

Turning the Tide: Toward Community-Based Fishery Management in Canada's Maritimes

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Abstract.—This paper describes a unique nongovernmental initiative, *Turning the Tide: Communities Managing Fisheries Together*, that is supporting community fishery approaches in Canada's Maritime provinces and helping to build linkages between native and non-native participants in the fishery. The initiative has been motivated by the desire of participants for community-based fishery management and, in particular, the recent opportunity for aboriginal First Nations to enter the commercial fishery on a community basis. The paper describes the role played in *Turning the Tide* by three types of activities: 1) workshops, networking, and capacity-building; 2) exchange visits; and 3) development of resource materials. Finally, the paper discusses the need for grassroots initiatives such as this to be complemented by governmental policy and logistic support for community-based management.

Introduction

Community-based management is rooted in the idea that fishery sustainability and the overall benefits the fishery produces can be enhanced when fishers (fishermen), together with others in coastal communities—those living closest geographically to the fish stocks—have a significant level of responsibility for and control over managing those resources. Thus, community-based management is a form of comanagement in which fishers and their communities participate in decision making on the various aspects of marine resource stewardship and fishery management (e.g., Berkes et al. 2001; Wiber et al. 2004).

A range of both practical experience and social research indicates that, while community-based management cannot be expected to work in all circumstances, where appropriate it can provide a strong vehicle for resource conservation and sustainable development. This occurs in particular through 1) better utilizing traditional ecological knowledge, 2) empowering local resource

users and their communities (leading to better acceptance of conservation measures and compliance with regulations), and 3) providing a vehicle to resolve conflicting local resource uses (Pinkerton 1989, 1999; Charles 2001). As an alternative to top-down governmental management, community-based fishery management fits within the broad trend found in many societies toward devolution of governance. It is also in keeping with traditional aboriginal approaches to natural resource management (see, e.g., Barsh 2002), a key point of relevance here.

This paper explores the role of grass-roots linkages among fishery communities in supporting community-based fishery management, through examination of an initiative within Canada's Maritime provinces, *Turning the Tide: Communities Managing Fisheries Together*. Specifically, the paper discusses development of linkages among local communities, across the region, across Canada, and internationally.

Turning the Tide

Turning the Tide grew out of two realities. First, a substantial set of fishery participants in the Canadian

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Maritimes has come to see the desirability of a local approach to resource management as a means to improve the sustainability of fisheries, support marine conservation, and enhance the well-being of coastal communities. Second, in many parts of the Maritimes, there has been a need to develop cooperative endeavors that link aboriginal (particularly Mi'kmaq) and non-aboriginal peoples. The latter became crucial in the aftermath of the Canadian Supreme Court's 1999 Marshall Decision, which recognized the right of aboriginal people to fish commercially, and which led to an increasing presence of Mi'kmaq people in the fishery (Coates 2000), a move with parallels elsewhere in the world, such as the United States (e.g., Singleton 1998) and New Zealand (e.g., Memon et al. 2003).

Thus, *Turning the Tide* pursues simultaneously the twin goals of building community-based fishery management and building linkages between native and non-native fishery participants. These two goals are interconnected, in that community-based management is the traditional approach of Mi'kmaq First Nations, tied to aboriginal values linking humans and nature, and this inherent philosophy is increasingly being recognized by non-native fishers as supportive of their own aspirations. Thus, *Turning the Tide*—funded through the Pew Charitable Trusts—builds on the common desire of participants to work together for better fishery management so as to reinforce well-being in their communities, and this in turn provides a rationale for cooperative initiatives among aboriginal and non-aboriginal fishing communities.

The initiative began with four major participants, all located in the province of Nova Scotia, Canada: the Bay of Fundy Marine Resource Center (a civil society organization that links a range of fishery and community groups and provides facilitation, networking, and GIS services), Acadia First Nation (one of the two Mi'kmaq aboriginal bands in southwest Nova Scotia), the Center for Community Based Management (an education and support centre at St. Francis Xavier University), and Saint Mary's University in Halifax. Over the course of the initiative, five additional participants were formally added: Bear River First Nation (the second of the Mi'kmaq bands in southwest Nova Scotia), the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island (an organization linking the two Mi'kmaq bands, Lennox Island, and Abegweit, in the province of Prince Edward Island), and three com-

munity-based fisher-men's associations—the Bay of Fundy Inshore Fishermen's Association (a multispecies community-based fishermen's organization in the Digby-Annapolis area), Local 9 of the region's Maritime Fishermen's Union, and the Fundy Fixed Gear Council (a community-based groundfish management board covering the Nova Scotia side of the Bay of Fundy).

