

Fisheries-Tourism in Bonne Bay

A summary report prepared for the CURRA

Examining the foundation for stronger fisheries-tourism synergies and increased local seafood consumption in the Bonne Bay region of Newfoundland & Labrador

Introduction

This summary report presents the results from a Mitacs internship involving fish harvesters and tourism operators (<http://www.mitacs.ca/accelerate>). The internship was based in the Bonne Bay area on Newfoundland's west coast looking at the foundations for improved economic opportunities for fish harvesters and tourism operators based on enhanced collaboration among their two sectors fisheries and tourism sectors, as well as on increased regional consumption of seafood including among local people. The full project report will be available by November 15th at www.curra.ca

This internship was led by Kristen Lowitt, a PhD student in Interdisciplinary Studies at Memorial University, and funded by the Mitacs-Accelerate program and the Rural Secretariat, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador with support from the CURRA program at Memorial University.

The Bonne Bay area on Newfoundland's west coast is surrounded by Gros Morne National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The area has six communities within it and a relatively small year-round population of 2948 people.

Approximately 187,000 tourists visited Gros Morne National Park during the 2010-2011 tourism season (Parks Canada, 2011). Fishing is also an important industry, employing approximately 17% of the workforce in the area in 2005 (Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency, 2009).



Bonne Bay



John Decker's and Ernie's Decker's boats moored at Baker's Brook.

The fisheries and tourism sectors depend on each other. For tourists, seafood is an important local culinary attraction. There is a high demand for local seafood among tourists visiting the region as well as among local residents. Many restaurants in the Bonne Bay area specialize in seafood products and try to source fresh and local seafood as much as possible. Experiencing the local fishing culture and heritage is also an important part of what attracts tourists to the Bonne Bay area. Family members of owners of fishing enterprises and seafood processing families sometimes work in the tourism sector and their patronage helps support local restaurants. Local sales of seafood from fish plants in the region to tourists, tourism operations and to local people contribute to the viability of this operation and thus to the sustainability of the local fishery and of local employment.

Despite the interdependence of the fisheries and tourism sectors in the Bonne Bay region and including their role in employment creation, incomes and local food security, there are no existing programs or initiatives in the region designed to promote synergies between the sectors. This gap was identified in community workshops hosted by the CURRA in 2009-2010, including *Bonne Bay: A Treasure and a Resource* in October 2009 and a *Fisheries-Tourism Forum* in June 2010. Reports from these workshops are available on the CURRA website.¹



*Fish Plant in Rocky Harbour,
owned by Harbour Seafoods
Photo Pierre LeBlanc*



*Mussels served in Lighthouse
Restaurant in Woody Point,
Photo Anita Best*

The *Fisheries-Tourism Forum* held in the Bonne Bay region in 2010 led to the development of this examination of the foundation for fisheries-tourism synergies and increasing local seafood consumption in the Bonne Bay region. The examination was carried out as part of a Mitacs internship program. Its main objective was to identify and raise awareness of opportunities for, and barriers to, fisheries-tourism business development, enhanced local seafood markets, and fisheries-food security in the Bonne Bay area. The methods used to carry out the examination included: background research on successful fisheries-tourism and fisheries-food security synergies; an internship with eight host enterprises from the fisheries and tourism sectors; key informant interviews to supplement the findings from the internship; and an anonymous mail-out survey to households in the region to gather information about trends and patterns in seafood consumption.

¹ See: Bonne Bay Fishery-Tourism Forum, June 13 2010: Meeting Report. Prepared by Joanie Cranston. Available at http://www.curra.ca/documents/Bonne_Bay_Fishery-Tourism_Final_Report-2010-for_Web.pdf

Bonne Bay a Treasure and a Resource. Prepared by Joan Cranston, Barb Neis, and Anita Best. Available at <http://www.curra.ca/documents/Bonne%20Bay%20Meetings%20FINAL%20Report%20Jan%2013%202010.pdf>

The overall findings from the internship show that there are important reasons to begin promoting stronger fisheries-tourism synergies and local seafood consumption in the Bonne Bay region in the near future. Many restaurant operators consulted as part of this project said it is a challenge to get a consistent supply of fresh and local seafood with the quality and traceability they would like. At the same time, fishing enterprises are facing challenges related to low prices for their products along with declining catch rates for some species and short seasons. In addition, the number of local fish harvesters has declined substantially in recent years and it is unclear how many local enterprises there will be in the region in the future.

Experiential activities related to the fishery, such as boat tours led by fish harvesters that take visitors on the water to demonstrate how they fish and catch some seafood, offer another option for fish harvesters to diversify their fishing enterprises while providing memorable experiences for visitors. Experiential tourism activities need to be developed for the best fit between the tourism and fishing seasons. These are a potential option for improving the viability of local fishing enterprises and for promoting local tourism but none currently exist in the region. Experiences are becoming a stronger focus in tourism efforts in Newfoundland and Labrador and beyond. In the province, a 2004 study commissioned by the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation emphasized the need for the tourism industry in the province to “focus on experiences first” (Economic Planning Group of Canada, p.89).

In addition to the important role of fisheries in the tourism sector in Bonne Bay, and the capacity for enhanced collaboration among these sectors, fisheries are also an important part of food security for people living in the region. Increased consumption of local seafood among residents can also help support the fishery. The results from the seafood survey distributed to households in the Bonne Bay area as part of this project show that local people strongly prefer eating seafood from Newfoundland and Labrador over imported seafood but that consumption of local seafood is



Darrell Burden's fish store in Martin's Point.

