ever saw five cents of that. That just kind of all got forgotten I think.

Q: Now, when did the DFO start buying out licenses? Like Albert's, they bought his out didn't they?

A: Yeah, well, the DFO, or the federal government, probably the DFO, I dunno who they call it.

Q: So when did that start? That must have been recently-

A: Oh, wasn't last year, the year before.

Q: Yeah. So did they have any reason, among the fishermen, why they started doing it or?

A: Well they wanted to ease the pressure on the fisheries and the fish stocks, the lobsters and stuff.

Q: Do you find any changes that have happened in the lobster industry in Pictou County have effected the community as a whole, like the economy?

A: Well when there's lots of lobsters theres lots of money to spend, you know, everybody's spending money, there's no lobsters there's no money to spend. That's in the small communities themselves.

Q: That's what I mean, small rural communities.

A: Well if somebody has money they can buy a newer car, or fix their property or house up, spread some money around.

Q: Do you think that's the case now, or do you think that it will have to be a couple of years before that happens in this area?

A: Well right here (Pictou County), yeah.

Q: Do you think that there's a decline happening in lobster stocks now in the strait or do you think that they're trying to recover?

A: I think that they're trying to recover now.

Q: Especially where the DFO is trying to buy out some of the licences or?

A: I don't know. Well that had to help a little bit. But there's places like down in, from Pictou Harbour east or maybe and up farther this way a little bit, that's where they're really catching a lot of lobsters and there's no gears that ever came out of there. So that didn't make a bit of difference there.

Q: No. So, if it's recovering they must have seen that there was a need to try and initiate something to recover. So, when... wasn't there a big decline in the 90's, or was it earlier?

A: Yeah, in the 90s. Along here, but it just kept going downhill.

Q: So, when do you think it started to recover, in the past couple of years, it's shown-

A: Well I can't say that it recovered a whole lot here yet, but I don't know, well its coming a little bit...

Q: A little bit every year.

A: Not for us so much, but down towards Caribou and Pictou Island, down where I was saying ... ours are coming a little bit at a time, but nothing dramatic.

Q: Do you think that people, younger people, that are getting into the lobster fishery is a good idea or do you think that they should stay out of it and find something else to do or?

A: Well all they're doing is buying the existing licenses. It seems to be... I don't know, it seems to be a lot of pressure on the policy, and stuff, it almost seems like the government is trying to push the owner-operator out and try and make it a corporate thing.

Q: The new fisheries minister for Atlantic Canada just put out a new document with the DFO about making it all corporation and no more owner-operator.

A: Yeah that's what they're trying to do, see.

Q: Do you think that they're doing that just so they make more profit, the province or?

A: Well the province isn't getting any out of it, it's the companies, the big companies like Clearwater and stuff, they're pushing it cause they can use their own boats. They'd have

half a dozen boats up through the whole strait here and they'd just hire crew for half a dozen boats, and its cheaper for them see.

Q: I didn't know they had boats up here...

A: Well they don't, but that's what would happen.

Q: Oh ok. Do you think that that would happen in the next 5 *years* or so? Or?

A: I don't know, I think it will slowly...

Q: They'll push owner-operators out?

A: I think, I don't think it will happen overnight but I think eventually they're gonna...

Q: Do you think if that happens that they'll just ruin any progress lobster stocks made, because they would probably just fish it to death, wouldn't they?

A: Well I don't know.

Q: Unless they had restrictions placed on them.

A: Well they'd have to have restrictions but big companies... restrictions don't mean nothing to them.

Q: That's what happened in the 30s, they had the trawlers and they overfished the cod, and moved from that after they fished all the ground fish and they moved to the lobsters and scallops and stuff.

Q: So do you think that a successful lobster fishery could be reestablished in Pictou County?

A: Oh yeah, but in order to be successful you need lobsters and I'm afraid now they're-

Q: So do you think that if there's more involvement from Environment Canada, or the DFO or even provincial government that it would work better to reestablish itself?

A: I think if they would just leave things along it would be the best. There's too much involvement by DFO and govt.

Q: How so?

A: Well like I said, corporate, they're trying to ... if they'd leave the owner-operators alone.

Q: So that's all the questions that I have, I don't know if there's anything else that you can think to tell me?

A: Well, just that they should drop, probably drop the trap limit.

Q: What is the trap limit right now?

A: Right now its 280 –

Q: Oh I thought it was more than that-

A: Well it was 300 for years and years, they dropped 20. If they dropped to 250, and limit the size of the traps. Another thing that hurts the lobster stocks is technology, sounders and GPSs and stuff.

Q: How does that effect-?

A: Well there's not a spot on the bottom where you don't know if there's a rock or-

Q: There's just too much, so everybody has too much of an advantage is that it?

A: Yeah there's too much, the lobster doesn't have a chance. See back when I started we had nothing. We had a compass.

Q: Yeah.

A: That was it. Remember what I said before, with the older people, it was landmarks. That's how you knew where you were.

Q: Yeah, that's what Gregory said too. He tried, tried, to learn the landmarks.

A: Clinton was only fishing a few years before-

Q: Before you went?

A: Before I went with him, but old Bill fished for 40 years and it was through experience that he knew where to-

Q: Where everything was and where all the best spots were and-

A: He didn't learn that just in 1 minute.

Q: Yeah. So, if they want to limit the size of the traps, what size are they using then? I thought they were all using the same like you have, wooden ones...

A: Yeah, but I mean there's, most of them are 4 feet, but some of them 27 inches wide and I have 21 inch.

Q: Yeah.

A: The 27 inch ones don't catch anymore lobsters when there's no lobsters, but when there is more they'll really clean up-

Q: An area up.

A: Yeah. If you were using, like a smaller trap, they can't hold as much.

Q: So some lobsters have a chance cause it's already full.

A: Yeah, yeah. A 21 inch trap will work just as good as a 27 inch trap. You know, it just won't hold as much.

Q: Now, in where Chrissy is (Northumberland Fisheries Museum), and they're trying to promote the lobster hatchery and the adopt a lobster and send the little ones down the tube into the harbour, do you think that that's a good idea and try and promote it that way or?

A: Can't hurt.

Q: No. But do you think that, I know that some people would think that it's ridiculous to send, to adopt a little baby lobster...

A: Well I don't know about the adopt-thing, the seedlings, I mean that can't hurt anything. Nobody knows how many of them live or anything but, it can't hurt.

Q: Yeah.

A: That's the association that backs that. The union down towards Antigonish that way, they do it a little different. They don't have seedlings, but I'm not sure if this is right, basically what they do at the end of the season, I think the guys, they bring in their catch, I think they have an agreement with the buyers they they'll pick female lobsters out, and the fishermen get paid for them lobsters, but I think the union buys them back, and sets them back in the water. That again just puts more females in the water. I think that's a better idea than the hatchery. Those females are going right back to the natural habitat. Instead of-

Q: The seedlings being grown in a hatchery.

A: Yeah.

Q: It's one thing to do that and then let them go at the end of their tourist season, but I think it would be more beneficial to have the females than the poor little babies that may or may not survive.

A: Yeah well they're only wee-

Q: Yeah they're only bean sized.

A: But that's just me saying that, I don't know maybe the hatchery idea is better, I don't know.

Q: Is that in Lismore they have that or?

A: Well just down, I can't really... I'd just say down in Antigonish, down that country somewhere, from Lismore and up.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, down there, the union is bigger down there than the association, they have more members.

Q: What about, now, where they're going to try and get rid of or change seasonal EI? Is that gonna be-

A: Well that's another way of getting people out. The seasonal EI for the fishermen got out of hand. Instead of drawing one claim – I still do that – they were allowed to buy, or allowed to draw 2 claims.

Q: Ok.

A: If you have enough money, it goes by how much money you've earned-

Q: Ok-

A: You have enough money right after lobster fishing you can draw summer claim from middle of June.

Q: Oh ok.

A: Until the end of October and go right on another claim ... twice. **[Smirks]**

Q: How though? I don't understand...

A: Well it doesn't go by hours, or weeks, it goes by how much money you made. So if you made enough money in May-

Q: Yeah-

A: You can start a claim on the 1st of June, and let it run, draw unemployment all summer...

Q: While you fish-

A: Well you don't have to fish...

Q: Oh ok-

A: And then in October when that claim runs out you can start another claim-

Q: Oh ok-

A: And it's not right.

Q: No. And that would go until the next-

A: Until the spring.

Q: Yeah.

A: So, that got out of hand. One claim is plenty.

Q: So, do a lot of people do that up here, or is that more like-

A: Well it's more... if you had enough money.

Q: Yeah. Because up here-

A: Pardon?

Q: Up here they would have enough would they?

A: Oh well some of them, probably Caribou, I never have enough. I just wait until, I start a claim in November and that gets me through the winter. But if you have enough money then you can run two claims.

Q: Oh.

A: So these guys that are catching all these lobsters, well they're making \$100,000 doing that, and they're riding unemployment for 10 months.

Q: Ok, so they only have to fish lobster... so they don't bother fishing anything else?

A: Well some of them do see.

Q: That's how I thought they could do the 2 claims, was that they fish lobster, that was done, and they did their first claim, and then they fish herring or scallop or crab or something.

A: Yeah well they can do that, if they don't have enough... they make enough for their 1st claim the end of May or whatever. See you always have to start that claim for the 1st of June. If you don't have enough for a full claim you can-

Q: You can do partial can't you?

A: Partial, yes. But then, whatever you make in June and whatever you make doing something else, you can draw another claim, see.

Q: Ok.

A: But if you make enough money lobster fishing, you don't have to do anything else, you can just go right into unemployment. Which isn't fair.

Q: No. See I didn't think that a lot of people were doing that here, I thought that was more like, the south shore and the eastern shore because they have different seasons than here. Ok, because I didn't know that. And... so they're kind of ruining it for everyone else then...

A: No, it just got to be ... if everyone would of just kept getting one claim...

Q: Yeah, instead of offering the option for two.

A: Well then once everyone else found out about that, well no wonder they say it isn't fair cause its not fair.

Q: Yeah-

A: And I think that's why that got shut off.

Q: Yeah, because seasonal EI is different for fisherman than it is for other types of seasonal workers.

A: But now they're gonna make it that hard, like I can draw it this year, but next year I'm not even gonna be bothered even trying to get it.

Q: Because it'll be too-

A: It's just too much red tape.

Q: Yeah-

A: And you gotta call them in about every 2 days, or everyday and tell them you're looking for a job, they're just making it that hard that you're not gonna even bother trying to get it.

Q: Oh yeah, they just want you-

A: They want you out of the unemployment.

Q: So what are you doing to do if you can't claim EI? Build Aunt Janice another cottage I guess? **[Laughs]**

A: I'll have to work or do something that's all. Now maybe that wont happen too, there might be enough pressure against it that they can get it reversed somehow, maybe they'll, I don't know, but right now that's the way it looks.

