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**Partenariat sur l'économie sociale et la durabilité**

Bridging, Bonding, and Building / Renforcement des liens et des capacités

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# **At the Table: Exploring Women's Roles in the PEI Fishery**

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**March 2009**



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Canada



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## About the Network

The Social Economy and Sustainability Research (SES/ESD) Network is the Atlantic Node of the Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships (CSERP) – one of six regional research centres across Canada, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), 2005-2010. The Network has a wide variety of academic, community and government partners representing Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador. [www.msvu.ca/socialeconomyatlantic/](http://www.msvu.ca/socialeconomyatlantic/) For more information, contact us: Social Economy and Sustainability Research Network, c/o Research House, Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia B3M 2J6

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The SES/ESD Network will periodically publish research papers about our research in Atlantic Canada. The papers will be written by both academics and social economy practitioners. The SES/ESD Network hopes these papers will contribute to the theory and practice of social economy within the Atlantic Region. Noreen Millar is the Network Coordinator and Managing Editor of the Working Paper Series. Papers in this series are not formally peer reviewed, but are products of Network-approved and managed research projects.

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*At The Table*

# Exploring Women's Roles in the PEI Fishery



Social Economy and Sustainability Research Network  
Partenariat sur l'économie sociale et la durabilité  
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This research report is the result of participatory action research conducted by Women for Environmental Sustainability in partnership with Women's Network and the Institute of Island Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island. All partners are members of the Atlantic Canadian Social Economy and Sustainability Research Network.

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## Introduction

When I look back to 30 years ago, I keep trying to tell young fishermen that when we went fishing we could just set our nets and bring in enough herring for bait for the whole year, not in the same day, but we had herring every day, and when fishing season was over you could go out, and there were schools of mackerel everywhere. There is none of that anymore, so where did it all go? It wasn't looked after. The government didn't look after fishing.

-Male fisher

### Fisheries and Fisheries Management in Atlantic Canada

It is widely accepted that at this point, fisheries and marine ecosystems are in trouble all over the planet.<sup>1 2</sup> Many major fisheries have collapsed, and vast dead zones are spreading across the sea floor in more than 400 locations around the world. The underlying causes of these troubles are many: poor management, overfishing, habitat loss, and pollution rank among the most important.

In Atlantic Canada, despite having one of the most advanced (and expensive) fisheries management systems in the world, we have driven our greatest fishery — the northern cod — to commercial extinction. This has caused the loss of jobs and identity for tens of thousands of fishworkers and widespread agony in coastal communities where, for generations, the fishery had been the backbone of the local economy, social networks, and culture. Some blame the offshore draggers for the collapse of the cod fishery; others blame the top-down federal fisheries management system,<sup>3</sup> which failed to listen to the warnings of experienced inshore fishers<sup>4</sup> and instead responded to the demands of industrial fishing fleets and politicians.<sup>5</sup>

As this report will suggest, an unexplored, largely invisible factor may well be the absence of women and young people in our “advanced” management systems; the effects of these absences are inestimable.

More recently, we have heard concerns about declining fisheries in the Southern Gulf of St. Lawrence, and especially in the Northumberland Strait which separates New Brunswick and Nova Scotia from Prince Edward Island. Fisheries for cod, hake, and other groundfish are long gone and, more recently, we have seen downturns in many other species. Among major fisheries lobster, scallop, spring herring, halibut, winter flounder, and mackerel are in poor shape, and there is also trouble with minor fisheries including those for smelt, silversides, and eels.<sup>6</sup> Damage has been done

to the sea floor, water pollution is an issue, and exotic species have invaded the fishing grounds.<sup>7</sup> And now, changes to the climate are bringing more coastal erosion and rising water temperatures that will likely have negative consequences for marine life.

As grim as the situation appears, Canadian fisheries still provide about 37,000 jobs in the harvesting sector alone.<sup>8</sup> About 12% of these harvesters are women. Demographics are shifting: compared to 1986, when fishers under age 24 outnumbered those over age 45, we now see the reverse situation. Many fishers are approaching retirement, and fewer than 10% are under age 24. Only about a quarter of the harvesters who are now on the water ever completed high school. When they were young, it was common to abandon school to go fishing. Most have been fishing since their early teens, and they possess an immense treasure of marine skills and knowledge.

It is generally agreed that to assure a future for fisheries, to make it attractive for young people as a career option, and to maintain the many rural communities that depend on fisheries, we need to change the way fisheries are managed. A recent Senate report outlines the deteriorating conditions in rural Canada,<sup>9</sup> including fishing communities. One of the report's recommendations is to pursue "place-based" policy making. That involves engaging local people to develop local solutions for their problems, with the federal government playing a facilitating role rather than dictating policy. Local researchers have called for research and action to protect and restore fisheries stocks and habitats; and they and others encourage improved management not only of fisheries, but also of farming and other land-based activities that pollute our waters.<sup>10</sup> For both political and practical reasons, when dealing with fisheries and coastal management, government researchers and managers need to build partnerships with fishing communities in order to have any hope of success.<sup>11</sup> Too often, decision-makers fail to remember that treating women and young people as equal partners in coastal communities and fishing enterprises is an essential part of restoring hopefulness.

Canada's federal government proclaimed the Oceans Act in 1996. This legislation provides a legal framework for new forms of coastal and fisheries management. The new system that is being promoted is called co-management because, in theory, it will open up fisheries research, monitoring, and management to involve members of fishing communities. In anticipation of change, many Atlantic fishers have begun to experiment with alternative management strategies.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>13</sup> With so many of our Island fisheries in trouble, there is no time to lose in sorting out better ways of working together, and yet there are core issues that have never been publicly debated, much less resolved. These include the following: Who should be at the table when decisions are made concerning fisheries? How should these persons be selected? Whose interests would they represent — just fishing families or also the wider community? How could the process be designed so that fishers (or more broadly, coastal communities) share power as well as responsibilities?

As we will see in the following research report, which focuses on the first question (who should be at the table), the people we have interviewed raise some other important questions that also require investigation and public discussion. For example, how can the management system

incorporate the wisdom and experience of fishers who have spent decades on the water and fishing families who have incredible knowledge and insight from the shore? How can we remove politics from decision-making, without removing democratic principles based on people's voices being welcomed and heard? And how do you build a new system that takes into account the impacts of management decisions on the people whose way of life and livelihoods depend on fishing?

## Goals of this Research Project

To answer the question of who should be at the fisheries management table, it is logical to take a look at who is actively involved in fishing. The idea to produce this exploration of women's roles in the PEI fishery came out of the recognition that women and young people could be seen on fishing boats, but the available statistics on PEI fisheries say nothing about how and to what extent women and youth are involved in fisheries or fisheries management. There are no statistics to show the numbers of men and women who are holding core licenses ("primary") and helpers' permits ("corks"), or who are engaged in work on shore and in the home (such as book-keeping, purchasing, marketing, child care, and preparing food for harvesters) that directly supports family fishing enterprises. Women and the work they do are essentially invisible — to the point where, if asked, many women engaged in fisheries-related work do not identify themselves as fishworkers.

In this research report we document the perceptions of people living in coastal communities regarding women's role in the fishery. Our participants have helped us understand some of the barriers that prevent women's participation in management and decision-making, and how management processes could be made more inclusive and effective. Our goals are to

- raise awareness and understanding of women's contributions to the fishery;
- recommend ways to make fisheries management more inclusive and effective;
- inspire and empower women who want to take their place at the management table; and
- strengthen the social economy organizations working in the fisheries sector — whether these be fishers' associations, community development agencies, or women's organizations.

## Methodology

This project is primarily informed by interviews with people involved in lobster and herring fisheries in eastern Prince Edward Island. In total, 36 people (16 men and 20 women) were interviewed over the course of 2008, either in person or by telephone and for approximately one hour each. Participants were selected purposefully, based on the judgment of both academic and community partners with long-term experience in the fishery. Each person interviewed was judged to have valuable insight and knowledge based on their long-term engagement with the fishery, as a lobster fisher or shellfisher (aboriginal or non-native); as a community leader; as a member of a fisheries-focused organization; as a media reporter; or as a staffperson in a government fisheries agency (Federal, Provincial, or First Nation). (See chart, next page.) Many

Persons interviewed	#
Fishers and PEIFA staff	16
Directors of Women for Environmental Sustainability	4
Other coastal community members	7
Government fisheries staff (Federal, Provincial and First Nations)	9

respondents were directly involved in a herring fishery dispute which took place between 2000 and 2005 on Prince Edward Island and which is the focus of a case study in this report. Others were women known for speaking publicly on fisheries issues. After interviewers obtained informed consent from participants, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, then analyzed using standard qualitative methods.

This community report includes the following elements:

- main areas of concern that emerged from the interviews.
- historical accounts of PEI women’s engagement with fisheries management, including a case study on the role of women in the PEI herring fishery dispute of 2000–2005.
- views of the past, current, and potential roles of women in fisheries and in fisheries management generally.
- barriers to women’s full involvement in decision-making in the fishery, with attention to opportunities and strategies for overcoming these barriers.
- proposed actions and strategies that various organizations and agencies could adopt to make fisheries management more inclusive and effective.

## Realities and Perceptions in the PEI Fishery

This research reflects diverse voices of Prince Edward Island's fisheries. Even with the diversity of views, some perceived "realities" were echoed by most of the participants, and these speak to what the fishery looks like today on PEI.

### Fisheries on the Brink

There have been significant changes in many Island fisheries over the last 30 years, and now people are asking the question, *Will the fishery be there for the next generation?* In the eyes of most respondents, many stocks are low, and the Island fishery — both as an industry and as a way of life — is teetering on the brink of collapse. A long-time female fisher commented: "It's been 32 years ago since I started fishing, so I've seen a lot of changes, with the crab fishery, the herring fishing, lobster fishing, and bait fishing and all those things. Everything is depleted."

Groundfish harvesting and processing, once dominant in places like Souris, have faded away. The scallop fishery is in bad shape and, as described by one fisherman, nobody understands how or to what extent changes in the environment are affecting it. The oyster fishery, which has long been important for providing income to rural Islanders, also faces serious problems — and in this case environmental factors loom large. One family dependent on oysters told us that after building up their lease over 25 years, they suffered a sudden 95% loss of stock in 2008 because of what they called "an environmental collapse." Their story was important for revealing how the health of rivers and their fisheries is being affected not only by agricultural practices but also by the cottage developments of urban Islanders and visitors.