In addition, members of several other organizations have been involved in the initiative, drawn from other First Nations, community and regional fishery organizations, and resource centers. Important connections have also been developed with 1) the Saltwater Network, an organization linking marine conservation and local management groups on the Canadian and U.S. sides of the Gulf of Maine and supporting a range of ecological and fishery oriented projects, and 2) the North Atlantic Marine Alliance, a New England based but increasingly transboundary organization focusing on the Gulf of Maine from community- and ecosystem-based perspectives.

Turning the Tide has helped participating organizations by 1) bringing together partners to discuss key issues, principles, and values, and how these relate to community-based management, as well as to identify common issues, priorities, and strategies; 2) supporting educational and capacity-building efforts, including workshops, fishery exchange visits, training courses, and development of resource materials; and 3) undertaking concrete activities related to community-based fisheries and coastal management, from those at a local level (e.g., supporting community development of fishery management plans) to those with a potentially global impact (e.g., the development of a "community fishery management handbook," described below). In particular, the major activities within *Turning the Tide* included

- Bringing together aboriginal and non-aboriginal fishermen and communities;
- Sharing information and ideas on community-based management;
- Identifying common issues, outcomes, priorities, and strategies;
- Supporting educational and capacity-building efforts;

- Highlighting the need for community-based management within government policy;
- Supporting concrete, local-level, ecologically oriented management initiatives;
- Documenting community-based management practice and insights obtained;
- Undertaking a range of educational activities promoting community-based management; and
- Establishing regional, national and international links.

These various categories of activity in *Turning the Tide* can be grouped under three headings:

1. Workshops, Networking, and Capacity-Building

Perhaps the single most important tool used by *Turning the Tide* is the apparently simple act of “convening”—bringing people together, particularly those from groups that rarely interacted in the past. This has taken place through a series of meetings and workshops (which served a dual role in facilitating informal development of cooperative community-based management ideas), as well as in several “special events”—for example, a workshop on managing multiple ocean uses was organized as part of a pilot project on “place-based” integrated management of human activities in St. Mary’s Bay and the Annapolis basin, two key fishing locations on the Nova Scotia side of the Bay of Fundy. *Turning the Tide* also enabled partner organizations to attend a workshop on community-based natural resource management at St. Francis Xavier University and an associated training program. In addition, *Turning the Tide* has supported the capacity-building of its partners, such as a planning process of one First Nation partner to develop a community-based fisheries plan, in part through connections with non-native fishers.

2. Exchange Visits

A key component of *Turning the Tide* has been a set of exchange visits, in which participants travel and share experiences together, building linkages among themselves and with those they visit. Sets of First Nation and non-native participants from the Maritime provinces traveled twice across Canada to British Colum-

bia, specifically to the west coast of Vancouver Island and to Alert Bay on the northeastern corner of the island. This provided opportunities to interact and develop stronger relationships internally, to consolidate linkages with like-minded groups on Canada’s Pacific coast (including native bands, community-based commercial fisher groups, and local aquatic management boards) and to incorporate capacity-building through a range of presentations to and by the participants. A third exchange took place around the Gulf of Maine (including the Bay of Fundy) in 2003, crossing between Canada and the United States and involving participants of both countries. The trip involved stops in four provinces and states: Nova Scotia (Yarmouth, Digby), New Brunswick (St. Andrew’s), Maine (Eastport, Stonington, and Saco), and Massachusetts (Cape Cod, Boston). Organized in partnership with the North Atlantic Marine Alliance and the Saltwater Network, the tour involved a combination of networking, thematic workshops to examine needs, and challenges of community-based management, field testing of resource materials under development, and occasions to promote community-based management as an appropriate conservation-minded approach for fisheries and other coastal resources. These three exchange visits required considerable effort and cost, but they turned out to be remarkably effective in achieving multiple goals—development of bonds among participants, the discovery of linkages regionally and nationally, and an innovative use of “mobile workshops” to produce valuable new directions. The concept of exchanges is nothing new, but the diversity among their participants, and among the learning and relationship-building opportunities, was exceptional, as was the good will the exchanges encouraged.