Q: But it would have to be pressure from, like, wouldn't all the unions and fishermen's associations would have to actually cooperate together and...

A: Yeah...

Q: Do you think that would happen or do think that they're unorganized?

A: Oh it would happen I think, maybe.

Q: There was, I remember in like, March, there was a big rise up against it but I haven't heard anything about it since so I don't know if it got pushed aside and they're trying to redo the-

A: Yeah I don't know, I never heard much about it either.

Q: I think a lot of people too, they would be spending their EI checks in the community, and then if they take that away that's another hit to the economy.

A: Yeah that's another hit, that's right.

Q: When I wrote my chapter on the socioeconomic impacts, a lot of people talked about that, like if they're going to take away to EI that's another strike against them, they don't understand why the provincial and federal governments would allow it because they're not going to make any money if the local economies aren't making any money.

A: Yes, that's right. Well the Harper government just hates the east coast and they hate the fisheries, and they look to the west coast for an example because it's been ruined since years, its all corporate out there, and they're just dealing with one big company.

Q: Yeah, in BC it's all corporate isn't it?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, because I read about that in another article and someone was saying that its totally ruined and it just looks like, they called it a wasteland cause there's just nothing there anymore for fishermen.

A: Yeah.

Q: So when you say they look to the west for an example, do you mean like, the fishermen's associations or do you mean Harper and them?

A: Oh well Harper and them, that's what they want to do and of course the associations are looking and they don't want that to happen. Two sides of the... and another thing here, not that subject, but everybody got too big. \$200,000 boats and ... you know.

Q: It's all about having the best of everything, isn't it?

A: Yeah, it's like try to take too much, trying to take \$100 out of a \$50 job sort of thing ... it's just not there.

Q: Now do you think that's more like, people that are doing that, are they younger generation (Robert shakes head yes)... and they want the best of the best of everything?

A: Yeah they just have to have the best of everything.

Q: Now there's another thing with the BC issue was that they talked about, because there's no local fishermen or anything that are involved in the fishery over there, that they've lost that whole sense of, that way of life, altogether, it's just gone. Do you think that's a big thing that fishermen around here are worried about, that it would be lost altogether?

A: Well, can't help but be lost because there just wouldn't be anybody there.

Q: Yeah-

A: Well there'd be some that would be working on the company boats and stuff but...

Q: Do you think that the younger generation, like over there [points to neighbours house]... they don't take advice from the fishermen that are already in the fishery and have been for decades?

A: Oh they'll take some, whatever advice they want.

Q: But they don't really want any ... they want, technology, technology, and then more technology I guess?

A: Well, if you're going to compete you have to have it.

Q: Have the best?

A: Well maybe not the best but you have to have something.

ACST MA Thesis Interview Transcript:
Gregory Johnson, October 19, 2012

Q: Interviewer, Caitlin Johnson (Question)

A: Interviewee, Gregory Johnson (Answer)

Q: When did you begin fishing, and with whom?

A: Oh I started in 1956, I was 14 years old, and just fished on the weekends, Saturdays, or if there was a school holiday. Because then ... what they call March break now, that was Easter week, it was tied in to Easter weekend. Sometimes ... there was one year when Easter was really late, so I could go fishing...

Q: Oh ok. So that was in 1956...

A: **[Inaudible]**... and that was the first year that I had a lobster license-

Q: Oh you had to have your own?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Everybody had to have their own then. I thought you would have had to work off-

A: Everybody in the boat had to have their own. And it was a tremendous cost.

Q: How much did it cost in 1956?

A: 25 cents. **[Chuckles]**

Q: That's what I figured.

A: Actually I don't know what grandfather's... probably cost a couple of dollars.

Q: A couple of dollars more. So how many years did you fish with him for?

A: 2 seasons, I only fished 2 years. 2 months worth of work a year just wasn't quite enough. And then I fished part time with him probably four or five years.

Q: So when he took you out fishing did he teach you anything or try and teach you anything to help ... Dad talked about landmarks was one thing he was taught when he was out fishing.

A: Grandpa tried... **[chuckles]** ... but uh, but it is extremely important. It may not be a whole great big ocean out there but that's a lot of water out there cause you see the island is on the other side... but a lot of times it's real easy to get hauled down [the strait] so you had to know the shore landmarks. Back then it wasn't ...

Q: It was all about knowing where you were –

A: Knowing where you were all the time. I can remember being out there and the fog closing the strait down and telling grandfather to "turn the boat around!" **[Inaudible]**... and the more he stood in the middle of the boat, cause then they steered from the middle of the boat[muffled]... and he's take us straight in [to the wharf] and he couldn't see in the fog but he'd be looking over the side and he could tell by the height of the ripples how close he was to the shore-

Q: Oh-

A: The closer you were the higher the waves would be... **[Inaudible]** ... and we'd be away out in the off grounds, he'd use a lead weight with bacon fat on it, and drop it over the side to tell how good the bottom was, because you wanted rock not sand. It was kind of neat and like, he could tell by the feel of the line ... but I mean he'd been doing it for up to 50 years by this point.

Q: So he was pretty much a pro at it. **[Chuckles]** I'd never heard of that one before, with the bacon grease on a lead weight. I've read about taking a grapple to feel the bottom.

A: Actually, it was around when uh, Captain Cook I think it was, when he was surveying NL, that's what the English sailors would have used to bring up samples of the bottom. It was pretty interesting ... I spent one summer on the Acadia, that's the one that's down in the museum- that's how you know you're old, when stuff you worked on is in museums- but uh, what I found really interesting out there every time it was so different, and looking at his charts and their charts, they had to go back over because Cook's was more accurate, and he was doing this 200 years before technology- didn't have anything even close to a computer- and I just found that totally amazing. And he'd say [Cook] that there was a sandy bottom under 200 meters of water, there would be a sandy bottom. **[Inaudible]**

Q: Was there anything he taught you to help increase yields, like how he would know there would be- other than rock on the bottom- where there would be a lot of lobsters?

A: Temperature of the water, and the way the wind was blowing. Now it had to be a big wind, not just a little breeze sort of thing, but south winds didn't fish well and of course that's years of being out there and seeing these things. When the water was cool the lobsters moved around more, and the south winds usually meant warm water. **[Inaudible]** And of course there's other things, like the bait had to be right, and uh, if there's too much salt put in the herring we used for bait, it wouldn't decay and didn't attract the lobsters. That's what I mean when I say the bait had to be right, almost coming apart in your hands when you take it from the crate.

Q: Before you had talked about that Albie had a larger role in Toney River because he had property rights, or something, that you had explained before?

A: That would have been great grandpa Johnson, not your grandfather Johnson, his grandfather. We're reaching back here. Albie sold the property rights when they went to the states. You came pretty close to being an American!

Q: Oh great! **[Chuckles]**

A: There used to be pictures, when I went through all the pictures out there, I found a lot of them missing-

Q: Out at our house [interviewer's parent's house]? Oh ok-

A: There used to be pictures there of Dad and Duncan down in the states, when grandpa Albie- just to keep it simple, was working down there at Ford or GM, one of the other, and they went down... but uh, I had no real idea but I think that it probably had a lot to do with home sickness that he came back, but now of course he couldn't get the old farm back, he had sold it, that was the one-

Q: Beside the moss plant [in Toney River]-

A: That was the original homestead. It's actually not the original one, the original was inland a little bit but that's... getting into the family history. Anyway, so grandpa became, I'm not exactly sure how it worked, but he did have some of the water rights that didn't go with it, and sometime in the '30s they passed legislation [muffled] ... it didn't take it away from him but he couldn't pass it on to one of his sons or family, when he died it was gone. But they had to come and get permission from him when they wanted to do work at the wharf, and he probably got some money out of it.

Q: I would hope so. **[Laughs]**

A: You wouldn't know anything about him except for stories, and that kind of thing.

Q: Well I mean, I don't even know a whole lot, I didn't know they even went to the United States... Dad never really talked about it a whole lot, cause you know how talkative he is.

A: Almost as talkative as his father. We used to joke about the fact that Duncan had only been issued 500 words and he didn't want to waste them. And I find it amazing because in his younger years he was very talkative.

Q: See I never would have known that.

A: I remember being up at the wharf and the other fishermen would be telling stories about Duncan in younger years, and I'd be standing there saying, "My uncle? Are you

sure?” Him and his green hornet... apparently if he pulled in your yard and stepped out of the truck with a bottle in his hand you knew you were really going to be drinking. I find it hard... I still find it hard to believe.

Q: Well Mum tells me stories about Dad when he was younger and I'm just like, “Nope, I don't believe it.”

A: Well did she ever tell you the story about the time he drove over the woodpile in his truck?

Q: Nope. **[Laughs]**

A: He did that, in his four-wheel drive truck. And he wasn't trying to do anything, he was just lost. **[Laughs]**

Q: When did... when you were fishing, did you ever notice when the government was trying to move in and regulate different things in the lobster fishery, or take over different places?

A: Actually the government wasn't, at least where I was, anyway I never really noticed it, outside of the fisheries officers. When they first started cutting back the number of traps, but that was the fisheries association, and uh, I don't really remember the government saying too much other than, “We think this might be a good idea, what do you guys think?” And poor Isaac Veniot was the fish warden assigned to that part of the strait... All the fishermen liked him, but all the fishermen hassled him, but they didn't want to hassle him to the point where he'd quit cause they didn't want a new fish warden-

Q: Another person to be put in there. So what was his role as fish warden? Did he just make sure that everybody did what they're supposed to do or?

A: Oh yes, well he sold the fishing licenses, and check and make sure everybody followed the rules, check the boats for safety like, for things like lifejackets and things like that, and he did ... he wasn't the only one, they had others- but check for small lobsters, like illegal lobsters, but he had a pretty good job. But also looking for poachers, which wasn't a very big problem, if there were poachers out there they probably wouldn't last very long for Issac to get to them **[chuckles]** ...

Q: Yeah I was just going to ask you that.

A: The thing is they just aren't as close knit as they used to be, and there's no bunkhouse or factory for them to hang out in...

Q: Well it was like a little community really-

A: And uh, they'd have their yearly union party the last week of April. They'd get everything all done and they'd be ready to go out to sea, nothing else to do ... and this

always happened “by accident,” and it just amazed me that none of them ever drowned because a lot of them couldn’t swim.

Q: I know, I’ve read that, that a lot of fishermen, not just in Pictou County, but everywhere ... they just don’t know how to swim.

