

## Before the beer, some sober thinking

**For the participants at the Halifax workshop on networking for sustainable fisheries, it was more work than fun**

**B**etween 10 and 12 August 1994, a fine blend of fishworkers from the North and South, as well as a number of environmentalists and social activists, met at Halifax, Canada. Most were members of the Oceans Caucus but there were also outside participants. The occasion was a workshop on sustainable fisheries conducted by ECO-PEI, with help from the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), the Ecology Action Centre and the Environment and Development Coalition. The meeting rooms were provided by the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, whose staff was unfailingly helpful. On the whole, the meet turned out to be a great success.

Each day began with informal conversations over coffee. This set the tone for the entire meet, which was characterized by avid talk and lots of good humour. Most people had such a cheerful time swapping fish stories that it was often difficult to get them to sit down for presentations. To their credit, though, all the speakers kept to the duration allotted for their presentations, and all scheduled events began on time.

Thanks to the energetic troupe of volunteer interpreters, we heard about the conditions of fisheries in Chile, Senegal and India. The expositions were compelling, and the similarity of problems in fisheries worldwide became very obvious. After the first day's formal programme ended, participants viewed videos on fisheries in Canada and overseas, including some historical footage from the 1940s. The inaugural day was capped with a South American supper.

On day two, the first presentation was by Chief Kerry Prosper of Afton, Nova Scotia, who spoke of the history of fishing

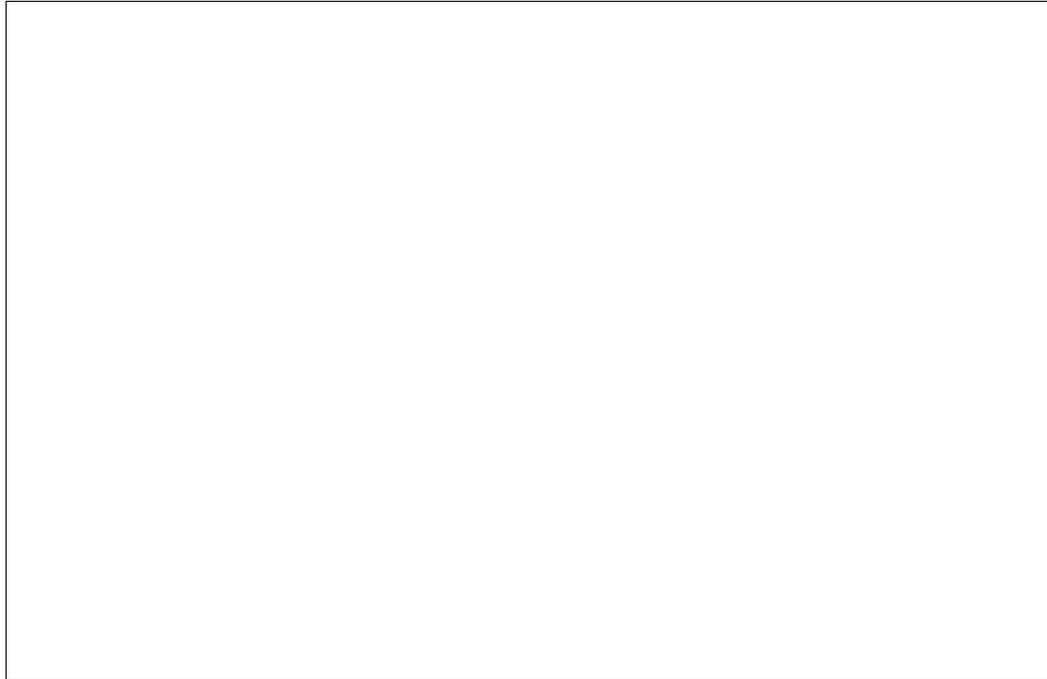
by the Mik'maw people and their current struggle to establish their fishing rights. Prosper's calm and measured explanation of the aboriginal perspective was very powerful and provoked thoughtful discussion. His talk was followed by a slide show by Margo Hearne of British Columbia, who included information on the efforts of the Haida fishers in her family and community to gain access to fisheries and management rights on the west coast.

Over the rest of the day, Ray Rogers provided a thorough and provocative analysis of the crisis in the east coast fisheries, while Peter Hennebury of Lord's Cove, Newfoundland, spoke from his heart of the impact of the collapse of northern cod stocks on coastal communities.

By the end of the formal presentations, the workshop participants, primed with information and moved by the testimony of fishworkers from so many different cultures and circumstances, worked together with a sense of urgency to identify common problems and suggest practical actions to help save the world's fisheries and coastal communities. The participants' labour was captured on audio tapes and will be used as inputs to a written 'Practical Action Plan for Sustainable Fisheries'.

### **Working overtime**

The working group was forced into overtime. We had to scramble out the door to make it to Sambro for our scheduled tour of Sambro Fisheries, followed by dinner at the local restaurant. The fish plant tour was of great interest not only to our Southern guests but also to those environmental and social activists who had not previously experienced a working fishing enterprise at such close quarters.



**F**or everyone, it was a real treat to finally get out of doors beside the sea. Supper featured absolutely fresh fish, cooked to perfection and served with liberal doses of Nova Scotia hospitality!

Friday was spent discussing the United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks. A background paper on the Law of the Sea and Agenda 21 was provided for the information of all participants, to provide a context for the discussions.

To start off, Sebastian Mathew of ICSF and Irene Novaczek of Oceans Caucus, who had attended previous sessions of the UN Conference, reviewed its history and progress. Judith Swan, a legal expert on fisheries matters and the representative of the Ambassador of the Canadian delegation to the Conference, brought us up to date on the inter-sessional negotiations that had taken place since March.

Her reading of a revised version of part of the negotiating text had a dramatic—even traumatic—effect on many workshop participants. The gulf between the dry technical text of the proposed Convention on high-seas fisheries and our sense of urgency regarding the ocean's ecosystems and coastal communities was painfully obvious.

For many listeners, it seemed that the UN negotiators had completely forgotten the fish and the human lives and livelihoods at stake. Judith Swan was interrupted and further review of the technical document abandoned in favour of a discussion on the rightful mission and mandate for delegates being sent to the UN. The debate, which carried through lunch and into the afternoon, re-visited the material presented by the various speakers. It resulted in the drafting of a joint statement of concern from the workshop participants. The statement was later welcomed by other NGO participants at the UN and was published in full in the NGO journal, EW.

**No more cares**

While a working group re-drafted the text of the joint statement, others enjoyed videos and slide shows. After another fine supper, and a final look at the draft text, we cleared the tables, broke out the beer, turned up the music and happily danced our cares away. ♪

This report is by Irene Novaczek of Oceans Caucus, Prince Edward Island, Canada