

Community Fishing Associations

Strengthening Alaska's Fishing Communities Amidst the Gulf of Alaska Catch Share Program

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council is in the process of developing a catch share program (rationalization) for the Gulf of Alaska trawl fishery. As the current title suggests, the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) Trawl Bycatch Management Program is in response to a growing management concern: bycatch of critical species, particularly Chinook salmon, halibut and Tanner crab in the Gulf of Alaska trawl fisheries.

Catch share programs or individual transferable quota (ITQs) programs allocate a specific portion of the fishery resource to participants thus ending the 'race for fish' and providing the trawl fleet with the tools needed to reduce bycatch. Nevertheless, nearly 20 years of direct experience with catch share programs in Alaska demonstrates clearly how catch share programs can adversely impact fishing dependent coastal communities. The problems encountered in catch share programs in Alaska and around the world are widespread, well-documented and now predictable. These include:

- absentee ownership of quota
- fewer locally based vessels
- high leasing fees
- rapid vessel consolidation
- consolidation of quota ownership
- lower crew pay and job loss
- out-migration of fisheries based wealth and fishery access opportunities from communities



WHAT IS A COMMUNITY FISHING ASSOCIATION?

Direct allocations to fishing communities were authorized in the 2006 reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA). Under this provision, fishing communities are eligible to receive initial allocations of quota, or to purchase or hold quota. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council held a workshop on Community Fishing Associations (CFAs) at their Seattle meeting in February 2014 to inform the Council and other North Pacific stakeholders on key issues and elements that need to be considered in order to facilitate the inclusion of a CFA in a GOA Bycatch Management Program. The workshop provided valuable real-world examples of how CFAs benefit communities, support new generations of fishermen, and promote growth and stability of fishing businesses.

There is a NEW management construct, proven successful on both the east and west coasts, that can help mitigate the community impacts caused by catch share programs: Community Fishing Associations (CFAs). CFAs ensure that a portion of the fishing quota is anchored in the community in perpetuity. The strongest CFAs have quota allocated at the time a catch share program is started. Quota allocated to the community is then used to address community goals of keeping a local fleet, encouraging participation by future fishermen, equitable crew compensation and vessel/owner residency. Creating a CFA as part of the GOA Bycatch Management Plan will enable Gulf of Alaska communities to address some of the adverse community impacts associated with rationalizing fisheries.

HOW WILL A CFA STRENGTHEN GOA FISHING COMMUNITIES UNDER A CATCH SHARE PROGRAM?

1. CFAs effectively anchor quota to communities in perpetuity.

Anchoring quota to communities will provide a local management tool that should ensure long-term multiplier of benefits, especially fish dollars, to local communities. Anchoring quota to communities allows the community to leverage its quota to encourage fishermen to deliver to the community, remain in the community, use community services and infrastructure and treat crew equitably.

2. CFAs support new generations of fishermen, including crew and new entrants.

CFAs are often designed to help transition fishermen without adequate capital into a new fishery and they also can be used to acknowledge crew as real stakeholders. CFAs can include crew contracts and codes of conduct as a way to protect crew from reduced compensation because of lease rates for quota transferred within a catch share program.

3. Initial allocation of quota to CFAs amplifies community benefits.

Initial allocation of quota to communities is critical to buffering initial changes caused by catch shares. Initial allocation of fishing quota to communities via the CFA will advance community protections by years if not generations as the community works to build or rebuild strong local businesses and enable positive local impacts.

4. CFAs provide for community involvement and diversity within decision-making.

CFAs offer a way to include fishermen and community perspectives in the operation and decision-making processes which impact local communities and businesses. The inclusion of community perspectives in decision-making processes ensures that the variety of participants and stakeholders in local communities benefit from local fishery resources.

Summary

Healthy fishing communities depend on healthy ecosystems, but they also depend on fisheries access, second generation fishermen transitioning into the fishery and local participation. A CFA structure can strengthen the emerging GOA catch share program and help to ensure that the program benefits Gulf of Alaska coastal communities. Looking back on our experience over the past 20 years and identifying the negative impacts catch share programs have had on fishing communities elsewhere makes clear: Now is the time for Alaska catch share programs to include the CFA management tool.



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