A: Grandpa could swim but he said a lot of them didn’t see the sense in it because if you’re 15 miles offshore, why prolong the agony, just get it over with. No, I’ve seen them fall off, they always seem to get a hold of something... remember there one spring Johnny Pott was sitting on the gas can, and gas cans were metal then, and he was smoking a cigarette and he dropped the cigarette butt near an empty gas can full of fumes and it blew him right into the river-

Q: Oh my gosh-

A: Somebody got into a boat and pulled him out you know, and there always seemed to be somebody there to pull you out. The funny part of it was he just went and got another pot, another gas can to sit on. I don’t imagine Robert ever did the ice - he might have I don’t know-

Q: He didn’t say anything, but he may have-

A: Well if the ice was coming down packed real firm, and two years that I was out there with him [Grandpa]... to put the traps out ... everybody knew the ice was coming, but there was a couple of the older fishermen like Grandpa that would run the chance and they’d put their traps out, and then if the ice... once it ran past the end of the island coming up the strait, we would long line. You’d take the bull trawls, put them together, tie them together, so in our case that meant 9 miles of rope and they put trees, like spruce trees, on the ends and we’d space them too because the idea was that they would slide under the ice, and they would be quite long, probably 5 feet long or something like that, and with the weight of the traps they’d stay maybe a couple of feet above the water so then we could find them and catch up. After all the ice went, once you went to long line it, might have taken a week or more, you pull those traps... with the bull traps, you have 56 bull traps, 20 traps to a draw, you’ve got a break in between each bull trap, but on the long line snap that rope on the niggerhead – and that may not be politically correct but that’s what it was – and you started pulling and 9 miles later you stopped pulling.

Q: Oh my god.

A: I seen, like the first day out there, Grandma almost had to feed us, the arms would be, you know a bit tired [shows limp arms]. Once you got a half an hour of it, you’d be ... but it was, it was hard work. But it was good work. The uh, I’m just trying to think of things ... the community aspect is a big thing I miss of it, when I was up there, from about the first of April to the middle of July there was always people at the wharf. And even through most of the summer because some of them were dragging the scallops and the Irish moss, and all that kind of stuff. Not everybody did that. A lot of them just did

the lobsters and went back to full time work. And there were several like myself, I was two years part time while I worked at the car works-

Q: Oh ok-

A: I had to be there for the start of the 4 o'clock shift and get off at midnight, go home and out on the water... I'd die now.

Q: Oh yeah, I think I would too-

A: But then I could do it. And unlike Jackie I didn't drink much.

Q: Oh yes, he's a different story altogether I guess.

A: Not that I didn't, but I didn't drink much.

Q: Well what was that you said about Jackie... didn't you have to go pick him up one night or something?

A: Hmm?

Q: Didn't you have to go pick him up from somewhere, at a dance or something, and he crashed the car or something?

A: Oh there was a whole bunch of things done, see the night he crashed the car he made it home with somebody else, and then your grandfather drove him to the hospital.

Q: Oh ok-

A: That's when he got the bad back-

Q: Yes he broke his back then didn't he?

A: He got a lot of sympathy from grandpa [sarcasm]... we went in the next day- grandmother insisted that grandpa had to go in to see him- everybody that talked to grandpa was at an absolute loss, but we knew better. If I really wanted something I knew to ask grandma. She made it look to the outside world that he was the boss, but she was really in charge... But anyways she marched him in, but at that time he was in the hallway – even back then –

Q: There was still no room-

A: Still no room, and uh, grandpa crept up to the edge of the bed – grandma sent me with him to make sure the old fella went – she knew, she said “I'll know if he leaves the yard, I wont know if he goes to the hospital – that's why you'll go” – so anyway, he walked up

to the edge of the bed, and he looked at Jackie and he said, "Well I suppose you expect to get paid while you lay in here doing nothing." All the sympathy in the world you know-

Q: Oh my god, **[laughs]**.

A: The first week of lobster season was the worst... he used to do things like chase Jackie with an axe, and the boat wasn't very big ... I would have to try to intercede – it took about the first week of the season to get him sober, and after that he was good, he only drank during that time period, that I knew of. The only time I experienced his drinking was the last week of April and the first week of May – and not very much during that first week of May, just sort of enough to keep the head straight. But uh, he was ... he never got angry at me, mad at Jackie all the time ...

Q: Well cause it was Jackie **[laughs]**.

A: Yeah **[laughs]** Well I shouldn't say he never did, he got mad at me once, I did something wrong, he started hollering at me, and I said, "Grandpa we're starting close to shore, I'm going home," and he said, "you cant leave!" and I said, "I can leave right now, right over the side. I can swim from here to land, so make up your land, I'm not taking this." He had a belly full of beer, and I was about to wonder... he had quite the temper, he had some pretty big hollering things in there ... While grandma was arranging her estate, paying off the funeral, and uh, but he never asked me to drive him, he always got Jackie to drive him. I have no idea why-

Q: You just knew your role and that was it-

A: Oh yes we all had our spot. Uh, and I'm trying to think of more of ... Grandpa was a big time fishermen, the first couple of weeks we'd average around, well the highest was about 3000 lbs.

Q: Oh wow-

A: But keep in mind you're getting about 28-30 cents a lb for them.

Q: Yes. Was there every any problem in the strait that you knew of, with um, trawlers or draggers?

A: No. There was something about, if they were ... I remember them talking about the possibility and the Fishermen's Associations of NB, NS and PEI got together to do something about the draggers. Now I wasn't in any way... I remember them talking about it... but this was kind of after I had left. So it never really went anywhere. I really think the biggest thing that saved them was the quantity of fish in the strait, and I think the closest thing they had for big schools of fish was herring in Caribou.

Q: Was there any talk among fishermen about if the draggers had done any damage to the where the lobsters were usually found in the rocky bottom?

A: Oh there's no doubt in that.

Q: I've read a lot of scientific reports by Environment Canada that draggers really damaged a lot of the habitats where the lobsters were living.

A: You can tell where a dragger's been. 15-20 years would have gone by and maybe even longer than that. I dive, ok, and I've been down, just after draggers have gone by - this is off the south shore - and I've also been down in areas that were drug years before that - I don't know how many years, but the local fishermen said around 15 to 20 years ago, but they even take up the rocks. They just destroy everything, that's going to be lobster habitats, scallop habitat ... there's just nothing. It doesn't recover fast. My observation is that draggers should be banned from the face of the world.

Q: There was one report I read and I think it was by the DFO, but it was the scientist hired for them to do the research, and he went down and he dove and observed where the draggers had gone by outside of Pictou Harbour, and it was just nothing - there were no lobsters, no scallops, just a big -

A: Just a big field-

Q: Yeah, and that was like 20 years prior that they had done all that, cause that was in the '70s when he had done that report. You also worked done at the factory for Broidy, didn't you? And what was that like? Good or bad?

A: I wouldn't do it now but it was a lot of fun. **[Laughs]** No, Mr. Landry, Charlie Landry, ran the factory, he was a really good supervisor. He wasn't a ranting or raving idiot, he got people to work by being nice to them, he was a really, really good supervisor. Of course he could have ran the factory just with his family - they had 22 children -

Q: Oh, oh my god I didn't know that-

A: I think they had 4 or 5 sets of twins, anyways, in doing all that Mrs. Landry worked at the factory full time, and he had a brother that worked for them too. The brother ran the fish factory over in **[Inaudible]** ... and it was uh... I worked both in the factory and on the floats.

Q: That's what I was going to ask you, it was floats that you also worked on-

A: Yes, they're two separate things but I worked on both of them. I worked on the floats the first year and by the second year - they had the tank house - and I worked there.

Q: Oh ok.

A: And of course one of the big attractions of working at the lobster factory was you got to eat at the cookhouse.

Q: Oh right you talked about that.

A: I'm taking a guess but there were about 250-300 people working there.

Q: Oh I didn't realize it was that many people.

A: It may actually have been more, I know that there was nearly 200 people that came from New Brunswick. See, what Broidy did, most the time, because he'd be in Caribou and then he would move to Cape Tormentine, so when he was in Caribou he would hire the families of the fishermen in New Brunswick, and when he was in Tormentine he would hire the families ... you know, and back and forth, and they'd move back and forth – not so much the fishermen but their families – but uh, I can't remember now, 10 or 12 crates of lobsters in the big cooker, and it took roughly 15 minutes – it would cook by steam – took roughly 15 minutes and they brought them out and set them at the tables and all that kind of stuff [to dismantle for canning]. It was kind of a dangerous place but I don't remember a lot of people getting hurt, I think it was because everybody was being extra careful. The wooden floors were always wet, and no flat floors, the floors were all slanted and uh, and of course you were always in a rush because see uh, because the idea was you got paid so much, like in Cape Tormentine got paid so much a month, but we got paid so much an hour, but we got paid based on a 48 hour week. If they had 10 tons of lobsters in the morning and those 10 tons were done, we went home. Everybody was always rushing, and of course you used very sharp things for cleaning the lobsters, like the shears, people occasionally getting bad cuts but I don't remember anybody really being off. The floats were losing people because the days got to be really long, and sometimes you'd be out there 18-20 hours, and you're walking down the float and you've got this crate of lobsters and you walk right off the end of the float, and you're wearing rubber boots and oil skins and heavy clothes and you'd have all the swimming ability of a brick. But uh, they had to do resuscitation a couple of times but I don't believe that anybody ever actually died. The only one I ever seen come close was Donnie Landry, and that's because he slipped and fell into the herring guts, and there was a little squabble because nobody wanted to start resuscitation on him, [chuckles]. But first nobody wanted to go in after him. But anyway, and he died in a car accident a couple of years later. But the uh, the factory wasn't a bad place to work. Broidy was a big believer in the meals being good, he had this thing that if you keep them full they won't get cranky. We did have a strike once, when I was on strike for a ... I got nose to nose with Cox Russell – I don't know if you've ever heard of him-

Q: Yes I have-

A: He and I almost got into the "you and me – outside" stage [Inaudible] You know what Cox to back off? Broidy looked at him and said, "Cox, that's Albie's grandson."

Q: Oh, yeah end of fight right there. [Chuckles]

A: You beat him up and the old fella will come looking for yah. [Laughs]

Q: Yeah I wouldn't want that.

A: It was more because of the fishing connection with lobsters, bought and sold ... he sold to Broidy, but he always had the option of going ... But when I started it was just at the end of the Co-op, and the Co-op died because they had nobody to buy from. All the fishermen had got together **[Inaudible]** and I don't know much about him [Co-op manager] but he had to be the worst person to be put in charge of something, because he didn't keep track of who took what, and wasn't keeping track of what went where. He had this attitude of "oh well it all belongs to you guys so just help yourselves," and you can't run a business like that. The year I was there was the last year of the Co-op, they were there ... Broidy and Magee worked on the side of the wharf next to the moss plant - the moss plant wasn't there then - and the other side of the wharf was the Co-op.

Q: So what would you do on the floats? I've never read a whole lot on the floats and Dad's never really talked about floats with me.

