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# The Effects of Amendment 13 on the Fishing Port of Gloucester, Massachusetts

**James J. Corbett**

The goal of domestic fisheries management must be the development of a technically advanced and economically efficient fishing fleet with a minimum number of units required to take the catch over a prolonged period of time (Stratton Commission 1969). For the last 30 years, the primary goal of the federal fisheries policy has been to maximize the net profit from the fisheries, for the good of the nation—with the elimination of inefficient fishermen and fishing communities as an unavoidable side effect. The three decades of fisheries management based on the principal of economic efficiency has hit home in many towns along the coast of New England (Molyneaux 2004).

Although many fisheries managers feel that the environment, communities, and cultures matters, those considerations have only a token value in the decision-making process guided by the neoclassical economic model. But ecological economics, based on some old values and the laws of nature, may provide the tools for truly sustainable fisheries, and the survival of New England's commercial fishing culture (Molyneaux 2004). Amendment 13 attempts to answer many questions in the groundfish fishery, but when it comes to the future of the industry, three questions appear to drive the show: Where are we going? When do we have to be there? How do we get there? The complexity of Amendment 13 lies in the fact that there are several answers to each of these questions (*The Fisherman's Call* 2003). U.S. Senators responsible for writing federal fishery law told managers they are mishandling the law's implementation and warping its intention, picking and choosing among its sections and ultimately creating havoc for the fishing industry (Schreiber 2003).

It is a travesty of justice that the future of the fishing industry is being determined by litigation in the courts by people who do not have any practical experience in the fishing industry. There should be nothing short of a Congressional investigation of the entire workings of NMFS (National Marine Fisheries Service). Adding insult to injury is the fact that the environmental groups who have even less experience and defer to the same flawed science doubles the attack on the fishing industry (*Fishermen's Voice* 2003). New England's groundfish industry is set to change radically with the introduction of Amendment 13 (Baker 2004).

National Marine Fisheries Service assistant administrator William Hogarth pointed out that 90 percent of shrimp and 70–75 percent of all seafood in the United States is imported. In light of the global market, he said, it is up to the industry to search out niche markets as well as new mass outlets. The industry, he said, "is not all doom and gloom. There are a lot of good things happening in the fisheries right now. The goal is to stabilize the fishery so you have a future" (Molyneaux 2004).

The National Marine Fisheries Service has gone on record on more than one occasion, in its support of the reduction of the groundfishing fleet for the sake of the sustainability of the resource. In the planning for the future of the groundfish fleet, the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance (NAMA) is kicking off the Fleet Visioning Project (Schreiber 2004) The Fleet Visioning Project is predicated on the philosophy that fishermen have a role and responsibility in helping create the future fleet; the Fleet Visioning Project is a comprehensive endeavor to create a collective opinion of what the fleet of the future should look like—its composition, capacity, and geographic distribution (*The Fishermen's Call* 2005).

Needless to say, Amendment 13 immediately spawned more litigation. Five lawsuits were instituted after the publication of Amendment 13 by industry and conservation groups (Ouellette 2005). In recent years, the local fishermen have been under pressure to cut back on their catches. Ecologists worry that improved fishing techniques are quickly depleting the region's fisheries. While fishermen defend their livelihood and maintain that the local fishery is healthy, one cannot deny

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that other fisheries have been overfished, leaving those fishermen without a livelihood. To head off that fate, regulations have become stricter in an effort to curb the catch. Only time will tell who is right—the fishermen with their age-old knowledge of the seas, or the ecologists with their computer forecasts (Hirtle 2005)

## Background

It has been a year of turmoil and tragedy for a fishing industry struggling to cope with new regulations that went into effect in May 2004. The regulations, known as Amendment 13, halved the numbers of days at sea for fishermen in an attempt to stop overfishing and rebuild fish stocks. Many say the regulations have hurt the industry even more than fishermen feared (Arsenault 2005a).

Bad weather over the winter added insult to injury for fishermen hoping to make up for a summer of bad fishing. Fishermen kept their boats tied to the docks last summer to preserve their days at sea for winter months when the prices are usually better and fish are more prevalent. But then high winds and long stretches of rough seas during the winter kept them home. The result was that some fishermen did not use all of the days at sea that were given under Amendment 13. Fisherman have no idea if Amendment 13 is working (Arsenault 2005a).

## Methodology

Time has passed since the fishing regulations known as Amendment 13 went into effect. They slashed the number of days at sea for fishermen. *The Gloucester Daily Times* ran a year long series, "Voices of Change," interviewing 50 people in the community with the goal of illustrating the many ways fishing regulations like Amendment 13 have impacted the city (Arsenault 2005b).

## Results

Of the respondents, 32 percent had to give up fishing for a steadier income or went back to school, 26 percent do not sell to as many customers or feel that price and quality fluctuate, 16 percent "have felt the squeeze," 14 percent notice that life has changed on the waterfront, 8 percent obtained employment with the government, 2 percent are now fishing elsewhere, and 2 percent will not follow in their father's fishing footsteps. Data are presented in Table 1.

## Discussion

Fishing is an irrational business, so it is no surprise that from time to time managers, regulators, and stakeholders weigh in to rationalize fishing (Redmayne 2006). In the past 12 years close to 1,000 people tied to the fishing industry found new professions through the Gloucester Fishermen and Family Assistance Center (Rosenberg 2006). New regulations spawned by the Magnuson-Stevens Act—which has lately become more of a slayer than a savior of the Northeast groundfishery—have been tough on the local groundfish industry and fish consumers (Prybot 2006).

Almost all of our state fisheries have finite seasons and catch limits. The cost of doing business has increased while the price of the catch landed has in most cases decreased. Altogether, the earning potential in many fisheries has been reduced to where an individual can no longer make enough to live on. The longer we wait, the more working fishermen will have to quit fishing (Rice 2006).

**Table 1. Responses to "Voices of Change" Interviews.**

| Occupation | Content Analysis of Comments | Number of respondents | % of respondents |
|---|---|---|---|
| Business | Do not sell to as many customers | 10 | 20 |
| Dealers | Price and quality fluctuate | 2 | 6 |
| Fishermen | Have felt the squeeze | 8 | 16 |
| Fishermen | Left fishing for steadier income | 7 | 14 |
| Fishermen | Had to give up fishing | 6 | 12 |
| Fishermen | Went back to school | 3 | 3 |
| Fishermen | Now fishing out of New Bedford | 1 | 2 |
| Civilian | Notices how life on the waterfront has changed | 7 | 14 |
| Civilian | Will not follow in fathers fishing footsteps | 1 | 2 |
| Government | Got employment from Amendment 13 | 4 | 8 |
| Totals | | 50 | 100 |



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