3. Resource Materials

Raising the public profile of community-based fishery management and its potential in the Canadian Maritimes and beyond is a significant goal of *Turning the Tide*. This motivation led to production of a broadly-distributed brochure and a Web site (www.turningthetide.ca) describing the initiative. In addition, *Turning the Tide* participants saw the need for resource materials on community-based fishery management to support local initiatives in “northern” countries such as Canada, analogous to those available in developing countries, where the role of and potential

for this approach is better recognized. Accordingly, a practical community-based fisheries handbook is being produced to support communities in such locations pursue community-based management (see www.turningthetide.ca). This handbook draws on the knowledge base and on-the-ground experiences of native and non-native partners, to share insights obtained in initiating community-based fishery management across the Canadian Maritimes.

Discussion

Community-based comanagement as an approach to fishery management has become a major topic of study and practice in recent years. Its focus lies in bringing fishers, their organizations, and fishing communities more extensively into the management process—in other words, as more equal partners with governments. Given the many past failures of top-down government controlled fishery management, this is an important endeavor and has led to research directed at the challenge of developing suitable “vertical linkages” between community-level fishery management and governments. At the same time, there is a need for community fisheries and their local management systems to interact with and learn from one another—for “horizontal linkages” between these entities and vertical linkages providing coordination among them.

The *Turning the Tide* initiative has sought to provide a vehicle for such grassroots linkages in the Canadian Maritimes and the Gulf of Maine area. This initiative operated informally, without involvement of state governments, and with linkages built over time through a range of meetings, workshops, exchange opportunities, and the like. While it cannot be claimed that *Turning the Tide* changed in a major way the manner by which fisheries are managed in the region, it has helped to highlight an alternative vision, one that builds on important attributes of community-based management to help achieve both marine conservation and the well-being of coastal communities. In addition, personal and organizational bonds have developed that will likely support further efforts to build community-based fishery management and that will be important in helping aboriginal and non-aboriginal coastal residents cooperatively engage in sustainable resource use and environmental conservation.

The fact that *Turning the Tide* operated on a grassroots level, without governmental involvement, had implications both positive and negative. On the one hand, the initiative provided a “safe place” for a diverse set of participants to meet informally, with “no strings attached”—leading to important team-building, development of relationships with one another, and the exploration of ideas and approaches. This provided an important alternative to formal fishery stakeholder processes, in which government chairs a formal meeting at which each party states and defends their position, discussions ensue, but no real social capital is developed. Instead, *Turning the Tide* provided a more elaborate illustration of the value of “sharing a meal together”—facilitating the creation of social capital through convening informally.

On the other hand, the absence of government, particularly the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans, in the development and implementation of *Turning the Tide* meant that the initiative was not within the mainstream of government-led fishery discussions. Would it have had greater impact in official circles if government participants had been involved? Or would that have merely eliminated the initiative’s comparative advantage as a grassroots effort? It does not seem possible to answer these questions precisely, but one lesson does seem clear. *Turning the Tide* demonstrated not that interaction with government is unnecessary, but rather that there is value in complementing such interaction with another approach—a nongovernmental one built from the bottom up. The linkages between people and organizations developed in this manner may well be more robust and long-term in nature than could have been developed in any other way.

While it is well established that development of community-based management takes significant time, it is clear from this experience that the availability of financial resources, to facilitate the processes of positive human interaction, can speed up the process considerably. But if there is value in developing fishery linkages informally through a nongovernmental process such as *Turning the Tide*, how is this to be supported? In the Canadian context, the federal government—with its responsibility for fishery management and interest in comanagement—would seem an appropriate avenue to provide support for local level development of linkages that can enhance the effectiveness of coman-

agement. Indeed, the federal government supports similar activities abroad through its agencies such as the International Development Research Centre. However, in the case of *Turning the Tide*, support was provided not by the national government, but rather by a U.S. foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts. In reality, the independence of this funding may well have helped ensure the credibility of the initiative, but such support cannot be counted on in general, so a lesson for the future is the need for governmental support for such nongovernmental linkage development.

Turning the Tide, as a people-oriented initiative, produced results that could not be measured quantitatively (e.g., in terms of the number of fish tagged), but rather were more nebulous, in terms of capacity-building, education, and, most crucially, the positive interactions developed.

It was thus a “leap of faith” on the part of the funding body to support this kind of initiative, requiring recognition that efforts such as *Turning the Tide* are crucial both for conservation and for improving the well-being of coastal communities. In particular, they bring together motivated people who must work cooperatively to achieve marine conservation and community improvement—and who, in the case of native and non-native communities, historically had little interaction with one another. The range of positive results from *Turning the Tide* has reinforced, among participants, a mutual dedication to managing fisheries in a local, community-based, and ecologically-oriented manner, and has inspired them to continue building momentum in support of community-based fishery management, through their new friendships and organizational ties.

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