A: Ok well when the lobsters came in, either off the boats or off the back of the trucks, the first thing we did was weigh them all in, now they'd already been weighed at Toney River or wherever they bought them, so we weighed them all in and we looked at them all, picked out all the weak ones, made sure they were tagged - at that time there were wooden tags- and then put them in the pressure pot. **[Inaudible]** So we did that, and of course we measured them for size, and then we repacked them, and the markets were in to a certain float and when the tank house was filled - the markets went into the tank house - and the canners were the ones that were going in to cook. So we sorted that out and took them in the trays - and the floats were a whole bunch of trays - and there were only about 6 inches deep, and we'd fill it, put it in the float, and then put another tray on top, and then another. Of course you had to keep track, now not everybody on the floats is doing this, but somebody on the float is keeping track. A comment on people working on the float: I got the job of standing with the clip board keeping track of all that - because I could read and write - and at that time there were a lot of people that couldn't read and write much. And they didn't care, and I didn't have to work hard so I liked that. But you better not make a mistake, or ...

Q: You're in big trouble.

A: Every lobster that went into that boat **[Inaudible]**...they kept track of them on a number basics as well as weight, but because it was outside and it didn't matter what the weather was, you were on the float. Unless it was that dirty that the fishermen couldn't even go to sea, and even when they didn't go to sea there were a certain amount of people on the floats to make sure they didn't get away. It was interesting, you know. It was something else for me. You'd get the oil skins off and just drop cause you're so tired, maybe wake up 2 or 3 hours later and get undressed and into the bed, at the bunkhouse. And every one of the bunkhouses had at least one person whose job it was to sweep the floors, keep the fires going, things of that nature. The female bunkhouses had at least 4 older women who were the wardens.

Q: Ah yes, a lot of the women were from New Brunswick, weren't there? They were Acadians?

A: A few, I should say quite a few, 20-30 were from Springhill.

Q: Oh ok, I think I've read that somewhere-

A: Not long after the mines blew up there was a lot of widowed ladies came to work. I'm not sure on this but I believe they worked together, one or two grandmothers, maybe a dozen of them, would look after the children. **[Inaudible]**... worked 4 months out of the whole year, but it gave them enough stance to go on unemployment. Those ladies had life pretty tough. But I never um, I don't remember... there were a few fights, but I don't remember a lot of fights. There was a thing between the French and the English but very seldom did it get to actually fighting, usually if it got to actually fighting it there was a girl involved.

Q: Yes I was going to say, it would probably be over a girl.

A: Some things never change. Of course I imagine now there's probably some fights where the girls would be fighting over the guys.

Q: I think that's more the case nowadays than the other way around. **[Laughs]**

A: **[Laughs]** ... And of course the accommodations were ... while they were comfortable, though they were a little rough, there was no running water, so everything was cold water unless you wanted to heat water on the stove that's in the shack, and the toilets were, a row of toilets behind the building. Most of us made off pretty well.

Q: Now, was Broidy a very important figure in Pictou or, was he just kind of there to just to do his business and that was it?

A: First, Mr. Broidy was a great person, ok, personal opinion here obviously. He did keep a relatively low profile, I guess father started business with him ... and um, he moved up on the hill, I cant remember the name of the street ... anyway you had to walk by his house to get to the Exhibition ...

Q: Oh yes I know here you mean-

A: ...and he had the most fascinating driveway because you never got snow on it –

Q: Oh-

A: ...it was heated-

Q: Oh, ok!

A: The snow melted off right off it ... and uh, he was really ... my dad really liked working for him and all that sort of stuff, there was always somebody that didn't like him for some reason... but the majority of people didn't have anything against ... But the thing I found funny when I was growing was most of the people in the towns would give the Mansour's more trouble than him because the Mansour's were Jewish. There was a conflict between Mr. Broidy and Mr. Mansour. And he did things, like um, every year he would get a list of names of the people that were having hard jobs in the town, and he would make sure that they got pretty good grocery orders, and not just at Christmas –

Q: Oh he did it ...

A: Everybody gets some stuff at Christmas, but there were some were starving in February, you know its small towns its not hard to figure out who's in hard times. And uh, I delivered his newspapers, he got 2 papers every day, one at his house and the one at his office. And if I had to drive my bike and paddle all the way to Halifax, for the Halifax Herald, I would have.

Q: Did you ever have to? **[Gregory shakes head no]** No? **[Laughs]**

A: **[Chuckles]** When I first started delivering the papers they came in to town on the train, and there was a train that came to town every morning that picked up the workers at the car works, and they dropped the papers off, and the last couple of years of delivering papers there was a taxi driver that was contracted to come to Pictou from Alma Corner, he met the bus at Alma Corner, an Acadian bus. Mr. Broidy was more than generous... but he got those 2 papers, and I got to hang around his house a little bit, kind of browsing. He was never pretentious or that sort of thing...when I was a teenager **[Inaudible]** When I got my drivers license at 16, my first driving job was to drive Mrs. Broidy to Montreal in their brand new Jag, XKE, not the sports car, but the big Jag. And this is on the old roads, so I've got this little old lady in the back of the Jag, she wasn't as old as I am now but, **[muffled]** when I was 16 she was a little old lady, and so I was trying to avoid pot holes and all this stuff that I figured would upset her. **[Inaudible]** and there was a partition and I had to turn on the intercom, and I piped up, "Yes Mrs. Broidy?" and she said, "Young man, are you afraid of this vehicle?" and I said, "No ma'am, I just didn't think you wanted to drive very fast" and she said "Bill told me that your father taught you to drive WELL." And I said, "Well yes, " and she said "Bill will pay any speeding ticket you pick up," now this is in the days before points you know, and she said "I don't want to spend the rest of my life on the road to Montreal." That was quite a trip, now on the way back I took it pretty slow, but when she was in the car she wanted to go 180 miles an hour, that thing would top ... but anyway, **[muffled]** they were really nice people. Some interesting conflicts between the Broidy's and Mansour's, both of them were known to be grumpy but the Mansour's weren't quite as There was a competition at one point, they put Victory Heights up for sale, ok, and it was between them - Broidy wanted to sell it to individuals but the Mansour's and town council put it up as a unit. So they bid, he bid, they bid, he bid, and in the end of it, he ended up with it and he said he'd sell it all to the people that were living there. I don't want to be biased but I certainly did not want the Mansour's to own it, the housing. They certainly owned a

lot of property. Samuel B used to bring over, Samuel B was a boat the Broidy's owned, used to bring fish from the Magdalene Island's, something else that we dealt with, and dad used to spend a month every winter rebuilding the engines, they managed to sink it at least once a year. It was a fairly big boat, a wooden boat –

Q: I think I've seen pictures of it-

A: And Sam B, **[Inaudible]**...the captain on it would not **[Inaudible]** ...he was a nice gentleman, really nice guy, sailing back and forth between Pictou and the Magdalene's ... I don't know how much she would hold.... she must have been extremely buoyant because it was a ... 2 or 3 day trip. Loading the trucks, that was another thing we did, out of the boats, and out of the tank house, we had the trucks go down to the states. Mr. Broidy had a bunch of cowboys driving the trucks, he bought a brand new truck every year. To drive for Mr. Broidy you had to be able to load out of Caribou and 23 hours be backing into the fisherman's wharf in New York City and you had to clear the border on the way, so like I said a bunch of cowboys. But once again if Broidy paid all the speeding tickets and there was no points.

Q: So they didn't have anything to worry about because they didn't have to pay the tickets.

A: If they were on this side of the border Bill looked after it they were on the other side of the border his brother Samuel looked after it. His brother lived in New York City, he's the one that sold the fish. I went on a couple trips down when I was in high school and that sort of stuff, the other driver had to agree, that sort of deal was ok well we'll take your kid this week and next week. **[Laughs]** We were pretty well- for the most part- looked after. **[Chuckles]** They were always playing jokes on each other and everything, and the worst thing that Dad did to me on this trip when we were coming back from the states, go in to the border, Dad gets out of the truck and goes in to have some sodas... and the guard passes by and says, "what are you doing in there?! Let's see some identification." I was... I thought I was going to jail, almost in to tears before Dad came out and said "ok, that's enough, we've had our fun"-

Q: He put him up to it did he?

A: Oh yeah, **[laughs]** I had no idea... Coming back one trip we smuggled a grand piano in for Mr. Broidy, and Mr. Broidy said to Dad, "If you can get that across the border without payin' duty on it, the duty money is yours." So they put right in the front of the truck, and put tarp over it, and then they packed it full of fish crates and they were pretty sure – and they were right – that the American, 'er Canadian customs guards, the Americans didn't care – the Canadian customs guards were not going to crawl in through those fish crates to see what was in them. But I can tell the story now because everybody that would have been involved has long been deceased. **[Chuckles]** There's nothing anybody can do about it now ... I don't know what else... some of the fishermen would take tinkers ashore – Grandpa would never do that – that's undersized lobsters-

Q: Oh ok-

A: The tinkers are actually the best eating-

Q: Yes, yep. The smaller the lobster the better the taste – not that Dad ever brings home undersized lobsters or anything like that. **[Chuckles]**

A: Yep, it is, and not a lot of people realize that when they buy lobsters they should get the canners. Not those great big jumbos that are just like-

Q: Oh yes I know, that's why I laugh because when I used to work at Sobeys in Pictou, and the tourists would come in and get the biggest lobsters in the tank and I'd be like, "why did you get that lobster?" and they'd say, "oh well cause they're the best!" and I'd be like, "no, that's not right."

A: Yeah, that's not the way it works. **[Chuckles]** ... Well I spent, well not just me by myself, there were 4 of us, but I spent about 5 days watching a huge jumbo- well actually they had killed him, he was cooked-

Q: Oh yes you told me this-

A: Hmm?

Q: You told me that before, they took the lobster and they set it on an anthill?

A: And the ants ate everything out, it was totally naturally looking- this thing, it was huge, it came in a lobster crate all by itself propped up – and they couldn't get the top down, it had been brought up in a dragger or something, I'm not sure exactly how they got it, and Mr. Broidy got it mounted on a plaque and I have no idea what happened to it after that.

Q: I was thinking about that too, because I was wondering if maybe someone has it in their house somewhere and they just don't bother telling anybody-

A: It might or it may have ended up with the relations, I have no idea what happened cause I was long gone from Pictou after that.

Q: Broidy also started the Lobster Carnival didn't he, or had something to do with ...

A: He didn't start it, he revived it. It existed before the war, stopped during the war, and he started it again. It was before the war when Dad and Duncan won the trophy...

Q: Oh ok cause I didn't know if it was before the war or after the war that he had gotten the trophy. Cause I remember it used to sit on our piano in the living room, but I never really asked about it I just knew that was what it was from. But Aunt Janice has it now, I don't know why –

A: That doesn't surprise me, she probably has pictures too.

ACST MA Thesis Interview Transcript:
Jackie Johnson, November 1, 2012.