Most participants noted that, at this point, coastal communities rely heavily on the success of the lobster fishery. In other words: "If the lobster fishery fails, the state of the fishery will be failure."

Reasons informants commonly gave for the decline of various fisheries included bad management, overfishing, use of destructive fishing technologies, a lack of respect for local fisheries knowledge, changes in water quality and temperature, corporate greed, the impact of the global economy, and poor market prices. Many of these factors are inter-related.


This is a do or die reality.  
-Female fisher

As reported by our participants, the challenges facing the fishery are significant. There is a feeling that fishers are "really fighting for their livelihood." One fisher echoed the feelings of the majority when she said, "We're in a crisis; in my way of thinking, anyway."

## Everything Is Connected

Participants noted that if one species is fished out, it impacts the entire fishery. An example often referred to was herring, in that if the herring stocks were depleted, the lobster and other stocks would suffer. People also made the connection between what happens on land and in the sea. “We lost a lot of rivers full of trout and every other living thing because of pesticide runoff, and there are still fish kills every year all around in PEI because of nitrogen pollution and lack of oxygen,” said one female community member. “Until we start recognizing that watersheds go from the inner reaches of the rivers, out past the mouths of harbours into the sea, and manage them as a system, we are going to be in trouble.”

People are also very much aware that decisions made today will have an impact on future generations, and they know that fish stocks must be conserved in order to protect their way of life in the coastal zone, now and in the future. “The survival of the fishery is more than a fisheries issue,” explained one fisherman. “It has to do with the survival of rural Canada. It has to do with the survival of rural businesses and small, family-owned enterprises.” What came out in the interviews was a general sense of urgency and emergency; a deep concern for the whole, interconnected web of life in the coastal zone.



It's part of our culture; it's part of who we are.  
-Male fisher

## Power and Politics

The relationships among fishers and the staff of the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) are complex and often conflicted. Many fishers feel that they are outside of the fisheries management decision-making process altogether. “This is where a lot of problems lie,” noted one fisherman, “when fishermen themselves can't have input and that's the way the department [of fisheries] is run. It's been run that way for a long while.” Yet, people within DFO see the situation very differently. They consistently point to increased efforts to consult with fishers. “There's been a big change, I'd say, in the last 20 years in fishery management,” reflected one staffperson. “There's been an uptake of this co-management,” he insisted. “They've listened to fishermen.” Fishers say that DFO has been changing and becoming more consultative, but many find it difficult to believe that the advice they provide is taken seriously. Others have learned to respect DFO. For example, in the case of one fisher speaking about changes to lobster-size regulations, she confessed, “We were all so upset, but then it ended up in the long run helping the fishery.” She went on to say, “I've learned to trust that they know what they're doing.” However, the extreme imbalance of power and the ways in which politics enter into decision-making are consistent causes for concern.

Under the Fisheries Act, the federal Minister of Fisheries has absolute discretionary powers to control and regulate fisheries. Many of our respondents — including fishers, fisheries staff, and even a politician — expressed concern about political interference by the Minister of the day: “Politics rules the fishery today,” said a female community member. “The fishery is run by

Ottawa and the decrees are sent down from the ministers, and, unfortunately, some ministers decide to make political decisions that are harmful to the fishery,” commented a male community member. Perceived political interference breeds mistrust among fishers, who then are reluctant to engage in government processes. “There’s a perception out there that government dealings are a waste of time because decisions are already made before they make it to the people,” said a fisheries staffperson. The absence of structured decision-making at the local level, the limited participation of fishers in federal decision-making and policy development, and the perception of political interference all contribute to feelings of powerlessness.

Fairness is yet another issue related to power. No matter how officials make difficult decisions, when these decisions affect people’s lives, they must be seen to be fair. As one fisherman summed it up, “You have to have scientists and people in the fishery that want to say no. They have to say no to everybody. They can’t not say no to me because I’m from PEI, and say no to somebody else because they’re from Nova Scotia. You have to say no to everybody.”

In terms of influence, inshore fishers perceive themselves to be at a disadvantage relative to corporations that have the money to spend on Ottawa lobbyists. One fisherman maintained, and others agreed, that the federal government allows “narrow corporate interest to override broad community interest” and characterized major fish-processing firms as being able to “pick up a phone and call a premier,” or even a “federal minister; there’s no end to it!” There were first-hand accounts of a situation where the owner of the Barry Group Corporation, faced with opposition in a fisheries meeting concerning herring, simply walked away, saying that he was not going to negotiate further; he was taking his side of the story straight to Ottawa.

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that a scientist who provides advice for fisheries management held the perspective that it is the fishers who appear to wield political power because they are “very good at getting political response and political attention, so they play a very large role in fisheries management decision-making.”

Clearly, anyone wanting to promote an alternative system of fisheries management must first understand who really holds power, how they use that power, and how power and powerlessness are experienced in fishing communities.<sup>14</sup>

## Data for Decision-making


Many respondents commented on the need for sound science. Several noted the tendency for some fishers to provide false or incomplete catch information to the DFO, a practice that sets the system up for failure. Fisheries staff also expressed concerns because they often lack the resources and time to gather all the scientific data they need for sound, science-based decision-making. Fishers perceive that DFO ignores one source of relevant data — their own hard-earned, intimate knowledge of the waters where they fish — what one fisherman called “true science.” A female community member said, “We are in a crisis because they never acknowledged the people with the knowledge because they were uneducated, and what would they know, you know?”

Although they appreciate science-based decision-making, fishers do not necessarily want DFO to be entirely guided by science. Some want to reframe management decision-making so that it takes account of social as well as economic and ecological values. As one fisherman pointed out, in fisheries management there is little thought given to how decisions will affect the communities. “The DFO is responsible for dividing up quotas,” he says, but “when it comes to the cultural way of life, that’s not inside their realm whatsoever.”

## Great Uncertainty

People shared many common concerns about the state of the PEI fishery. Most also shared an overwhelming sense of uncertainty.

The few who believe that the Island fishery is doing okay still worry about increasing costs and the impacts of depleted stocks. Those who see the fishery as failing question whether fishers, communities, associations, and/or governments can turn it around. There is no overall agreement about what needs to change or how to bring change about. Often, none of the available choices seems attractive. One female fisher put it this way: “We want to keep a fishery for the future”, and “fishermen are quite concerned. At the same time, expenses have gone up and they have to sustain their living too.” Fishers are faced with a difficult dilemma: “They know they have to give up something, but they just don’t want to give it up.” Where there seem to be no easy answers, or where there is not even a difficult path that people have agreed upon, many are reluctant to try anything new or different for fear of making a bad situation worse. This fear was most clearly expressed by a female fisheries staffperson: “People are very afraid of doing things when they are not convinced it will help the fishery, but in the short term they are pretty sure it will harm their livelihood.”



The whole issue of fear, that really plays into this.  
-Female fisheries staffperson



## Case Study: The Herring Fishery Dispute, 2000-2005

### The Trouble with Seiners

Trouble in the herring fishery began brewing in Souris in 2000 when large herring seiners came to fish in PEI's waters for the first time in about 30 years. Until 2000, the herring seiners fished their entire annual quota — allotted by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) — in the Bay of Chaleur, northern New Brunswick. Then, concerned about overfishing of local stocks, DFO limited their catch in the Bay to 50% of their quota and so pushed them out in search of new fishing grounds.

Herring is a migratory species. Every fall, large schools of herring are on the move in the waters of Atlantic Canada, heading toward their wintering ground in the deep water off Cape Breton and Newfoundland. Needing to fill half of their quota outside of the Bay of Chaleur, seiners followed the migrating herring to fishing grounds on the northeast shore of PEI.

The large (65 plus feet), corporately owned seiners were fishing in shallow waters that had traditionally been the fishing grounds for the small boat, inshore, gillnet fishers who depend on herring as bait for the lobster, tuna, and rock crab fisheries. The seiners were able to enter

these grounds because of a change made to a map showing regulated fishing areas. The change involved removal of a line that had previously limited seiner fishing to waters outside of the 25-fathom depth contour. It was unclear whether this change to the map had been an unintentional error or a conscious change in regulations implemented without discussion with the affected parties. Whatever the reason for the change, “moving the line” was actively contested by inshore fishers.

You have to protect the herring because it is the foundation of the fishery.

-Male fisher

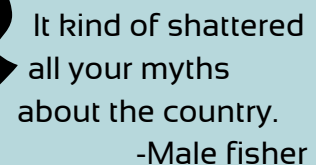
Community members watched with dismay and apprehension as the seining vessels unloaded their catches on Souris wharf; on average, the five seiners would unload 20 tractor-trailer loads of herring in a single day. Many observers were old enough to recall a time, 35 years previous, when seiners had fished out the herring stocks from the Northumberland Strait. Only after the stocks collapsed had the government banned the seiners from the area.

Seiners use a large net to encircle and capture an entire school of fish. Fishers had observed that many herring spawning areas in the Strait remained barren after the seiners had gone. They

believed this was because herring run in distinct schools, each of which tends to return time and again to a particular place to spawn. Once an entire spawning group has been picked up in a net, there are none left having the instinct to return to that spot. Local fishers experienced this as the loss of an inshore fishing ground. In Souris in the year 2000, fishers knew well that the north side of PEI had dozens of small spawning beds. They believed that the groups of fish attached to these beds were vulnerable to being eliminated by the highly efficient process of seining. Souris citizens were worried, not because herring brings a great deal of cash into a fishing enterprise — it doesn't — but because these abundant fish are food for so many other valued species.

## Fishermen Take Action

By the fall of 2001, worried discussions in Souris turned to action as 40 fishermen occupied their wharf to protest the seiner fishing. They blocked two trucks loaded with fish from leaving the wharf and stopped seiners from unloading their catch. In response, the seiner owners went to court for an injunction against the fishermen, who eventually allowed the trucks to leave and the seiners to continue working. The two sides reached a “gentlemen's agreement” for the 2002 season: the seiners agreed to fish farther from shore, but still offloaded their catch in Souris. The local politicians and DFO promised to address the problem of “the line,” but by the fall of 2003, nothing had changed. With the five seiners again fishing in Island waters, the Souris fishers and their supporters — about 350 people — resumed the blockade of the wharf. One fisherman remembered, “Well, I was a fisherman and also a demonstrator; tried to protect the fishery, what was left of it. I want something left here for the young fellas.” In the community, there was a feeling of exhilaration from finally taking a stand against the perceived injustice of having the inshore fishery put at risk for the sake of corporate profits.