Q: Interviewer, Caitlin Johnson (Question)

A: Interviewee, Jackie Johnson (Answer)

Q: So, when did you begin lobster fishing?

A: Oh, well I started goin' out with my grandfather when I was eleven, so that would be... I was born in 1943 so ... '53 it'd be, '55-'56, roughly.

Q: Ok, and that was with your grandfather. Did you ever fish with anybody else or, mostly?

A: Well through the years I fished different species off and on, with other people. But mostly I fished for myself.

Q: When you fished with these other people did you learn any like, tricks or techniques about how to-

A: Oh it's every time you're out in the boat, you're learning something new, you know, if you're paying attention-

Q: **[Laughs]** Yeah-

A: That sort of thing. Yes, so uh, for example herring fishin', I went out with the Pictou Islanders, a man by the name of Scott Falconer. First time I fished herring I supposed I'd be, maybe 15-16 years old, fished one season with him. Learned the trade that way of herring fishing with him, cause my grandfather never fished herring – commercially – he just fished for bait.

Q: Did you ever learn like, I know Gregory was telling me about that when he was out they learned to take, like a lead weight and take it on the bottom and have bacon fat on it, so they could tell where they was sand or where there was rock?

A: Oh yes, yeah. We wouldn't have bacon fat, we used to just use grease, actual grease, the same principle. That's the days before electronics. Oh I'd say the early '60s they come out with depth finders and what have yah, electronically. In the days before electronics when you fished lobsters, if you fished anything, really, you went by landmarks, especially in the inshore fishery. All you had for navigation was a compass.

Q: Did you um, have a hard time trying to learn ... I know when Gregory and I talked he said he had a really hard time trying to learning landmarks.

A: Well it's kind of a thing that's part of the trade, some people catch on to it quicker than others. I had a good teacher, my grandfather, cause he was a real good fisherman and that's how he done it, and when he was teachin' yah something you learnt because you paid attention. So therefore it was really not ... it's something that you catch on to and it just comes natural to yah.

Q: Mhm. Do you find that... did you ever keep using older techniques towards the end when you were finished fishing or did you just kind of start getting into the newer technologies that were available or-

A: You'll always use the... old method... is always with you cause the new method is mostly electronical and that can fail at any time. So when I took my navigational course at the Fisheries school and got my fishin' masters ticket, that's what they taught yah, was never forget the old way because electronics was only an aid to navigation. Always be aware of your surroundings and ... when we were fishin' the old way, you went a lot by time, so you knew the direction by the compass and it took you so long it took you to get to the spot, navigation was... everything was time eh, all the, even the electronic part of it is time, speed, and distance. That's the three factors in navigation, on the water anyways, I don't know about the air. I guess it is anyway... you know your longitude and latitude.

Q: Have you noticed or heard any other fishermen talking about changes in the Northumberland Strait over the years that would be maybe, environmental problems that are occurring out there, or pollution, that kind of thing?

A: Well since I've started fishing I've noticed quite a bit of difference in the tides... the tides seem stronger than they were at one time. As far as pollution goes it's hard to follow, but... my personal opinion is that an awful lot of pollutants come from pesticides that are sprayed on the land, and I think that's probably the biggest problem that I can see on the Northumberland Strait here.

Q: So, like farming and that kind of thing?

A: Yeah, I hate to be nasty about that ... but agriculture, I guess we'll put it that way, and that covers...blueberries, and potato farming, agriculture I guess is the way to put it.

Q: I've read a lot about that in research that I've done-

A: And another thing there is uhh ... for years there had been very little restrictions on septic systems, along the shore, like cottagers and so on ... I don't want to be picking on them either but it's true. Now there's restrictions, septic systems are modernized and it's a lot better than it once was, and course then you have... just navigational on the waters, pollution from that. There's always danger of oil spills ... but I think that things are improving as the years go by as far as pollution goes. All stages of gov't seem to be acting on that, although slowly but acting.

Q: Well slowly is better than nothing, so- **[Laughs]**

A: Yep, **[chuckles]**, take it for what it's worth.

Q: Well I've read a lot too, in environmental reports about Scott Paper and what it's done to Pictou Harbour and Boat Harbour, and how that's seeped out into the strait ...

A: That is a real menace, and a danger to be even worse if things wrong. But all industry is a threat to environment. Now I heard stories – I have no proof of this – of the salt mine in Pugwash, but I don't know if they cured the problem or whether it was just fishermen's gossip or whatever you want to call it, but there has been talk that there's some pollution from the salt mine. I don't fish in that area so I can't really come out and say ...

Q: That's what I want though, **[laughs]**, I want the fishermen's gossip.

A: I have talked to fishermen buddies of mine up that say that... Cause lobster fishing, the further west you go in the strait the worse it is, the spring fishery anyway. They're blaming it on everything from, you know, salt mining to agriculture, pollution, to whatever but ...

Q: Was there any times, when you were fishing, that you ever noticed that there were less lobsters or anything out in the strait because of maybe farming or?

A: Well I don't know what to blame it on, see lobsters, of all the years I've fished, and your father would say the same, lobster are like any other species, there's cycles, and there's humps and hollows in the cycles, and you don't know whether the low part of it is due to man made effects or whether it's just nature, and of course the weather has an awful lot to do with it, and water temperatures. So nature... combine it all and it's quite a mixed bag of whatever could happen. But see I'm trying to think here, probably three times in my lifespan there has been the up and down cycle –

Q: Oh ok-

A: ...so you're talking in a period of fifty years.

Q: Is there ... I've read oral histories from fishermen in the Pugwash and Wallace area and they said that there was a cycle that was every 14 years or so?

A: Well they are pretty well on I'd say, yep roughly. That seems the way it works. But now I've noticed the last number of years since they've come out with tighter restrictions on the fishery, such as escape mechanisms in the traps, the number of traps fished and the number of days fished and so on, that the highs are not as high and the lows are not as low in the last 15 years I'd say. Whether that's due to the conservation measures or that's just nature itself. There's a saying from fishermen, is that if we knew everything we'd catch the last fish! **[Laughs]**

Q: Yeah! **[Laughs]** Do you find that there's been any changes in the lobster industry and, in the economy or local economy that have affected you, or people in this area?

A: You mean up or downs?

Q: Yes.

A: Yes. While conservation measures are on, it slows the fishery down, so therefore it has to effect the economy, and then there's world markets involved there and that's another big factor in the economy- the economy of the fishery- so once again there's a mixed bag of concerns there along with weather and so on. You're gonna have good years and bad years, you're always gonna have them. I think fishing is like any other primary industry, like farming or lumber, you have your ups and downs and you can't control the weather and the economy.

Q: You just gotta go with the flow.

A: Yeah, don't put all your eggs in one basket.

Q: I just ask that because a lot of um, books and literature that I've read for this research, they say that there's this huge decline in lobster stocks in the Northumberland Strait region so you know, it affects the economy and local economies and they don't know if its actually going to decline to the point where that it cant recover or if its just in part of this cycle, where it's a down part of the cycle.

A: In this here particular area they never went as low as they did in the western Northumberland Strait, so we're seeing a little bit of an increase in the catches in the last few years. Now, they are very slow to rebound in the west in the spring fishery, now in the fall fishery they tell me they are seeing some signs of improvement, and once again they have, the west end of the strait, has the big topic of the fixed link –

Q: Yes. That was going to be another question I was going to ask-

A: So, there was a lot of blame put on that at first, but now fishermen that I talked to in the last few years are saying its kind of reviving itself and things are looking better around the fixed link, now that's west of it. Now to the east is the lowest catches recorded in the Northumberland Strait in the last number of years. Once again whether that's to do with the fixed link or whether its other reasons, time will tell – see that's the trouble. But as time goes on and its not coming back, less fishermen and younger people are not getting involved up there, they're moving out west, working on the oil rigs, the number of fishermen are declining, along with government buy backs, which is supposed to be a conservation measure.

Q: They haven't been doing as many buy backs?

A: More.

Q: They've been doing more? Oh ok-

A: Yeah. Some places this was the first year, last year was the first year for this area. But in the western part now they've had buy backs there for a couple of years now.

Q: Oh ok. When they started putting in the link to PEI, did you hear anything about how all the silt coming down here and if that effected anything or?

A: Well these fishermen that fished east of the fixed link had been complainin' about the bottom siltin' up and everything, but that's just listening to other fishermen cause I don't fish that way at all, but yes. And they did, when they said they were gonna build it, they said when there would be a certain amount ... and I don't know if there was ever compensation paid to some of the fishermen or not. Did you ever hear...?

Q: No, cause I went through um... the Department of Fisheries and Oceans had to do environmental assessments before they even permitted the building of the link, and they said you know, that it may or may not have an effect on these species of fish and such and such, but they never said they were gonna compensate and, there never was any, not in any record I found, any compensation being given.

A: If my memory serves me right, when they were gonna build it of course, the company that was building it or whoever was in charge said that the fishermen would be well compensated. But that was never heard tell of ... that was just all... political bull I guess. And another effect of the lobster fishery, they claim, some fishermen claim, other fishermen claim, is scallop dragging. So out in the strait here now they have what they call bumper zones now, around vital lobster bottom, you have to stay a mile to a mile and a quarter mile off the lobster bottoms, which is in shallow waters.

Q: Yes. See I've never heard about the bumper zone, but I've read about scallop dragging effecting- up to the 70s, not recently- about the scallop dragging effecting the bottoms for lobsters.

A: See in the 70s there were very few regulations on scallop fishing, anybody could buy a boat and go scallop fishing, and there was- at one time- 80 boats dragging out of the ferry wharf down here, and they were from New Brunswick and from all over PEI and they were from everywhere. But there came in, I forget what year it was, with regulations, but you couldn't go from one province to the other to drag scallop, and then they put restrictive licenses on and they started slowin' it down a lot which helped an awful lot, and then in the last 8 or 9 years they came up with the bumper zones.

Q: Oh ok. Gregory was telling me that he has done diving, but not up here, it was more along the eastern or southern shores of the province, and you could just see where it used to just all be dragged, up to the '70s, not just scallop draggers, but bigger draggers, and it was just like nothing, nothing there, there was no fish whatsoever.

A: Yep. Well it's just like running a bulldozer blade over your-

Q: Yeah, and he that afterwards he would get out and he would go find a wharf and talk to some of the fishermen, and they said, “yeah, that’s from about 20 or 30 years ago” and its still just, nothing.

A: All the ocean is so rugged but it’s pretty timid in other ways you know.

Q: Yeah. Ok, did you ever feel like there was a decline happening in the strait with the lobster stocks or is it just kind of, it’s in that down part of the cycle and people think it’s a decline but really its not or?

A: Um, no. I think the lobster stocks are reasonably strong in the gulf, which includes the strait, in areas where they’re in abundance and there’s other areas where they’re like, ... in the west end of the strait where they are right in decline. So, the stock, the overall stock I think is healthy, providin’ no environmental disaster or anything...

Q: Yeah...

A: I mean, if you talk to fishermen, they’re never satisfied you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: You can go to say, down in, just off of Cape George, the lobsters were really good there for a number of years ... they get down to 10,000 lbs a year and awe they’re cryin’ you know. And just up here, in the strait, the eastern part of the strait here, 10,000 lbs is a really good year, you know. Like Pictou Island, some of them are up to 15,000 and again it depends which side of the island you’re fishin’ on, and every spring there seems to be a hot spot, either the eastern end or the western end or the southern side, and that’s ... you know lobsters in nature, you know for some reason they shift and they come and they go.

Q: Mhm. Do you think that the lobster industry in the Pictou County region will ever kind of, get back to where it was, like after, like in the 50s and 70s- probably not?

A: It’ll never, because of the processing part of it. The majority of lobsters today are shipped live, they’re not processed in Canada. Right now there’s an awful thing going on, the big buyers will ship lobsters to China to be processed, and shippin’ them back here to be packaged, it don’t make sense, but anyways you’re talkin’ cheap labour I guess. But at one time, right up until the late 60s, there’d be 4 or 5 lobster factories along the Northumberland strait here, not to mention to the west end of New Brunswick where there’s a lobster factory in every cove. They’re down now, and now we only have one here, which is Logan’s, the rest of the lobsters are shipped out.

Q: So even if there ever was a lot of lobster to be caught we’d have no way to really process them.

A: Exactly, they'd have to be shipped out to process them, and it's a sad thing cause it's hard on the local economy cause women are not getting jobs and you know, the neighbour factor. No it will never be what it once was as far as the local economy is concerned... I don't think so anyway.

Q: Yeah. What do you think about these changes they want to do to EI? [**Chuckles**]

A: That's a very touchy subject, and I think they gotta be careful. It's the backbone of what little fishery is left. At one time, at one time, and it happened to me, back in the 70s, I used to fish lobsters and then I would go work construction cause lobsters were scarce, and my boat was too small to fish other species at that time, and I didn't want to put any more money into it so I'd go fish lobsters and then go work in construction, wherever I'd get work at the shipyard and all that sort of thing, and the government stepped in and said "If you don't fish, you aren't allowed to work," you're allowed to work in the primary industries, you were allowed to say, farm, you were allowed to farm and fish, you were allowed to work in the woods and fish, and uh, other than that you gotta stay home or whatever. So that made it so that unemployment was essential to survive. Although there is other fisheries, but they're just ... the heart of the fishery is lobsters, and if you don't have a license to say to fish herring or fish scallops or anything, you aren't going to make a living fishing. Have to subsidize it otherwise. So now they changed it back again, you're allowed to work wherever, I think there may be a rule in there about a percentage, but I'm not sure now, cause I'm not belongin' to any association, whether that's still in the clause in there or not, at one time you had to make 60% from fishin' before you could have a bonified permit. Now did you ever get into that stuff...?

Q: Sort of, but that's a whole, like-

A: Highly technical, because who's allowed to fish and who's not.

Q: They have some of the documents online, and then I've tried to call the DFO in Dartmouth, but they don't answer the phone- because they don't want to talk to me, so-but, I'd have to take like, probably a week and try and read through all of it-

A: Well it's complicated and uh, there's pages and pages that don't say nothin', and then all of a sudden there's a real-

Q: Very important, one line that says-

A: That's it, and that's the way that beaucracy works, you see, you've probably learned all that.

Q: Oh yeah. No, I've tried to read some of the documents but then I have to walk away from it and then come back because it's like reading nothing for pages and then all of a sudden it's something important and-

A: That discourages people, ordinary people from gettin' ... I went all through that cause I was the president of the Northumberland Fisherman's Association for a number of years

and I was involved with the board of directors for 25 years or 30 years, and we were discussing things with the Department of Fisheries under a rendered term you know, and you got to learn a lot more than what the ordinary fisherman would know about the rules and regulations, because it was supposed to be our job to go to the meetins' in Moncton, and take the message back to the fishermen, but its hard to get fishermen to go to meetins' and it was just a... but you're always all the time fightin' bureaucracy... and angry fishermen, and so forth. But you go to a meetin' in Moncton at the Department of Fisheries and you discuss uh, just for an example, opening dates for lobster fishin', and you'd sitting at the table with them and this is the date everybody agreed on, and then you'd come home after the meetin' and two months or two weeks or whatever down the road, the Department of Fisheries would come out with an announcement altogether different.

Q: Oh?

A: So after you come home and explained it to your fishermen than your season's gonna open, just for example, the last day of April, they'd come and say, "oh that's not gonna open til the 4th..." 'er, just things like that, and that went on with all the regulations.

Q: It just kind of undermines the whole meeting that you even had with them.

A: Yep, and the reason for all this was they said they consulted with the fishermen, and blah blah...

Q: So, when you had meetings with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, did they ever... was it like, a good meeting, or did they seem like they were trying to help?

A: Oh, in most cases, there were some very hot topics over the herring fishery, we had to fight all the way to Ottawa.

Q: Oh ok.

A: Do you remember, you wouldn't remember, when we barricaded the ferry down here? I instigated that. They would not give us our own quota here, herring quota here. To make the long story short, there was a gulf herring quota, and it was broke down... to, first of all, it was an overall quota, and then they had hundreds of boats in New Brunswick licensed to fish herring, and their season and the herring come there first, so they would catch the whole quota before we'd hardly get a chance to catch any herring, season's closed. Then the place is full of herring here and we couldn't fish. So we fought with them and fought with them so they said, "ok, we'll give yahs a quota." Pictou area and there was the Island and that was all right, but then there was too many boats involved here, all the islanders were fishing, we all fished among one another and everything and it would only last a couple of days and the quota was caught - our share - and they'd close it down. So then they wouldn't listen to us and wouldn't listen to us so finally we had our old politics, Elmer MacKay up here was our MP, Peter's father, and I'm trying to think what year it was, we were living in this house, brand new, '86, 'round

'87, the fisheries minister at the time was Thomas Sidden, he'd been over on the island and we heard he was over there, cause Elmer MacKay told me, and he was coming across on the ferry at such and such a crossing, so we barricaded the ferry. With Elmer's help, we got a meeting in Moncton, and they wanted to know our demands and blah blah blah. We give our demands to Elmer and we give 'em to Moncton and we give 'em to Tom Sidden in here at the meetin' at the Harbour View Inn, every bureaucrat, and everything... the place was full of helicopters and everything. Finally, they did agree after awhile and they put lines in. Now, Pictou area have their own area, east end of the island have their area, which is workin' out good, western PEI has their area and New Brunswick has their area, and it can be broken down into little areas in between so, that's worked good ever since. We have our own quota here and we catch it when the herring are here. So that was one battle we won, which involved a lot of fighting. It was a very interesting life, fishing, you know. There's always somethin', never the same thing, same day, that's what I liked about it, that it kept me interested.

Q: That it was different all the time? [**Chuckles**]

A: Yeah.

Q: So having said all that, do you think that with the DFO being involved and that kind of thing, do you think that helps with the way things work out in the strait, especially with lobsters, or do you think that sometimes they get too involved? [**Phone rings**]

A: There's two ways of answerin' that. There's certainly a lot good they're doing, but when things get tied up in bureaucracy sometimes it is a hindrance... we'll just let that ring, it's Joan's girlfriend. That's about all I can say, I mean if the DFO wasn't there, the fishery would be wiped out, or big companies would move in, and there's another big thing we have in the gulf, which is a great thing, one of the best things that the DFO ever done, and it was threatened here, was the owner-operator.

Q: Yep, and the fleet separation.

A: Yes, which keeps the big guy out of the inshore fishery.

Notes from a further discussion at a later date:

-B.C. is totally wiped out; aquaculture is hard on the larvae, pesticides kill them when they come to surface; spraying on the trees in the woods; killing larvae in water systems.

-Culture not the same; lobster fishermen come out of winter, everyone starting to get ready.

-Pictou had 2 factories; 2 in Caribou, along the shore, everything was a big business.

-Not that big burst like there once was; what leveled things off was EI; if a guy buys a new truck every 3 years it wasn't a big deal; bustle was on there was no EI. Not until 1970s around here.

- Problem with the EI is federal, all regulations made in Ottawa, Maritimes don't pull big weight there, no input; they don't pay attention, they have no idea and they don't care.
- Don't care about local economies; local politicians always looking to Halifax/Dartmouth.
- One good thing: fishery dept. moving to Cornwallis
- Big companies going in to Ottawa, 'paid lobbyists' in Ottawa 24/5, Sobeys and Irving hired; pounding it into the politicians in Ottawa.
- As far as EI goes; pages upon pages of restrictions, and now closing all the licenses depots; lobster tags, all done online, making it much harder for fishermen.

ACST MA Thesis Interview Transcript:
Ronnie Heighton, December 7, 2012

Q: Interviewer, Caitlin Johnson (Question)

A: Interviewee, Ronnie Heighton (Answer)

Q: When did you begin fishing and with who?

A: I started fishing full time with my father, in 1965. We fished for lobsters and scallops at that time.

Q: Did you learn anything specific from him, like any techniques or tricks for lobster fishing or?

A: Well yeah, the landmarks, and the best place to go at different times of the year.

Q: Like different fishing grounds?

A: Different grounds for different times, yeah.

Q: Do you still use any of the different kinds of tricks or techniques that he taught you or?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Yeah?

A: Even with all the electronic equipment we have today there's... you know, the old ways, you can always just look at the shoreline and know where you are, it's a great reference. You can look at your plotter and it'll tell you where you're at but still after all the years you still look at the shoreline for marks.

Q: Do you find that's more reliable than the technology they have now or?

A: Well for me it's quicker.

Q: Do you sometimes find that all the technology they have nowadays is almost like a hindrance to you or?

A: Well no, it's great help, especially fishing at night for herring, or foggy days, that's when the technology really shows up, you know. You're accurate within a few feet.

Q: Oh ok. Have you ever noticed or heard of any changes in the Northumberland Strait over the years that might be kind of, something to do with, environmental or ecological issues out there? Or having to do with pollution or industries?

A: Well there's been massive changes, and Fisheries and Oceans have recorded them, there's massive changes in the shoreline compared to what there was back in, say 1940 til today, the shoreline is loaded with cottages, you know. There's more agriculture, bigger agriculture, I wouldn't say there's more but there's more, bigger farms. It seems like the central part of the Northumberland Strait is in a decline in lobster catches for some reason which we're not real sure what it is but, it could be something to do with the pollution coming from the massive amount of potatoes that's growing on PEI, plus the blueberries in Nova Scotia, and of course the cottages. Some of them have very little sewer systems, and one of the main chemicals that's responsible for killing lobster larvae while they're floating on top of the water is one of the fenals, and I'm not sure which one but it's found in dish soap. And of course you've got small, little lots where the cottages are, and very poor sewer systems. If you look at the main time that the cottagers, cottage people are there, July and August, that's when the larvae are floating on the top of the water, so you know it could be related.