It kind of shattered all your myths about the country.  
-Male fisher

Although the protesters were peaceful, reaction by the Provincial and Federal governments, the courts, and the police was swift and forceful. Armed with an injunction filed by the Barry Group Corporation (who owned some of the seiners), riot police with loaded semi-automatic machine guns and police dogs moved in to disperse the crowd and arrested 14 fishers. One onlooker described in vivid terms how the sight riveted his attention and shattered his idea of Canada. As he stood at the gates and watched, “The troops got out of the bus and got into formation. The sniper was there and he lied there.” The fisher remembers, “And they stood there with live guns.”

Fishermen were upset and frustrated, but also buoyed by a sense of camaraderie and community support. Local coffee shops brought a steady stream of coffee and donuts to the protestors during the standoff. The issue captured the attention of national media. Fishers held a rally at Souris rink which attracted more than 800 people. The seiners continued fishing, following the herring migration, but the provincial government and DFO promised to resolve the situation. DFO also commissioned a report that outlined each side of the conflict.

Although DFO was painfully slow to deal with the issue of the “line,” local fisheries staff were sympathetic: “It was difficult because we had to ensure an orderly fishery, and yet we believed the fishermen were justly concerned.” Among local field staff there was frustration because of the apparent lack of understanding at the regional and national levels of DFO.

Regardless of sympathies on the ground, “the line” had still not been reinstated by the fall of 2004, and fishers again felt abandoned by their governments. The police moved into Souris at the start of herring season to set up barricades, install video cameras, and patrol the wharf 24 hours a day. Meanwhile, the PEI Fishermens Association (PEIFA) was advising fishers that they could not block the wharf because the seiner owners had threatened to sue the 14 fishermen charged the previous year, and were claiming hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost earnings from 2003.

Into this situation fraught with frustration, confusion, and the real possibility of violence, stepped a group of women from fishing families in Souris. Their intervention in the herring crisis, and the response of male fishers, community members, and government agencies to the intervention, is a focal point of this research report. This case represents what can happen when women, in the words of a local fisherman, choose to “put their noses in where [they don’t] belong.”

## Women for Environmental Sustainability Weigh In

As noted above, the fall of 2004 was a time of intense frustration and confusion among fishers and their families. Faced with seiner boats fishing the local inshore herring spawning grounds, some community members had tried to organize around the issue, with limited success. “In the herring dispute,” one recounted, “I tried to organize fishermen to take some action.” He explained, “We laid out a whole strategy,” but for some reason, “we weren’t successful to even attract the guys to the meetings.” Looking for an explanation, he speculates, “That’s the way a hunter culture works. They see a very low value in paper, and their timeframe is very much in the present.”

As recounted by Sara Roach Lewis: “The community was at a loss. Everyone was talking about it, but we couldn’t protest on the water or on the wharf. My father is very passionate about fishing and passionate about the damage the seiners were doing to the herring. I was on maternity leave that fall, and my father kept saying ‘Someone should do something! We need to have a rally,

someone should do something!’ So, finally, one day after hearing this for a few weeks, I decided that no one else was doing it, so perhaps I should.”

Within a week, Sara had enlisted help from family and friends and had alerted the media, identified speakers, and organized a rally. The local Credit Union offered \$1,000 toward the expenses. At the suggestion of the PEI Fishermens Association, the rally focussed on the impact the dispute

was having on women, families, and the community. As in the previous year, over 800 people from across the Island packed into the rink for the rally. Speakers included a representative from the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, as well as local women who talked about how the conflict was affecting their lives financially and emotionally. They talked about how hard it was on

Their message resonated with the fishing community.

-Male fisher

children, including how hard it was to teach their children to respect police authority when their fathers were being arrested for trying to protect their families' livelihoods.

"It took Sara Roach and her group of women to organize a rally," concludes one fisherman who had attempted to organize a protest. "I think the whole notion we are moving into with environmental sustainability is a more feminine value." And furthermore, he adds, "I think we need those feminine values." Another fisherman observed, "These girls got a lot of support," and it was "not because they were women but because they spoke the truth." The women were expressing the same concerns that the fishermen had, about the sustainability of the fishery, but they were doing it with an unexpected degree of professionalism, which led him to conclude that "the management of the message, the administration of the enterprise, that really is women's role in the fishery."

Encouraged by community supporters, a dozen women met after the rally to discuss next steps. As a result, a new organization emerged. It was Women for Environmental Sustainability (WES), with a board of directors made up of four women. For them, the fall of 2004 and winter of 2005 will forever be remembered as "the year of the herring."

### "I have a record now ..."

In the week following the rally several members of WES met with the Provincial Leader of the Opposition and the PEIFA while others, including Sara's mother, Bev Roach, were involved in a small protest on the wharf in Souris.

The New Brunswick Minister of Fisheries was on his way to Souris with a carload of groceries, in response to the refusal of a Souris grocery store to sell groceries to the seiners. Although the RCMP stopped him before he got to Souris and advised him to turn around, his action precipitated the women's protest on the wharf. (His action also prompted WES to take the opportunity to send a message of their own. To drive their point home, they sent groceries over to the minister to distribute to inshore fishers in his own province whose catches had been affected by seiner fishing!)

The management of the message, the administration of the enterprise, that really is women's role in the fishery.

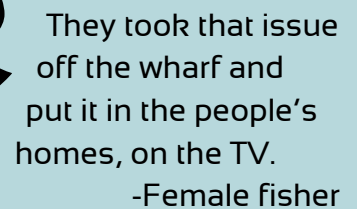
-Male fisher

Mrs. Roach was one of several women quietly standing in front of a police car, preventing it from going down the wharf, when four burly police officers moved in, and threw her to the ground. She was subsequently charged with obstruction of justice, fingerprinted, and sent into court. "It was quite shocking really," she recalled. "Well, I was very worried because I was going to go to court and I think jail, and I had a lawyer and lawyers are expensive." As one might imagine, "It was a scary thing to have to get fingerprints and a mug shot," but Bev was well supported by the fishers of Souris, who established a defence fund to pay her

legal costs and provided moral support. “We did a lot of joking about it, but I was living by myself in that winter, and the fishermen were phenomenal because every single day they would call me to see how I was doing,” she recalled. “All the fishermen showed up in court.”

## Doing Their Homework

The original four WES board members split the work according to their respective strengths. One liked research, while another was a natural organizer and administrator; the third took care of the finances, and the fourth was the spokesperson. Faced with arguments from DFO and the seiners that the industrial fishery did not threaten herring stocks, WES had a lot of research and learning to do. They met with anyone who would talk to them about herring: fishermen, politicians, the media, community leaders, scientists, and resource managers. They read management plans and scientific studies, created a website, incorporated the organization, and wrote letters to newspapers. As one female fisher noted, “I think they had a really good role to play, keeping us informed about things. You could go on your computer and go on that site.”




They took that issue off the wharf and put it in the people's homes, on the TV.  
-Female fisher

When asked about the role that WES had played, many people mentioned that they had “done their homework” in the form of research, which helped establish the group's credibility. Some noted that WES filled a gap because research is such a serious challenge for volunteers, especially in rural communities where a career in farming or the fishery traditionally did not require much formal education. “A lot of guys didn't go past Grade 10. Either that's all there was, or people left school to go fishing,” said one fisherman.

There was also some resistance from people within the fisheries towards WES's involvement. Even some members of the PEI Fishermens Association did not fully embrace the women's intervention. “It was very significant for women to go to the forefront,” noted one long-time fisheries observer, “and they kind of dragged the Fishermens Association along with them.” At the time, he had made a point of sounding the men out, and he reports that among the male directors of the PEIFA, “there was resentment of the women taking that role.”

By going to meetings in the community and listening to local concerns, WES was able to incorporate local issues with their research to provide a fresh, articulate, and credible voice for the community. People were impressed by the women's ability to speak the language of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and to use science and research to make their points. Local fishermen were strongly supportive. They attended WES meetings, offered suggestions, provided direction, helped with letter writing, and in about three months raised \$25,000 for WES's work — almost all of it donated by fishing families.

Responding to a politician's comment that he could easily ignore an issue that cropped up



After the initial long-term vision process wrapped up, WES was never invited back to another meeting.

only once a year and faded within a few weeks, WES organized a letter-writing campaign to maintain pressure through the winter. The publisher of the local weekly paper published every letter and at times devoted extra pages to the issue. WES also encouraged everyone to contact MPs and MLAs and voice their concern over the seiner dispute. More than 1,000 letters of support were mailed to the local MP's office. Bev Roach's court case provided additional press coverage. She appeared in court twice, pled guilty, and was sentenced to three months' probation.

## Bringing Women to the Management Table — or Not!

In the winter of 2005, the DFO began a process they called the “Long-Term Vision for Herring and Mackerel.” Three consultants were sent to speak to industry, do some research, and provide recommendations on a 10-year vision for herring and mackerel management. WES met with the consultants in Souris and attended meetings in Moncton and Shippigan. They spent considerable time and money and were away from their husbands and young children for days on end to be part of this process, which attempted to bring together seiners, processors, inshore fishers, and scientists to develop a vision for the industry. However, after the initial process wrapped up in July of 2006, WES was never invited back to another meeting. In 2007, when another consultant was brought on board by DFO to review the progress of the visioning process, WES was not even identified as a stakeholder.

Despite their hard work and their credibility in the community, WES was not invited to play any role in the PEI Fishermens Association. As noted by one observer, a male community member, “The PEI Fishermens Association should be embracing them” by calling on them to assist with research and analysis of fisheries issues.

## Lessons Learned

The women learned a great deal about the depth of support for fishers among Islanders. Everyone seemed to know and care about the herring issue. Business people in Souris, Montague, Summerside, and Charlottetown offered support, and WES members were asked to speak to various groups including the United Church Presbytery Faith in Action group, which numbered about 125 people.