Q: Oh ok.

A: And then we also have another thing that happened in the past years was the building of the fixed link, the Confederation Bridge. And that certainly didn't help the environment any.

Q: Now what have you heard about what the fixed link has done, more so in the central strait area?

A: In the central strait area it's right at the bridge itself because they narrowed the opening, because each one of the pillars- there's 40-some pillars- and each one of them pillars are so big, plus the approaches on either side. They narrowed it I think by like, 15-20% so that has increased the speed of the tides and that has caused erosion around the piers and the bridge. Erosion of course causes siltation which comes up and down the shore with the tide.

Q: Have you ever seen any direct effects here because of the siltation or?

A: It's hard for us here because we have, where I fish, we have these great big high mud banks, red mud and red clay, and the last few winters – this is a prime example, this winter - this time years ago everything would be froze over, right now them banks are thawing and freezing and thawing and freezing and causing them to deteriorate, and of course they tumble down, the erosion is back sometimes as much as 10 feet a year in places, and that amount of siltation is in our water here now. Whether the bridge is adding to that or not it'd be hard to tell.

Q: Yeah. Where there ever any specific years it might have been worse in the strait, either from agriculture or sewage?

A: That's real hard to-

Q: Really hard to tell?

A: It'd be pretty near impossible to pinpoint the exact... we've done water quality tests and siltation tests... there's nothing definite, nothing you can put your finger on that would say yes, this is the cause of the decline. But for some reason the center part of the Northumberland Strait is seeing, and the closer to the centre you get, the bigger the decline. You're looking at Pugwash where the catches this spring were likely in the neighbourhood of 2500 lbs, compared to say Cape John with say 8000 and maybe Toney River at 12,000. The closer you get to the centre part of the strait, and both ways, once you get away from the bridge on the New Brunswick side and the PEI side, the further away you get from the bridge the better the lobster catches are.

Q: Mhm, I've heard that from a lot of people, and not just other fishermen, I've read it in a lot of research too. But now down in Lismore and that way they also have good catches, recently too.

A: Yeah, they're likely more constant in their catches, we see the low and now the last few years they're seems to be recovery here, but Lismore has seen steady fishing for the last 20-25 years.

Q: Mhm, that's what I thought.

[Phone rings]

Q: Do you find that any changes in the lobster industry and the local economy have effected you, your family or the community as a whole over the years, or maybe more recently because of the decline?

A: There certainly is a big difference in the community, the money is not there like it would normally be there, people are not buying things they normally would buy. It seems like the community around here rely on the fishery and if the fishery is good then everything is good, if the fishery is bad then naturally everything is bad. It reflects right down to how many times you go out to eat on the weekends, you know, and how new a car you're driving.

Q: Have you heard anything about what they're going to be doing with the EI changes and do you think that will also have a negative effect on the local economy here?

A: I had a meeting with them a couple, three weeks ago, and it seems like, what they told us was that you would have to actively seek work. And if you do that, and if you don't

find a job then everything is fine, and if you find a job that is suitable to you and the money is within reason then you have to take that job.

Q: Ok-

A: So using the analogy we could very well be facing a shortage of helpers in the fishery. If they go and find somewhere, and find suitable work, you know, they may go away and not come back. I predict myself in the future we'll be using immigrant workers in the fishery. They're now in the processing plants but I see in the future that we'll be using them for helpers. Big money in Alberta is calling all the younger people and the younger people are not getting into the fishery. The new entrant today is somebody that is 55 years old, had been out West, made some money and came home and said oh maybe I'll fish for a few years before I retire, and that's the new entrant in today, its not a 20 year old that's coming into the fishery.

Q: Yeah. Do you find that a lot of the younger people that are moving away, that also kind of takes away from the community itself, like keeping this, the fishing traditions, that are kind of engrained in who we are as fishing communities that kind of takes away from that because we're not keeping those people here?

A: Certainly, and I mean with, the way the fishery is now, there's, you might as well say there's lobsters and a little bit of herring, and none of the younger people can afford to buy in and participate in the fishery at the same time trying to maintain a house, and children and so on, and a lifestyle for themselves. There's so much more money elsewhere then can be had.

Q: So do you, yourself, feel that there may be a decline occurring in the central strait region?

A: In lobster?

Q: Yes, in lobster.

A: Yes, up until the last year or so we've seen a slight increase the last 2 years in Cape John and that may be an indication of the cycle of lobsters coming back.

Q: Do you think that now that you've had a couple of years that you've had a bit of an increase that the lobster stocks will begin to recover now?

A: We're hoping they will but at the same time we're being faced with lower and lower prices and higher costs of doing business, such as fuel, bait and labour. So it's offsetting any increase we have.

Q: So with that being said, do you find that because of that offsetting, prices and.. do you find that maybe a lot of fishermen will call it quits after a while and move on and ... retire from what they're doing because they don't see a reason to try and continue if they're just

going to be in this vicious cycle of trying to afford to actually fish while the lobsters try and recover?

A: I don't think so, I don't think there'd be anybody give up. We went through a bad spell back in the 70s when lobsters were way scarcer than they are now and everybody hung on and you know, some of them took part time jobs and full time jobs and then left and came back but most of them stayed at it, and toughed it out. I think we're.. I don't know what the right name would be, maybe resilient; we certainly don't give up easy.

Q: So how do you see the lobster fishery looking in maybe 5 to 10 years? Improving?

A: I'd say catches are going to improve but I don't know if the price is going to improve because we are producing as a whole too many lobsters. And I don't mean in our area but if you look, in Canada alone, we produced roughly 140 million lbs last year and 125 millions lbs the year before that. So you're looking at 15 million more lbs went on a market that was depressed by too many lobsters so unless we can somehow get more people to eat lobsters and create a demand we're gonna be faced with a crisis in price.

Q: They're dealing with that right now on the South Shore, there's a big problem with that down there.

A: But they have big landings down there-

Q: Yeah its very different down there than it is here...

A: One fellow the first day had 18,000 lbs.

Q: Oh my gosh, I cant even imagine!

A: [Smiles] That's 2 seasons for us.

Q: Yeah, oh my gosh.

A: And I mean all they do is fish harder and land more lobsters, which hurts them in the end.

Q: So do you see a successful lobster fishery being re-established in Pictou County once the lobster stocks recover enough or do you think that this crisis that will happen with the price...?

A: I think the price is going to be our biggest thing. We're trying to break into markets in China but the whole trouble is the people who are putting them in China are just actually dumping them they're just putting them in as a high value product, they're putting them in as a low value product, a bargain in other words. They should have promoted these as being the best lobsters in the world. You at ours selling in Japan or in China for roughly \$7/lb and Australian rock lobster is around \$40/lb.

Q: Oh wow.

A: So I mean, the difference is the way they're promoted, and I blame the companies in Canada for dumping them on the Chinese market without doing a decent job of marketing. They should have been marketed as a high value...

Q: A high commodity product.

A: Yeah. So sure we're selling in China but at what cost, you know. And, you know there's a lot of people in the lobster industry who are called flippers, and they buy and sell, and all they're looking for is their commission, and they don't care where it goes, all their worried about is getting as many lbs from point A to point B and taking their commission out of it. If they were thinking anything about the overall price that they're ... the only thing that matters when they're buying it is if they're getting it from the fisherman for \$5 or \$3 because they still get their commission on a lb per lb basis. What we need in the lobster fishery is some companies that will promote and supply lobsters to other countries as a luxury item, and then they can improve the bargain price compared to Australian rock lobster at \$40.

Q: Have you ever dealt with the DFO themselves and do they ever have any explanation as to what might be happening with the lobsters in this area or?

A: They have no idea-

Q: **[Laughs]** No?

A: They think it's because there's very little movement in the centre part of the strait, tide-wise, it just goes back and forth back and forth. SO we're not getting any amount of larvae from any other areas, we're just surviving on our own and uh, that's their theory, and it's possible. To shoot their theory in the foot, Dr. Bob Miller from the BIO, he does larvae studies of PEI and found out that the larvae that comes out of Hillsboro Bay, and Charlottetown Harbour, went down along the coast of PEI, went around the east end of Pictou Island and went on the shore from Big Island to Arasaig, and if you look at the constant catches over the past 20 years, big catches, they are the east end Pictou Island and on the shore from Big Island to Arasaig. Ironically, if you take the predominant winds in July and August, the southwest, our larvae gets blown over to the PEI side and joins that larvae from there and goes down and does that same pattern. So realistically we're likely feeding the Lismore area.

Q: Oh god, **[laughs]**.

A: And we're relying on what we got left.

Q: Yeah. So why did you decide to get involved with the Fisherman's Association?

A: **[Laughs]** I don't know.

Q: You don't know? **[Laughs]**, ok-

A: It's just something that I thought I had to be done. I'm trying to find you a contact to give you more information on the ... he don't give me his email address the little bugger.

Q: **[Laughs]**...

A: He says "I promised I'd send you a web link to access and download the presentations from the Oct. 24 workshop, "Overview of the monitoring and research activities conducted in the Northumberland Strait." There's the link there if you want to write it down-

Q: **[Writes web link down]**...

A: That may help you, maybe you'll get some information there on what they've done and if you wanted to talk to him his name is Marc... He's in Moncton. He's at DFO in Moncton, I couldn't tell you his number.

Q: I'm sure there's a directory that I can just look him up.

A: He's done a lot of work on the Northumberland Strait so if you ever get some science questions, certainly I don't have all the answers, you may want to check with Marc.

Q: Oh ok, thank you very much. Ok, so you got involved in the Fishermen's Association and you don't know why... you said something had to be done.

A: I don't know why, I thought that I could help at the time, and I think I have helped over the years... I've got something like 22 years at it. I certainly learned a lot and met a lot of people, I took the association from, uh, it was a low of 17 members at one time-

Q: Oh jeez!

A: And now we're around 130-

Q: Oh that's good.

A: So something must have been done right anyways, or we certainly wouldn't have grown as big as we did.

Q: So what were your goals, just to try and increase awareness throughout the association or?

A: Yes, I think our mission statement would be "To represent fishermen at government levels on all issues of common concern," something like that.

Q: Mhm. So what kinds of things did you do with the association in your time at it?

A: Attended thousands of meetings, you know, our latest endeavor was the buy back program that we helped instigate and then come to life, and bought back 11 licenses in area 26A-1, so that was a challenge. Every year you see, it's always some big challenge that DFO would believe... DFO is now downloading a lot of their work, we're doing a lot of the work DFO used to do. Right now we're negotiating tags for fishermen, DFO is getting out of the tag business, so we have to negotiate a manufacturer and distributor for tags and of course that will be an extra cost to the fishermen. So that's the big thing right now.