Looking back on their experience at the management table, members of WES recollect: “From the beginning of our foray into fisheries management, people told us not to trust the DFO — that they would use us and would pretend to consult with us, the way they did with the fishermen. We gave them the benefit of the doubt and fully participated in many meetings with them. We respected the rules, which meant that at most meetings, we didn't have a voice at the table and were only welcome as observers. When we were asked to participate, we did. And in the

end, our role and participation in the management of the herring fishery was not respected or documented. And when we were no longer useful, we were no longer invited.” One observer noted that people in power, including the PEIFA, “just didn’t seem to embrace the fact that these girls did a great job.”

WES also noted that DFO consistently framed the herring debate as one about science, and that DFO claimed to own all the knowledge that could be deemed to be relevant: “The fisheries managers would say, ‘but we have SCIENCE,’ and you could almost see it in really big letters, looking very important. They said the inshore fishers had no scientific evidence to support their theories that the seiners were depleting the genetic diversity of the stocks, or the discrete stocks themselves. Depending upon the scientist and the day, they sometimes refused to even accept that there are distinct populations of herring.”

In an attempt to understand the science, members of WES spent countless Saturday and Sunday afternoons meeting as a group to study past stock status reports, acoustic surveys, and other research documents. Then, feeling that they also knew a thing or two, WES organized the Winter Herring Conference on March 12, 2005, inviting fishers, concerned citizens, academics, and DFO scientists to spend the day talking about the science of herring. By the day’s end, it was clear to everyone that the DFO’s science was grossly underfunded compared to that in other countries such as Norway, and far from cutting edge. As one example, a researcher from Dalhousie University was doing genetic research on herring in the North Sea that supported the idea of genetic diversity among spawning stocks.

Another lesson WES learned was that politics play a major role in the management of the fishery. They were told repeatedly that the only way the herring dispute was going to be resolved was through a political judgment. Under the Fisheries Act, the Minister of Fisheries has discretion to set fishing quotas and boundaries, and it was widely accepted that the Minister was not on the side of the small-boat, inshore fishery. So, in addition to studying the science, WES set about reading transcripts from the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, trying to figure out the political angles as well. In the end, they believe a resolution resulted from the following formula:



They are women, they got involved, they got things done, and it’s a very good example for a lot of women out there in the industry.

-Female fisher

***intense public pressure + negative media attention + minority government***

***= political action***

On May 13, 2005, Cardigan MP Lawrence MacAulay announced in Souris that the 25-fathom line was reinstated, effectively pushing the seiners out of the shallow waters off PEI’s north shore. The decision was viewed as a great victory for everyone who had worked so hard — for the fishers, for WES, for the provincial government, for the PEIFA, and for the citizens of PEI who had supported the fishers and their communities.

## Mixed Success

It should be stated that although WES was part of the solution, and is a worthwhile focus for the present case study, resolving the herring dispute was ultimately a collaborative effort. The Provincial Government mounted a lawsuit against the federal government, which drew a lot of media attention to the herring issue. The PEIFA, under new leadership, came out strongly against the seiners and DFO's position. Bev Roach's court case provided a focal point for public sympathy. Letters to the editor and media attention provided additional political pressure, and, as a result, Island MPs worked the corridors of power in Ottawa, promoting the issue in the context of a minority Liberal government — one that needed eastern-Canadian votes. As Sara Roach Lewis summed it up, "Those in power made a decision based not on what was best for the environment, the industry, or the herring, but on ensuring they would stay in power — which is not a great way to manage a fishery, but that's the way it works."

In addition to helping to resolve the herring dispute, WES also shifted local perceptions of women's role in fisheries. "[WES] took up a fight that no one else would take up, and they were instrumental in having the 25-fathom line changed," noted a fisherman. In his opinion, "They changed the face of the fisheries in Eastern Kings," at least in the minds of some people. As he went on to explain, there are "a lot of fishing guys that recognize and support that — and a lot of guys that don't."

Despite the efforts made by the people of Souris, the herring stocks that used to spawn on their local herring bank in spring have disappeared. From the perspective of inshore fishers interviewed in 2008, and expressed cogently by one female fisher, "The herring fishing essentially is gone. The last two seasons, 2007 and 2008, we didn't catch enough to bait up the first day." With the herring fishery in this state, it is a cruel irony that many lobster fishers now must purchase frozen bait supplied by the Barry Group's seiners. It is still a matter of debate whether the seiner fishery or the changing environmental conditions or some other factor has been responsible for the loss of the local spring herring fishery, and whether the loss is temporary or permanent.

Several of our respondents took care to point out that the herring issue may only be sleeping, not solved. The Minister of Fisheries never formally recognized that allowing corporate seiners to operate in shallow fishing grounds was wrong and amended no regulations. As one skeptical observer was quick to point out, "A long-term assurance only lasts until the Minister changes his mind." And recently, another worry has arisen for the inshore fishers and WES. The midwater trawlers, another industrial-scale, mobile fleet, are now allowed to fish for herring in the Southern Gulf.

Adding further uncertainty to the Souris-area fishery, lobster prices fell sharply in 2008 as the global recession set in. As noted by one of our participants, a male community member, as goes that \$100-million lobster season, so goes the economy, and, if the price for lobster fails to adequately cover fishers' costs, they are "going to be in some pretty dire situation."



## Women in PEI Fisheries: Past and Present

This research project was proposed based on an understanding that women play a variety of roles in the fishery and that the roles they play are often under-rated or invisible. This section of the report will highlight some of work women do, both in their communities and in government agencies. Although not an exhaustive description of the roles that women play in the fishery, this account provides insight into what women can bring to the management table, and why their inclusion is important.


### Research on Women's Changing Roles in Atlantic Fisheries

The profound impacts of the groundfishery collapse that played out through the 1980s and early 1990s prompted a great deal of research activity, including research on the role of women in Atlantic Canadian fisheries. Although research on Prince Edward Island was limited it did include one study focused on lobster fishing families<sup>15</sup>. As they struggled to understand and respond to a disastrous situation, Newfoundland fishworkers and their academic partners reached out to engage women in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and PEI in their discussions. The Women's Fishnet — an action-oriented network involving academics and fishworkers — was established, adding Canadian women's voices to an international women in fisheries movement.<sup>16</sup>

Research done in Atlantic Canada by Fishnet members revealed that women had always been engaged in important shore work and fish processing, but increasingly they were also stepping onto boats and going fishing. Once-profitable family fishing enterprises faced with declining catches and increasing costs, could no longer afford to hire helpers from outside the family. Many women, including some who had lost their jobs in fish-processing factories, moved into these helper positions. Unemployment and employment insurance programs were an added enticement, since they eventually allowed a family to establish two or more claims for assistance to the same household, and this provided cash through the winter season. The transition from shore to boat work was not easy. Often, women had to fight in court for official recognition as fishers and for their right to draw unemployment insurance or to claim government compensation after groundfish stocks collapsed.

## Women in Support of Fishing and the Irish Moss Strike

Women in Support of Fishing (WISF) was founded in the 1980s in the village of Miminegash, PEI, out of concern for fishing families, including those engaged in the Irish moss fishery. This is a fishery that provides raw materials to international food, cosmetics, and pharmaceutical markets, through buyers that represent large corporations based in the United States and Europe. For years the price for Irish moss had remained the same while harvesting costs rose, meaning that the labourers in the industry — including many women and children — were compensated less and less for their work. It was the WISF who undertook to organize a strike against the buyers in an attempt to get a fairer price for the moss. The strike went ahead despite serious conflicts that split harvesting communities into factions. After the strike was resolved, WISF continued on as a support group for fisheries and for community development. They established the Seaweed Pie Café and Irish Moss Museum in Miminegash, after many moss buyers abandoned PEI's fishing communities in favour of South America and the tropics, where seaweed could be harvested even more cheaply than on PEI.



When we [women from the fishery] came together it was all about being able to maintain and sustain and everybody be able to make a living respectfully.

-Female fisher

When they were most politically active, WISF reached out to women across the Island. One woman interviewed who was involved in those days recalled: “It was the early eighties when we had a network of women in support of fishing.” She travelled up to the western tip of the Island and found that “the ladies there were certainly much more in tune with fishing than I was.” It was an exciting time. “I’m sure at the time we were thought of as radicals, really, because it was not very kosher for women to be outspoken about anything, let alone the fishing industry.”

## Engagement with International Women in Fisheries Networks

In the late 1990s, a group of Prince Edward Island fisherwomen and researchers made contact with the Newfoundland Women's FishNet. In 2000, a group that included members of the WISF travelled to an international conference on gender and globalization in fisheries hosted by Memorial University in Newfoundland. Female fisheries activists from India visited the Maritimes and lobbied the Maritime Fishermen's Union to include women more fully in their organization. As recalled by a fisheries news reporter “Irene Novaczek and people down at the Voluntary Resource Centre” (that was Cooper Institute) would “hold conferences for women in fishing” and “get a whole bunch of women in a room. You’d never see them again out of that meeting; they just disappeared somewhere.” So, it seems that according to some, these early efforts to bring attention to women in fisheries had little impact on public consciousness. However, international contacts were maintained for many years among the women involved.

## The PEI Oyster Cleaner Dispute

The Island's fisherwomen came to the fore in a second political arena in 2000–2002 after DFO banned fishers' helpers, known as "cleaners," from the public oyster fishery. The ban was put in place because helpers on fishing dories could, among other things, help fishers bring in more oysters per day. Although the reason cited in public for banning cleaners was that they increased the rate of fishing and thus posed a potential threat to the sustainability of the fishery, in fact the main motivator was a feeling among some fishers who chose not to employ cleaners, that those who did had an unfair advantage. Cleaners on oyster boats did more than declump oysters. They

also ensured that spat got removed from adult oysters and returned to the water in good condition, and they were in a position to help control invasive species such as oyster thief.

From the start, their husbands were getting phone calls from other members of the community encouraging them to "control their wives" and "shut their women up."  
-Female community member

In response to the proposed ban on cleaners, a group comprised mostly of women from western PEI came together as the Shellfish Coalition with a two-fold mission: to lobby for more research to provide data for better management of the oyster fishery, and to organize resistance to the policy change, on both social and environmental grounds. They met with DFO and, finding the doors to management of the shellfishery closed to them, agreed to take their fight to the courts. One female oyster fisher had herself arrested in an effort to have the

legality of the policy change subjected to legal scrutiny, but the case was dismissed before a ruling could be made. Subsequently, the women gave up and disbanded.


Challenging the oyster cleaner ban was a difficult project for women to undertake. As with the Irish moss strike of the previous decade, the oyster cleaner issue split families and neighbours apart and resulted in conflict among fishers. Male fishers whose wives were involved in the Shellfish Coalition were harassed on the fishing grounds and subjected to abusive phone calls at home. In the end, all efforts of the Shellfish Coalition were unsuccessful. The DFO listened to the vocal male fishers who favoured the ban, ignored the potential environmental impacts of losing cleaners from the boats, and argued that social and economic consequences for the oyster cleaners, who were perceived as marginal players in the industry, were not their concern.

Research performed in the wake of the controversy documented the significant negative social, environmental, and economic consequences of the policy change — including the effect of discouraging young people from thinking of the oyster fishery as a livelihood option. The researcher found no positive benefits from the ban. She concluded that "since marine ecosystems clearly include fishers as well as fish, efforts to promote sustainable fisheries resources must take into consideration social, economic and biological factors."<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, she noted, "The cleaner ban also highlighted the role that

There was a time when it was unheard of to have women out on the water fishing.  
- Male fisher

women have to play not only in terms of the sustainability and management of oyster stocks, but also in the future of the industry.”

## Past and Current Roles of Women in Family Fishing Enterprises of PEI



[Women] seem to exert their influence in other ways, at home around the kitchen table when they are talking, or doing the books and hearing the stories of what goes on [on] the water.

-Male community member


As is true generally in Atlantic Canada, the roles women play in the fishery of PEI have changed markedly over time. In times past, women were employed only in shore work and fish processing, and to this day these tasks are still primarily women's work. These days, people note, there are more women than ever actively engaged in fisheries, including being on the boat. While there are no statistics available to show how many women are core fishers or helpers on boats, respondents such as one fisherman observe, “Women play a large role now compared to 20

years ago. Now a quarter or a third of boats have a woman aboard, and in three-quarters of families the woman is the one that does the books and takes care of paying the bills.” A male fisheries officer added, “Women are working on the boat, handling the family unit (arranging child care, making sure kids get off to school), making meals, dealing with the financial and administrative parts of the enterprise.” Women also bear financial responsibility for family fishing enterprises. Whenever a fishing family procures a bank loan, both spouses must sign for it.

As in other Atlantic provinces, the availability of (un)employment insurance (EI) together with financial constraints on the family enterprise propelled women onto the boats. “Years ago [women] weren't allowed to draw unemployment insurance from fishing,” recalled one female fisher. “Now they are, so that allows them to actively participate and get a bit of benefit for the family out of the fishery.” A fisherman explains the economics of it: “There is not enough money being made for hiring outside family. Another benefit is that the two parts of the family, the husband and wife, can draw EI through winter.”

Today, women in fishing families play a wide variety of roles and have complicated schedules. They may have to balance the concerns of the home, including the care of children and elderly parents, and volunteer work in the community, all while managing the fishing enterprise by ensuring licenses are up-to-date, making purchases, and doing the book-keeping. As one female fisher who did all of this while also being a cork succinctly expressed it: “I have four jobs!”

Women can exert influence in the fisheries “from the kitchen table,” but there are also many women who work on the boat as well as on shore. One woman described her work on the boat as very physical, “the same as the boys.” A female helper, or cork, can be influential in the daily management of the enterprise. One fisherman said, “Personally



There's no more beautiful place to be than on the ocean when it's nice. And there's no more hell to be when it's not.

-Female fisher

and from what I see, women have a big say in decisions on a vessel, where they are on a boat.”

One problem of having women fish with their husbands is that when the man retires or dies, the woman often leaves the fishery rather than going to work with someone else. “So it’s very sad,” a female fisher reflected, “because that’s a lot of knowledge and experience coming off the water” at one time.

When the women start fishing they really add a little bit of environmental [ethics] and then the women train the men to be a little more sustainable.

-Male fisher

Women may feel they need to go well beyond the call of duty to be accepted as fishers. One female fisher recalled, “I had important doctor’s appointments, that I should have missed a day of fishing and went to, but I was that dedicated to proving my point of — you know — take me serious I really am fishing, I really am a fisherperson — that I wouldn’t even take that day off.”

Some women own a core fishing license, but it is still uncommon for women to captain the boat. One woman who took over running the family boat after her husband left explained how she was intimidated when she first started. Not only were all the other captains men, but she felt she lacked knowledge and confidence, especially when it came to hiring and firing crew, and doing engine repairs. She was determined to prove herself but even after years on the water she admits: “I’m always on edge. I can’t sleep. I’m always wondering how am I going to do this? How am I going to do that? There’s so many things to be done!” Today, as a single mom with a teenaged son, she certainly has a lot on her plate, but she has proved herself. According to the local fisheries manager, she is the top harvester in her community.

Another female captain felt that competent women were respected by the men, whether working on shore or on the boats. Speaking of a female harbour master, she noted: “She gets things done and they appreciate that.” However, as an active female fisher she also expects to be treated like an annoyance when she tries to get involved in issues: “I’m more annoying than most, I would think.”

As workers on the boats, women have important roles to play in conservation, and as role models. “You were careful when you were doing your measurement and chucking your small lobsters over and being careful with your spawners,” explained a female cork. “I set them back over very gently and, basically, it’s the future when I look at them.” This woman also enforces rules to protect the sea. “Aboard our boat nothing goes overboard,” she said, and, “When I hire men I tell them — the garbage stays on board.” Women have also been a positive influence when it comes to safety. One older fisherman told of how, years ago, there was a program to promote the use of lifejackets, but “the fishermen wouldn’t have anything to do with it,” so they pitched the idea to the women instead. Attending to safety, “that was an old role of women in the fishery.” Women may even have a civilizing influence, according to a male fisher: “In the old days there was a lot of drinking and stuff but with the women around, that slowed down. For me personally, I’m glad. Well, I used to do it myself.”

I think the impact that women have on the fishery is completely under-rated.

-Male fisher

## A Day in the Life of a Cork

We get up in the morning at 3:45 and we head to the wharf at 4:30. We only have a five-minute sail to where we fish, so it's not a long way. We have [another] cork with us, extra hired help.

So we haul our first trap and the hired help takes it aboard. My husband is in the middle and I'm at the far end where I shove the traps up the washboard. My husband usually takes the lobster out, he shoves the trap up to me, I bait, and if there are any more lobsters in there (which hopefully there is) I take them out and throw them in the pan. We go through that and work our traps. My husband goes into the wheel house, the cork gets ready to push the traps off, and I go behind our bench and measure all the lobsters.

I always measure the canners. If the cork has time, he'll help me measure my markets, but it's up to me to measure my canners. I never let anybody near my canners, even my husband, because if we ever came in and there were short lobsters in the catch I would be blamed. If there are three people measuring lobster, you don't know who's putting the short one in. I'm very careful about that because in all the years I've fished, only once we got caught with one short lobster, and it was one of those lobsters that kind of hung in the gauge.

I cut the bait. We have mackerel. I slice the tail off and gut them. I just do whatever. I'm out on pretty rough days. I always take Saturdays off. I used to take Wednesdays off, but now since we had our first grandchild, Saturday works better. It just depends on what the weather is like for the day. With his illness, my husband isn't always the best on his feet, so I'm there every day more so because of him. I just do whatever a cork does. There's lots of times if something goes wrong on the boat the cork can't do it all, catch a buoy and take it in (which I don't like doing; it's pretty tough work, catching a buoy), or I can throw traps over. I don't run the hauler. That's the only thing I won't do.

So that's my job.

For myself, I'm doing the same job I was 30 years ago. I started fishing in 1980, and I've always done the same job. With me, the more I can do in the boat, the quicker the time goes by. I can't just stand in the boat and do nothing. Some just measure the catch but I'm not like that. I have to be ambitious. I can always see something to be done before it needs to be done. Like if my lobster pan is getting full, the cork and I will put it in the tank. The tank is always washed out, and there's always water in it. There are things like that. I don't really know if the role of a woman has changed from 30 years ago. If a woman is in the boat doing a job, you do it year after year.

Several participants noted that women also make significant, and often unappreciated, financial contributions to the fishery. When the family enterprise is not very profitable, women frequently take on paid employment outside the home, and it's the woman's salary that pays the household expenses. "Because women take on that role, all the money from the fishing goes back into it," explained a female community member. But then, she went on to say, the men often "don't see that as women contributing to the fishing enterprise."

## Women in the Prince Edward Island Fishermens Association

Women aren't asked to play any significant role in any meeting of fishermen, and that's largely because of culture.

-Male community member

Women occupy several office jobs at the Prince Edward Island Fishermens Association (PEIFA). From the point of view of a member of the Association who was interviewed, "There's only office girls there." However, he went on to explain that these women "know exactly what's going on" and may even "have a bit of input too" because it is their job to "read stuff and figure it out." Most people failed to see that women had any significant role in the PEIFA, at least not in upper-management positions or as members of the association.

The key reason for the apparent absence of women in the PEIFA is that in order to be a member, you must be a core license holder. Most women do not have the family fishing license in their name, even though they may be full legal and financial partners in the enterprise and fish beside their husbands or be active in managing the business. Unless they hold the license, their voice goes unheard at the PEIFA. The exclusive membership requirements of the PEIFA are also a barrier to younger men who fish with their fathers or other family members in anticipation of fully owning the fleet when the older man retires. It is quite common for fathers and sons to be partners in the enterprise for many years while the elder retains the core license. In these instances the young men, with their youthful ideas and energies, are also excluded from boards and committees.

Several participants mentioned that when women do attend PEIFA meetings they are not encouraged to speak up, and they tend to stay in the background. The fact that the PEIFA has only males on their board indicates that the fair representation of female fishers is not an organizational priority.

Look, I'd love to be able to sit on a board of something to do with fishing, but I was never asked.