Q: Well they are trying to do everything online, aren't they?

A: Yes everything will be online as of the 1st of April. Everything is online.

Q: Do you think that's going to be a challenge for fishermen around here?

A: I think it will be, but in 2 or 3 years time it won't be ... it's the initial shock of it, and DFO should have said ok, in 2014 we're gonna be done and we urge you to use the new system. A lot of people would have automatically used the new system and the other people would have complied by 2014. They really abandoned us and uh, said you know, here's the date 2013 in April, that's it, no longer, you make the phone call and there's nobody there. They just done it too quick.

Q: Mhm, they just kind of made that decision, really, without you. They left you high and dry. Do you ever find that sometimes you run into instances where DFO has too much involvement or too little involvement?

A: Both. Lots of times we want them to become more involved and sometimes there is fisheries and they are too involved. They ask us to manage the fishery and then they turn around and tell us how to manage the fishery, so you know, its kind of a double-edged sword.

Q: So other than the Fisherman's Association what else are you involved in?

A: Well I'm currently vice president of the Canadian Council of Fish Harvesters based in Ottawa, this is my 3rd term so I guess that means I'm in my 7th year of being vice president. That gets me to Ottawa and gets me in touch with DFO at the Ottawa level, and of course if there's anything that our fishermen want or need or trying to get their point across, when I'm up there I always try to find time to further our interests.

Q: Do you find whenever you're dealing with that position that people in Ottawa, kind of, just set you aside, and they hear what you have to say but don't really hear what you actually have to say?

A: That's right, yeah, some of them, not them all. I have some friends that I've made over the years, and they've moved up through the lines, they're assistant ministers and assistant deputy ministers, they're still friends of mine and of course, if I need a favour I can, sometimes it doesn't hurt to have friends in high places [laughs]... and there's some things you'll never win on, you get to know them, as, the amount of years you spend representing fishermen with DFO, you'll know pretty well when something comes out if there's any wiggle room or not and uh, for instance, the biodegradable twine for the traps for this year, we have to put a biodegradable panel in and uh, some of the fishermen requested that we fight it, and I did fight it, but I knew going in there was gonna be no turning back, you could say the writing was on the wall. Anyway it will be implemented in the spring, and there's virtually nothing you can do but comply. It's not all bad, if there are traps... if there is ghost fishing out there, if we lose them, if we can do something to alleviate the ghost fishing you know, I think, you know, it's got to be a good thing for the lobster industry as a whole. If all it takes is a piece of string, then so be it.

Q: Now, speaking of Ottawa, do you ever find that, um, they have a very different perspective of how we live compared to how we see ourselves, therefore they're making policies and documents that work more for a commercial fish processor, like Clearwater, or something like that, more so than for small business owners such as local fishermen?

A: I think they look, they're told to look at it as total number of boats and I think that comes to play more than anything. An awful lot of politics in both Department of Fisheries and Oceans and of course Transport Canada. They're the two regulators who we work with most, and there's people there that, I made the suggestion at different meetings up there that, if you fellas are going to work for the Department of Fisheries you should be forced to come down and fish 6 months on a fishing boat before you get your job because you really don't know what you're talking about. That doesn't seem to go anywhere, but that should be the case. There is some people that have no concept of the fishery and don't seem to want to learn the concept of the fishery. They have their ideas and they think that because it's their idea, it's right. I've run into many of them in Ottawa over the past 20 years like that.

Q: I only asked that because I heard another fisheries policies worker at a meeting at SMU one night discuss that a lot of the policies that are made, like the modernization document that just came out recently, is really streamlined more for like, corporate types of fishing, not for rural type of fishers.

A: And we have a minister, well he's not acting right now because he's had a heart attack, but we have a minister who is corporately minded, but the only good thing is right now is that we have Gail Shea in there right now that's temporary, and Gail is 100% knowledgeable about the local fishery and she knows, her family fished, she fished herself, she knows the fishery inside out. Gail was never corporately minded, but Ashfield is. I'm not wishing him any bad luck but I'm hoping Gail is going to be hanging around as long as she possibly can. Modernization is one thing we're going to have to tackle in the next upcoming year or two and it's going to be, how do you do it? I don't

know. We'll just have to sit down and start at it I guess. If you're gonna eat the apple you gotta eat it one bite at a time.

Q: Now are you involved with the Lobster Council of Canada as well or?

A: Yes, I sit on the board there at the council.

Q: They're more so working towards trying to have lobster marketed elsewhere, right?

A: Yep, nothing to do with the management of the lobster there, just the marketing of it.

Q: Do you find they're making any progress or it's kind of a slow process?

A: It's very slow because, I think it's the processors side, I think the industry side, the fishing side of it, I think overall there's support there for the Lobster Council. When it comes to the buyer/processor there is some support from some buyers, but there's a lot of big buyers that are fighting against it, and all its gonna do it improve their bottom line and I don't see the reluctance to be part of it, but they choose not to.

Q: Do you think maybe it's because they're holding out, hoping that more corporate fishing will become the in thing and that we'll go the way of British Columbia or?

A: Well there's certainly some of them would be looking at it like that, not them all but some of them. Hopefully we'd never get to the point where BC is, where in some fisheries one man has control over 90% of the fishery... he just bought somebody out there last, brought him up in the 90%, he just bought them out a few months ago, so I hope we never get to something like that.

Q: British Columbia, they just call it a wasteland now, there's no such thing as a rural fishing community, it's all just corporate and bought out.

A: 3.82\$/lb they had to pay for halibut quota, to go fishing halibut and they got \$5 for the halibut, so they made a little over a \$1/lb and on a 2 week trip on a 65 footer with 4 guys, the guys made \$1200 each. But the guy who sat ashore and owned the quota got \$3.82/lb.
[Laughs]

Q: Oh god.

A: That's that happens when it goes 100% the other way, corporately.

Q: Do you find, specifically in Pictou County, as a whole, that there's the same kind of culture that revolved around fishing as there was maybe 20 or 30 years ago, or has it really moved away from that?

A: From what I see, it's moved away. At one time, like, right now it's more competitive than it ever was before. At one time if somebody was broke down everybody at the wharf

stopped and helped him get going, whether they needed parts, pieces, whatever he needed to get going, and then they went fishing, and now they just come down, get in your boat and go fishing, and if a guy's broke down, then you just keep on going. The old way is gone.

Q: This is what my final chapter of my thesis is on, is kind of more about the culture of rural fishing communities and if lobster fishing isn't as important as it used to be then are we really still a rural, tight knit fishing area of Nova Scotia? And I'm getting the sense from other people that I've talked to and what I've read that we're not really anymore, we're just kind of all... we live in this area but we don't really have the same closeness that we used, we're not bound by the same traditions and values and mores anymore.

A: Absolutely not. The only place that I ever seen in Canada that you can go and get that same feeling is Newfoundland, they've never lost it ... yet. I think they will...

Q: Eventually?

A: Yep.

Q: See that's a large reason why I'm doing this research is because there's a lot of research on Newfoundland and their culture and the importance that fishing plays for them but Nova Scotia doesn't really have a lot of research on that, unless you're in the South Shore or the East shore and nobody's really looked at the north shore and we provide a large portion of lobster and other fisheries and I just kind of find it hard to understand why we've been neglected when we have, well we did have such a diverse culture on our own.

A: Yep, at one time.

Q: Is there anything else that you were involved with that I missed or? The lobster council...

A: I also sit on the Nova Scotia Fisheries Sector Council, and that looks at the training needs for fishermen. Tries to find funding for training.

Q: Now, what kind of training is that, like general safety training?

A: Safety training, yep.

Q: Is there ever any training on new technologies that are out or anything like that, that you can use out on the strait or?

A: Well one of my other hats, the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters, a lot of programs that we develop to help train fishermen, fishing enterprises, computer skills, that's only 2 to name of, there's 30 or 40 different modules that's available online and of

course by contacting the Canadian Council. There's a lot of stuff available, that you can do in the leisure of your own home...

Q: Mhm, if you want to know something then you can just...

A: We just finished – the Canadian Council – just finished a stability simulator which is what I was in St. John's, NL for, and it simulates stability on a fishing vessel, and its quite a program, it's almost 3 million dollars and it took us about, almost 4 years to get it to the point where it's at now. It'll learn fishermen how to safely load their vessel, the effects of free-service motion, such as fish or water on deck, changes, if you introduce tide and wind to the model what it does. The first few modules are training and the last one is more of a gaming module where you can literally go online, build a boat that looks similar to your own boat, put whatever gear you wish to put on it and take it for a virtual sail, and as you burn fuel, and use water your boat gets lighter and changes in stability and you can see them changes when you introduce wind and tide to them and so.

Q: Oh that's interesting...

A: And that's available to all commercial fishermen in Canada free of charge.

Q: Oh really? Well that's great.

A: If you want to look at that simulator or anything to do with Canadian Council, or any other program and stuff its up on the website, its fish harvester... fisherharvestorspecheurs.ca. It's on the bottom there. **[shows interviewer the website link]**

Q: Ok, very good.

A: We have a communications person too at the Canadian Council, if you needed anything, she'd gladly get you anything you needed, any kind of information you needed on the national issue, like how many of this or that, what was this or that done, Christine could help you.

Q: Ok. Now I've read a lot about younger people moving away and that type of thing, or there's some that stay and try and get into the industry, but they're all about getting the biggest and the best of technology and boats and equipment and gear - do you think that that works in their favour or do you think that maybe they should try and go out and get knowledge and advice from older fishermen so they can use that to their betterment of fishing instead of trying to get the best of, the most expensive technologies available or?

A: Well there's some things you'll never, the technology will never take over, and that's the movement of the lobsters and so on, when they move and why they move, nobody knows but, they move from one spot to the other, you'll never learn that with a computer-based electronics. On the other hand, you could likely take somebody who came from

Alberta, put 'em in a boat and if he's anyways computer literate, within three days he would be a competitive fisherman.

Q: Oh really?

A: Yep, I mean if he's got the willingness to learn there's an awful lot of electronic equipment that will make him a very good fisherman in a very short period of time.

Q: Oh ok, **[laughs]**, is that something that worries fishermen such as yourself, at that age group, or with the way it is now and they can't really buy in to this fishery, is it not really a concern at all?

A: Well, I think that ... we can't really stop technology, it's ... that's the way the world is. So, I guess if you can't fight it you might as well embrace it.

Q: Mhm. Do you think a lot of younger people will ever move back and try to get into the fishery or?

A: I think they will when, you know, the younger people will stay west for a while and then they'll come back, come back to their roots, after they've having made enough money to make them comfortable they'll come back and buy into the fishery. Some of them, that's their goal. That's why they go west, so they can come and ... come back to the fishery.