-Female fisher

Everyone we interviewed supported having women more prominent in the PEIFA, but few expected widespread acceptance of the idea. One fisherman predicted "a great debate" should the director of the PEIFA ever proclaim that the spouses and partners would be entitled to attend Association meetings with full voice and vote. A fisherman said, "I should think you would see him tarred and feathered, but it's something he should be giving thought to."

Despite their invisibility, women do have ways of communicating through their husbands, as one female fisher explained: "When my husband comes home we discuss a lot of this stuff, what's

going on. And maybe we have some input based on speaking to our husbands.” As she explained it, her husband “seems to agree sometimes with my point of view so maybe it changes his a bit.” A male fisher’s perception was, “I presume that most women, when their husbands are away at these meetings, ask a few questions and would know exactly what the answers would be if you asked them some of the questions.”

I was being sneered at because I was a woman.  
-Female fisheries staff

It was clear from our interviews with women fishers that there are some women who are ready and willing to serve on the PEIFA board and committees, should that become possible.

## Women in Government Fisheries Agencies

There has been a significant influx of women into the fisheries departments, especially DFO, over the last ten years. Women have also found work as harbour masters and dockside monitors. “There’s more women working in associations, and there’s more women inside DFO. It’s starting to move, change,” perceived one fisherman. But, many of these women are working in administrative positions rather than in upper management: “I know all the girls in the offices but I think all the managers are men,” a fisherman said.

Although women in upper management and research positions at DFO are relatively few, their numbers do seem to be increasing. Female fisheries staff who were interviewed commented on some of the difficulties of working in what is still a very male-dominated culture. Comments such as “It took a long time to build credibility,” “There was a resistance,” and “I had a battle and really had to work at it” show that although women have access to jobs, it takes fortitude to stay and to gain respect.

One female scientist also noted an interesting difference between female and male scientists with respect to collaboration: In her experience, women tended to help one another more, and to seek out information. “That’s not to say that my male colleagues don’t, because they do as well, but I just find that they are more reticent to ask for input than women.”

Most of our respondents felt that the proportion of women in fisheries departments still did not adequately reflect the number of women involved in fishing enterprises. A male fisheries staffer said, “Women play a much larger role in the operation of the business, the fishing enterprise, but in terms of the fisheries management interaction, this is still something dominated by men.” However, as one participant noted, an Island woman MP, Gail Shea, became federal Minister of Fisheries in 2008. Participants who mentioned this transition were hopeful that this might encourage women’s involvement in fisheries management and so have a positive influence on the fisheries.

From the viewpoint of female fishers, the increasing involvement of women as enforcement officers is very welcome, especially when the officers have family connections to the fishery. “We’ve got a different breed coming in at the moment, thank God that they’re coming in”, was the opinion of several respondents. They were referring to fisheries officers whose “grandfathers were in the fishery, and I think that’s a good thing.” For women, having such female fisheries officers to work with “makes a really big difference.”

## Breaking Down the Barriers to Women's Participation in Fisheries Management

The previous section provided a snapshot of some roles that women play in the fishery, and it also indicated some areas of fisheries management where women are rare or absent. In this section we will explore barriers to women's participation and how these might be overcome.

### It's a Man's World

In the past, folklore in the fisheries held that it was bad luck for women to go on the boats. Such superstitions are changing, just as gender roles in the fishery have changed rapidly in recent decades. There is no sign of this change being a bad thing. Yet, the fishing industry, and the structures within the industry, continue to be male-dominated and difficult for women to fit into.

Many women engaged in fishing enterprises — the members of WES, for example — have supportive male partners who welcome their participation in the fishing enterprise and would welcome them equally in the process of fisheries management. For many complicated reasons, some other women can expect resistance from their partners when they look to participate at the table in meetings concerning the fishery. Male pride plays a part in attitudes towards women's participation. As one male fisheries officer explained, "Men have a strong sense of pride," and, "They might not want to be seen as having their wives or women represent them," while a fisherman noted that "the wives don't want to embarrass their husbands and have a racket in the car on the way home."

There are a lot of hills to climb. You've got an entrenched resistance to girls in the industry that's not going to disappear overnight.

- Male fisher

As noted, a serious barrier known to most participants is that membership in the Prince Edward Island Fishermens Association is restricted to core license holders. Since most women do not have the fishing license in their name, but rather in their husband's name, they are not eligible for membership. Said one female fisher, "If you don't have a core license, we don't have a role. My son fishes, and I've fished twice as many years as he has, but he has more of a say in it than I do because of that core license. That core license gives him the opportunity to speak where my [commercial fishing] license doesn't because I'm just a little part of the fishing, where he's the whole part of fishing." Several participants suggested that the PEIFA should explore the idea of family

memberships, following the lead of the National Farmers' Union, which seems to have a more fair representation of women in their organization. People predicted that greater involvement of women would bring more order and action at PEIFA meetings, and more environmental and community focus in dealing with fisheries issues. Most participants felt that the fisheries would be improved if women got involved in the PEIFA.

When the role that women play in the fisheries is not acknowledged, it is difficult for others to understand what knowledge, perspective, and insight women could bring to the process of fisheries management. Raising awareness in fishing communities and within fishers' organizations about the important roles that women play is therefore an important first step. It begins to dismantle some of the barriers to women's participation in fisheries management.

## The Weight of the World


One of the barriers to women's full participation in fisheries management is the expectation that women will carry most of the responsibility for family, home life, managing the business, and volunteering in the community. These expectations can prevent women from having time and energy for full participation in fisheries decision-making. This barrier is not unique to the fisheries but rather is a societal issue that must be addressed.

Women's preoccupation with family is both a burden and a blessing. As many participants noted, the fact that women tend to be more family- and community-oriented gives them a perspective that could be beneficial to fisheries management. Several spoke of women's maternal instincts and how those might be transferred to the care of the fishery and marine environment. One man expected that women would take "a substantially different approach to resource management, where the protection of the stock and the adequate distribution amongst the communities is the most important thing," while another fisher pointed to women's potential role as educators and communicators: "I think that women would bring to the management decisions a perspective and an ability to pass knowledge on to the family."

The humility of women is a barrier.  
-Fisheries officer

## The Difficulty of Speaking Up in Public

It has often been noted that, despite their high-responsibility roles in society, women sometimes lack the self-confidence to engage in public processes and debates. According to one fisher, many women say they are not interested in attending fisheries-related meetings or being involved in new initiatives. The reason, she thinks, is that they need to have "more faith in themselves." According to another female fisher, there are very few women who would even want to talk, "simply because they don't want to say something wrong." In part, this lack of confidence may be rooted in the feeling women often have that they lack the depth of knowledge of fishing, even though some of them have in fact spent years or even decades at sea. Not only do women lack confidence in their at-sea knowledge, they are hampered by the fact that knowledge gained from



I can't vote without him because I don't count  
-Female fisher

managing shore work for a fishing enterprise is rarely recognized as being an important base for sound decision-making.

It seems that women's reluctance to speak may not be caused only by lack of knowledge or confidence, but may also result from feeling unwelcome.

Women attending fisheries meetings — even local ones — expressed the feeling that they have no right to speak. One female fisher explained: "I probably could go to a fishing meeting, but I'm sure if I got up to speak they would say, 'What are you doing here? You're not even a fisherman', even though I fished longer than a lot of them. But I don't have that right, because I don't have that license."

It was often remarked that although women may not speak up at meetings or rallies, many women are well-informed about what is going on in the fishery and talk about the fishery and its management with their spouses or other community members in private. While many older female fishers prefer to work behind the scenes, they look to younger women to be more assertive. "I'm hoping that the [women] that are coming in become more involved," said one. "That's what they need, is them young women to stand up and kind of be counted."

On the other hand, many men are also left out because they are shy to speak in public. A female community member empathized that "a lot of fishermen don't feel confident to get up and speak in front of people."

## Finding Space at a Noisy Table

Many people commented that fisheries meetings are not professionally run and often become rowdy. Where livelihoods are at stake, feelings run deep, tempers flare, and meetings can degenerate into shouting matches. Both men and women may be turned off by such unruly meetings. In one female fisher's opinion, "There are a lot of smart women out there that should be going to more meetings and voicing their opinions", but she feels that "they shouldn't have to stand up in front of a room full of men that are roaring and screaming at one another." From one fisherman's perspective, "Anyone that's in any way thoughtful tunes out" and this is because "They never get to solutions; they just get to stating the problem over and over again, ever louder." For a woman to be heard at such meetings, a fisherman suggested, "you got to elbow your way in."

The alternative to this form of interaction was imagined by a female fisher in these terms: "It would be nice to be able to think about fisheries management and what we could do to help manage our own fishery," she mused, "to see more people come together to make decisions and use resources together to try to make educated decisions as well." A male fisheries officer also longed for more civil, inclusive, and productive interactions: "I think fisheries management is a structure where industry, government (all managing partners), stakeholders, and fishers sit down and establish a sustainable fishing plan for the years to come and where everyone (including government) makes compromises." A number of respondents wanted to see the PEIFA bring in facilitators who could help them to bring order to their meetings. Others felt that the simple act

of inviting women's participation would help. Said a fisherman, "I would see them as a tremendous resource that I would want to pull into the organization" in order to "give a little bit of energy and organizational oomph, because women actually do stuff when they are involved in organizations, has been my experience over the years."

## The High Price of Entry

The future of fisheries depends not only on restoring healthy ecosystems but on attracting young people, both male and female,

I'm sure there's lots of women who, if they could afford it, would have their own fleet.

-Female fisher

into the fisheries as a livelihood. A number of informants raised this issue and noted both the lack of interest among the young and the rising age of fishers. "A lot of fishers are older and the younger people are discouraged by what they have seen," said one; "The lack of interest in young people to continue on with the fishing industry is problematic," commented another. Young people may well appear uninterested and discouraged, perhaps because there are significant financial barriers to their participation in fisheries.

The only option is you have to buy an outfit, so if a woman wants to do that she can. You have to put in your time. You have to become bonafide.

-Male fisher

A woman long involved with fishing explained, "It's very difficult for young people to get into fishing. When we bought our outfit in 1978 — we're talking 30 years ago — I think we paid something like \$2,800 for it. Today, I guess they're worth \$500,000 in some areas." With the cost of entry so high, how can a new generation of fishers be brought into play to ensure that the fishery has a future in PEI? This is an especially difficult challenge for young women who, according to Canadian statistics, can expect to earn only 72.5% of what a male worker earns in a comparable job.<sup>18</sup>

## Navigating the Co-management Conundrums

When asked to explain what they meant by the term "fisheries management," most fishers saw it as something that was done to fishers by government agencies, and not something that was done by fishers. A female fisher reflected: "Fisheries management to me should involve a group of fishermen, women coming together to project what happens to us in the future in the industry in general. But when I hear 'management,' I think of somebody from an office in Moncton dictating what happens to us in PEI." However, one female community member had a broader definition, arguing that management takes place at all levels, including at the kitchen table and on the boat: "There are negotiations and decisions made about how to fish going on at all levels. Whether or not to buy a bigger boat or a larger motor or change your gear type, or use bigger traps, all those decisions have an impact on the fish population and are essentially management decisions. The problem is, there's no process at the community level for people to work together to make sure that the sum of all their individual decisions is not going to ruin the fishery." Many

of the informants noted that there were few or no opportunities at the community level for either men or women to develop and promote management ideas and strategies that could influence government fisheries policies.

Some people recognized that the concentration of power in DFO, and in particular with the Minister of Fisheries, was a fundamental flaw in the current management system. As one fisherman put it, if the system has fundamental flaws, “You can be the most able manager, of any gender at all, and it’s not going to solve the problem.” In his opinion, a new governance structure is required as a platform for management. On the other hand, one female fisher expressed frustration that even though DFO had changed in many ways and was now requesting fishers’ cooperation to develop collaborative management, fishers were highly resistant to change — even change that could help them in the long run. As she saw it, many fishers simply refuse to participate, and if people do not go to the meetings, they deserve to suffer the consequences. “PEI fish harvesters always seem to complain that they never get a thing,” she stated. “It’s because they are not out there; they get invited to tables and nobody goes.”

It was noted that when men don’t want to go to fisheries meetings, sometimes women push them. “Behind every good man is a woman”, one female fisher asserted. “Somebody’s nagging them, like even just to get them to go to meetings, because if I didn’t go, he wouldn’t go.” It was often pointed out that fishermen “just want to fish” and not be bothered with meetings and paperwork.

Another female fisher had a different perspective on the issue of non-participation. She saw “a tremendous amount of alienation,” not only in the fishery but more generally in society. She felt that many people are “looking for some kind of strong leader to take them to the promised land. But that’s not going to happen.” In her mind, “The leadership is in the group, and everybody is a leader.” However, before anyone can lead they have to have some confidence that they know where they are headed. Lack of clearly defined options based on open discussion, combined with fear of trying something new that might not work, can lead to paralysis. Also, a history of poor relations between fishers and fisheries management staff has resulted in bitterness. This is very much evident among some older fishers and provides fertile ground for skeptics.

All of these factors — the lack of adequate decision-making frameworks, the lack of confidence in the power of the community, fear of change, skepticism and mistrust of government, and alienation — will make any movement towards co-management difficult for all parties, including women interested in having a role in decision-making. But there are fishermen and women who have a vision for future management where power and responsibility are shared. One fisherman promoted a model where there was a heavy emphasis on science-based decision-making, but wanted this to be “accountable to the stakeholders in the industry as opposed to a collection of officials.” He went on to declare, “I honestly believe that if fishermen were the ones [with power] that they would quickly see where their self-interests lie, and that is not fishing until the last fish is gone.”

There exists an urgent need to create space for dialogue about co-management, and many of our informants feel that time is running out. One female fisher said, "I don't think we can get them all to the table. Everyone is just so focused on their own." This report argues that many voices are essential for crafting local livelihoods in a globalized economy. The challenge is to build functional and fair structures through which to listen to and learn from people who spend their lifetimes on the water or at the shore.

## The Promise of Information Technologies

The widespread use of communications technologies such as the Internet facilitates research and communication. These and other, newer technologies may allow for new, more inclusive options for decision-making. The example of WES, and their effective use of web-based technologies, hints at the opportunities waiting to be explored. Current provincial government commitments to extend high-speed Internet to rural parts of PEI may be important and valuable to fishing communities, provided fishing families can afford the price of connection and monthly fees. On the other hand, federal plans to close down community access points (CAP sites) where people have free Internet access will serve to reduce opportunities to employ new technologies.

## Balancing Male and Female Strengths

During this research we asked participants what advantages they could see to having women's voices heard in the management of fisheries. There was an almost unanimous feeling that women and men have different and complementary skills and approaches, and that there would be great benefits from having both perspectives represented. Indeed, some suggested that the only way to ensure sustainable fisheries for the future is to break open the system and find ways to engage both women and young people in decision-making.

The best management will come from a mix.  
-Male fisher

For many, it is simply a matter of fairness. A fisherman stated, "I think that women should have a voice in fishing the same as they have a voice in parliament." Another said, "There are women in fishing so they should have some say in what's going on." As for Aboriginal women, although they have a defined place in their own community management processes, they have additional hurdles to surmount to enter into federal government processes. Reaching understanding between native and non-native fishing communities is another area of work needing attention. As one aboriginal fisher said, "There's a lot of wounds that still need to heal."

While respondents made some generalizations about gender roles and characteristics, they also recognized that not all women are the same, nor are all men alike. Also, they recognized that their perceptions are influenced by what one man called "the mythology of the female view [that is] everything sustaining and caring" and that others perceived women to have "feminine values" or "a softer approach." Yet, whether based on mythology or experience, our informants showed definite


views on what women could bring to the table when it comes to fisheries management.

Most people perceived that men were more actively concerned with meeting immediate financial needs, and more focused on the present. A fisherman said, "Men just want to catch fish; it's their job." The majority of people also recognized and valued the depth of skill and knowledge held by male fishers. That said, they also saw women as having helpful approaches to certain management tasks, especially when it came to negotiations, to analyzing the social and economic impacts of a policy, and to long-term planning.

Many felt that women tended to look at the big picture and consider the long term. One female fisher perceived, "I think women are much better at looking down the road and making choices." "Women are more concerned about what goes on in management," a male fisher said. "The main difference I see, from talking to relatives and friends, is that women know it's more complicated, that there are larger solutions that are needed," another fisherman added. He felt that "there's an undercurrent of anarchism among fishermen," whereas with women, "first they listen, and they talk a bit, and then they listen again."

A fisheries staffperson observed that the role women play in managing the financial end of fishing enterprises gives them a different perspective: "We've got a major collapse of the fisheries, and it's the women who know what's going on. They know that it's their husbands out fishing, losing money every year, and it's their RRSPs, their RESPs, their houses that they're going to lose. They can actually see the impact."

Respondents perceived women as having a capacity for critical thinking and for keeping up with information on paper. "Women tend to question the rationality behind the decision," a male fisher said. "Women are better to understand what is coming at them quickly and be able to interpret it," agreed a female fisher. "To be honest," commented one female community member, "there's a lot of men don't, you know, they're probably not even reading the whole thing," whereas there were also "probably a lot of women that did sit down and read it all and say, 'Okay, we can do this and this, but we're not going to do that, they're out of their mind.' But to get all this organized and communicated, that's the biggest thing."



I think if we had [women] in positions of power or fisheries management, the whole thing would be a far more healthy resource and a much better managed resource.  
-Female fisher

Time and again we heard that because women are new to the management table they are not stuck in the same mindsets that have developed over years of poor relations with authorities. Women are therefore expected to be able to bring fresh ideas and a different set of experiences to the table. "They have more education and experience in dealing with processes in government," said one fisherman, adding, "Women have broader views and their roles are relatively new so it brings a new eye on things."

Most people interviewed see women as good listeners and some women as skilled at negotiating a reasonable compromise. “Most women want to find a resolution that works for everybody,” noted a female fisher. “Now, I don’t want to generalize because I know men that are very collaborative, but generally when you have both sexes involved, you tend to get more of a balance.”

We also heard that respondents see women as tough-minded, and able to stick to their principles. “I think women should be able to stick to their guns a little more than men do. Men are persuaded very easily, I think,” said a male fisher. Another fisherman observed that when it comes to power, “men don’t want to give it up. They are scared of the women because they can’t control them like they can with other men.” This idea, that men could be persuaded by other men to change their position whereas women would more likely stand their ground, came up repeatedly in interviews. The ability of women to establish a position on principle and then stick to it was seen as one of the positive things they could bring to negotiations around fisheries management.

On the other hand, it seems that some fishermen are unexpectedly tender. Whereas women could sit down and hash things through, take and receive criticism and “still be good friends all over again,” a fisherman said that “when fishermen get together, from my experience, they get their feelings hurt very easily.” In short, with men, “you have to be very careful what you say.”

## Women’s Expressed Needs

Several women indicated that they would benefit from opportunities to work with other women across the region. “I like going to fisheries conferences [off island],” said one woman, who valued the experience because it brought her into contact with women who were “supportive and hopeful for the industry that you care a lot about. It’s really good for the soul. But we don’t have that a lot here on PEI.” Another female fisher had a similar experience. “To sit at one of these conferences with these women and hear them talk,” she related, “there’s hope there.”

Women also noted their ongoing needs for training, especially in areas that are not traditionally women’s work, such as engine repair.

Finally, for women to feel confident and welcome at the management table, there have to be fundamental changes to the structure and function of current processes, at the community level, at the PEIFA, and in Provincial, Federal, and First Nations governments.

## Recommendations to Increase Women's Involvement in Managing the PEI Fishery

### Advice to WES

During interviews and community meetings we asked people what they would like to see WES do in the future. People agreed that WES should not only find resources to continue their work, but also expand their scope, becoming a province-wide organization. It was recommended that

It is essential that they keep going and bring some new initiatives and some new thinking to the table.

-Male fisher

WES should bring forward the many voices of coastal communities — not only women's but also those of men, youth and nature. Some suggested that the organization could change its name to more accurately reflect the mission of supporting fishing families, as well as the environment.

Here are other recommendations, which could also be a guide to other women's organizations:

Advocate for a role for women within the PEI Fishermen's Association (PEIFA).

Develop public education tools to teach about the role of women in fisheries and the place for women within fisheries management.

Distribute this research report widely among PEI fishing families.

Share information on women in fisheries nationally.

Work with male fishers to encourage them to support their wives and daughters in taking active roles in decision-making.

Encourage youth organizations such as 4-H to develop programming specifically for children in fishing families.

Use the media and social networking to bring attention to the concerns of fishing families and communities.

To bring about change, ask people directly to help you; give them clear guidance on what needs to be done; and have fun in the process.

Track and analyze changes in fisheries policy to determine the implications for the fishery, fishing

WES has a key role as the voice of the people. WES could expand and be Island-wide or Gulfwide.

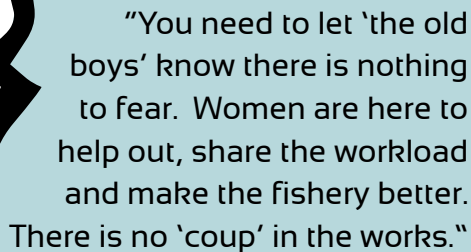
-Fisheries staffperson

families, and the future of coastal communities.

Become involved in negotiations between fishing families and policy-makers, as this is a very important role for women.

Maintain the imagery of women standing for environmental sustainability, as this is a very powerful political image.

Be collaborative in your approach: develop partnerships and engage with industry, environmental groups, women's organizations, government, youth, and community groups.



"You need to let 'the old boys' know there is nothing to fear. Women are here to help out, share the workload and make the fishery better. There is no 'coup' in the works."

Continue to do participatory research because "research participation gets people thinking".

### Advice to Other Organizations and Agencies

Many recommendations were directed to government agencies, community councils, fishers' associations, and academics. For example:

Community councils, educators, and government agencies should support public education about women in the fishery and the value of women's full participation in fisheries management.

Fisheries concerns should be recognized and integrated by coastal municipalities when they are developing their municipal plans.

Female fishers should be included in images of the fishery used in provincial tourism promotion, and the work of both women and men in the fishery should be celebrated in fisheries related festivals and events.

Fisheries agencies should promote the role of women in the fisheries and engage interested women's organizations in their work.

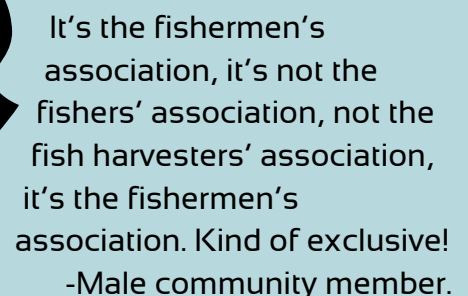
Fisheries agencies and organizations should look to other industry organizations with inclusive policies to identify process for including women and youth, and the benefits of doing so.

Fisheries agencies and organizations should provide more opportunities for women in fisheries across the Atlantic region to meet and share ideas.

Fisheries agencies should recruit more staff from fishing families.

The DFO should collect and publish data on male and female involvement in fisheries (for example how many men and women hold core and commercial licenses).

Fisheries agencies & organizations should attend to the training needs of women fishworkers: those on shore as well



It's the fishermen's association, it's not the fishers' association, not the fish harvesters' association, it's the fishermen's association. Kind of exclusive!  
-Male community member.

as those in boats.

The Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association (PEIFA) should adopt a membership policy that recognizes all active members of the fishing enterprise.

The PEIFA should develop a women's committee that could focus on fishing family and community issues, and engage interested women's organizations in the work of the Association.

PEIFA meetings need to be orderly and professional, and all voices heard. As an organization the PEIFA must change and grow to remain relevant. It could also consider adopting a more inclusive name.

Governments, community groups including women's organizations, and fishers' associations should collaborate to develop more inclusive and effective models of fisheries management, learning from models such as the community fisheries management framework in Lennox Island First Nation.

Academics should undertake more research on women and youth in fishing communities.

## Conclusions

### Embracing the Need for Change

Many fisheries in Prince Edward Island have failed or are now in trouble, and the lobster fishery that many inshore fishers depend upon for livelihood is now threatened by low market prices in a time of escalating costs. Recognizing that the past management of fisheries has not succeeded in conserving fish stocks, fish habitats, water quality, or fishing livelihoods, the federal government has begun to promote co-management as an alternative. This is a difficult idea to sell when a

Just think about farming. We used to have farming communities but now we don't; we have communities with a few farmers in it. The fisheries are different; we still have genuine fishing communities.

-Female community member

history of mismanagement and politicized, top-down decisionmaking has generated widespread mistrust among inshore fishers. Feelings of disempowerment, psychological impacts of serial stock collapses, and current financial insecurity have bred hopelessness. Yet, vibrant rural and coastal communities and cultures are immensely important to the well-being of Prince Edward Island. It is essential to

move forward to sustainable fisheries, even if the thought of change seems overwhelming.

Sustainability is multi-dimensional. It concerns conservation policies and practices, and the appropriate use of technology, science, and local knowledge to assure the health of fish stocks and habitats. Social relations are especially important because managing fisheries involves managing the activities of people, not fish. In working towards sustainable fisheries and fishing communities we must therefore be very aware of who holds power, how that power is used, and how we can achieve a better balance of powers. Changes must be made thoughtfully, and we should be prepared for a sometimes difficult process of negotiation and compromise. Legitimate leadership, trust, and cooperation are essential. So is inclusion.

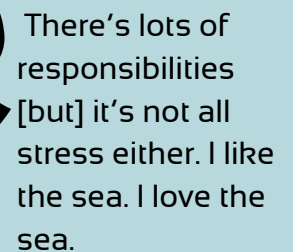
Our research has confirmed that women are very active in the fishery and yet they, as well as young people, are greatly under-represented in fisheries management decision-making that affects their livelihoods. In other words, the crew on the good ship *Sustainability* lacks some critically important sources of knowledge and energy, and ways of approaching problems. To take on the task of developing co-management without women and young people would be foolish. We need all hands on deck!

The fishery needs an infusion of young people, and fisheries management needs to draw on the talents of both young people and women, but do women and prospective new entrants need the stress of engaging with a broken system that fails to acknowledge and respect their participation? Will the men who currently dominate management reform the system to allow women and young people in, or must they elbow their way to the table? If the latter is necessary, should women and young people bother trying to save the fishery, or cut their losses and move on? We encourage men and women at all levels of fisheries and management to work together to develop more respectful, inclusive, and effective frameworks and processes for decision-making — ones that bring both youth and women to the management table.

According to the people interviewed in this study, bringing women to the table is a smart idea. “The women I know in the industry are phenomenal,” said one fisher, while acknowledging the challenge of getting more women engaged. Referring to fisheries management, she went on to say, “I’m sure if women got more involved it would change and it would change rapidly.”

## The Changing Social Environment Is a Cause for Hope

The role of women in society, and women’s access to education and employment, have improved dramatically. Public attitudes have changed with regard to the role of women in government and decision-making, and the level of expressed concern about the environment and the plight of fishing and other rural communities has increased. “In terms of the dangers of not being conscious of conservation issues, I think the general public is becoming aware of those issues,” a female fisher told us. It is evident that on PEI, “there is real support for fishers, in terms of wanting to see the fishers continue to succeed and thrive.” Among fishers, there are signs that new ideas are gaining ground. For example, the idea of marine protected areas, which have often been rejected as management options in the past, was greeted positively by one respondent: “They are finding that the richest fishing grounds are just in the spillouts around those [Marine Protected Areas]. So, you build a place where fish can grow and feed.” He went on to say, “I would love to see those zones established in a substantial manner in the Gulf.” Although change is often strongly resisted in conservative rural areas, the majority of our respondents, like this fisherman, had reached the point of recognizing that change is necessary.



There’s lots of responsibilities [but] it’s not all stress either. I like the sea. I love the sea.

-Female fisher

## It’s More Than Just a Job

In closing, it was evident, in talking to our participants, that the love of the sea and the lure of fishing, with all its perils and insecurities, are deeply felt. This strong attachment to the sea is the essence of our hope for sustainable fisheries for the future, because it provides a compelling motivation for positive change that is rooted in Island culture and tradition.

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*This research report is dedicated to the memory of Helen Deagle, former leader of Women in Support of Fishing, Miminegash. Helen was a tremendous Island role model for what a determined woman can do to support fisheries and fishing communities.*

## Working Paper Feedback

Public Investment, Social Value

A. Please let us know what you found helpful in this Working Paper.

Include Paper # \_\_\_\_\_

B. How could the Working Paper Series be improved?

C. Is there anything that needs to be changed in this Working Paper?

D. Your name and contact info (optional)

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## **SES/ESD Network Research Goals**

- . Contributing to the theory and practice of social economy in the Atlantic region
- . Internal bridging, bonding, mentoring & capacity building
- . Encouraging use of the “social economy” as a framing concept in the region
- . Linking Atlantic partners with other parts of Canada and the world

## **SES/ESD Network Research Themes and Questions**

### *Conceptualizing & describing the social economy in Atlantic Canada*

- . What does the social economy look like? What needs does it address?
- . How can we best capture this sector conceptually?
- . What, if anything, makes it distinctive or innovative? How interconnected are its facets, & to what effect?
- . What are the characteristics of social economy organizations?
- . What are the implications for government policy?

### *Policy inventory and analysis*

- . How are different understandings of “social economy” reflected in government policy?
- . What needs are not being met, & what changes are needed in regulatory environment?
- . What indicators can we develop to aid in policy development?

### *Community mobilization around issues of common concern (natural resources; food security; inclusion and empowerment)*

- . Do social economy organizations contribute to social inclusion, the democratization of the economy, & empowerment?
- . What inputs are needed to overcome obstacles & build capacity?
- . What can we learn from research on mobilization around food security, empowerment & inclusion, community management of natural resources & energy?

### *Measuring and Financing the Social Economy*

- . What can social accounting, co-operative accounting, social auditing, & other techniques contribute towards a better understanding of the work and contributions of social economy organizations?
- . Where do social economy organizations obtain the financing that they need?
- . What do social economy organizations contribute toward financing the social economy?

### *Modeling & researching innovative, traditional, & IT-based communication and dissemination processes*

- . How can social economy actors best communicate?
- . What can our Network team members contribute by developing & modeling processes and techniques?
- . What can be gained from exploring technology as an equalizer vs. technology as a barrier?



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