The project was overseen by a community steering committee including Ken Thomas, Roxanne Decker, Joseph Reid, Walter Nicolle, Joanie Cranston, Carolyn Lavers, Colleen Kennedy, Marion McCahon, Barb Neis and Anita Best. Dr. Barb Neis, Memorial University and Marion McCahon, Rural Secretariat supervised the internship.

The host enterprises for this project included the fish harvesting enterprises of: Darrell Burden & Greg Kennedy, Norris Point; Glenn Samms, Norris Point; Ernie Decker and Lynn Halfyard, Rocky Harbour; and John and Roxanne Decker, Rocky Harbour. The tourism enterprise hosts included: Todd Wight, Ocean View Hotel and Restaurant, Rocky Harbour; Vince McCarthy, Sugar Hill Inn, Norris Point; Tom and Doris Sheppard, Sheppard's Bed and Breakfast, Trout River; and Ken Thomas, Seaside Suites and Restaurant, Woody Point.



Bonne Bay Marine Centre in Norris Point, with mackerel boats at the wharf. Photo by Bob Hooper

Building on this project, future steps in fisheries and tourism work will include production of a report on regulatory challenges associated with promoting fisheries-tourism synergies to be funded by the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation and a pilot experiential fisheries-tourism project to be supported by the same department and developed by the Red Ochre Regional Economic Development Board. Results from this project will also be incorporated into Kristen's PhD research about food security and fisheries in the Bonne Bay area.

Those who have read this report and want to contribute to this work on fisheries-tourism synergies and promoting local seafood consumption, or who want more information are encouraged to contact Professor Barbara Neis (Memorial University) bneis@mun.ca / phone 709-864-7244, or Marion McCahon (Rural Secretariat) at MarionMcCahon@gov.nl.ca / phone 709-637-2937. More information about the CURRA can be found at www.curra.ca or by contacting CURRA Community Coordinator, Anita Best at the Bonne Bay Marine Station at abest@mun.ca / phone 709-458-3014.

Findings and recommendations

Seafood and culinary tourism

- The tourism operators consulted as a part of this project agreed that tourists are looking for seafood when they come to the region.
- Restaurants try to buy fresh and local seafood as much as possible. However, there is a need to develop a more consistent supply of fresh, local, and traceable seafood for restaurants.
- Emerging initiatives, such as the ThisFish pilot project, may improve traceability of seafood to the tourism sector while providing branding advantages to harvesters and other seafood businesses.
- There is one large fish plant in the area that has in place strong working relationships with restaurants and fish harvesters. These connections could be built upon to try out new types of marketing arrangements among harvesters, processors, and restaurant buyers and to promote consumption of local seafood among regional residents.
- As catches for some commercial species decline there is an opportunity to develop specialty seafood products that could be harvested or processed in small quantities and sold to the tourism sector. Fish harvesters, processors, and tourism operators should be brought together to discuss currently underutilized species, the capacity for value-added processing, and what products may sell well to restaurants and tourists.
- Direct marketing to restaurants, as well as local people, could allow harvesters to capture more value for a portion of their catch. Direct marketing should be seen as one additional strategy, in combination with other initiatives such as value-added products and experiential tourism, to diversify economic options for fish harvesters.
- There is a need for more research to look at the supply and demand for seafood in local markets (including what types of seafood tourists and residents prefer and how much they would pay) along with types and volumes of species being harvested. This could be used to inform the development of any new local seafood markets or products.

Findings and recommendations

Fisheries and experiential tourism

- The province needs to develop a set of programs and policies designed to promote fisheries/tourism synergies.
- Experiential tourism activities need to be developed in a form that achieves the best fit between the tourism and fishing seasons. Experiential tourism activities should be seen as an additional strategy for diversifying economic opportunities for fishing enterprises but their success may require changing some fisheries regulations.
- There are examples of experiential fisheries-tourism activities from other places that can be used as starting points for developing pilot projects in this region. Some examples are described in the full report.
- In developing experiential activities, identifying and working with relevant regulatory authorities, such as Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Transport Canada, will be key to addressing challenges related to infrastructure, insurance, safety, and fishing seasons.
- A starting point for identifying experiential attractions could be to develop an inventory of existing fishing infrastructure in the region. For example, many harvesters already maintain fishing stores, stages and cabins which could serve as sites for experiential activities such as fishing tours or demonstrations without a lot of added capital investment.

- Skill training opportunities for fish harvesters in areas such as communications and product promotion could provide new knowledge to work with their professional fishing know-how.
- Organisational capacity to undertake culinary tourism and experiential tourism initiatives could be strengthened through the establishment of a body such as a cooperative that brings together interested stakeholders including fish harvesters and tourism operators and that could play the role of marketing local products and linking interested customers with local suppliers.

Local seafood consumption and food security

Key survey findings

- Households reported eating local seafood much more often than seafood from outside the province. Local seafood is eaten most often in the summer.
- Household income, size, and having a member employed in the fishing sector are not significantly related to the frequency of eating local seafood.
- The five favourite types of seafood reported by households are cod, lobster, salmon, halibut, and crab. Most types of seafood are being consumed less often today than five years ago. Various factors could be contributing to this downward trend in consumption, such as

lower quotas for some species, a decreasing number of local commercial fish harvesters, and low catches in the recreational cod fishery.

- Local fish plants and networks of friends and family are the two main sources for local seafood. These are also the two preferred sources for local seafood.
- Nearly 70% of households are likely or very likely to order seafood when eating out at a restaurant.
- Only 50% of households said they are satisfied or very satisfied with the availability and affordability of seafood in their community. Quality of seafood ranks higher, with nearly 80% of households satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of seafood in their community.

Recommendations for strengthening the role of local seafood in food security

- The enhanced integration of fisheries into local food systems may help sustain fishing enterprises by diversifying economic opportunities and lessening dependence on distant export markets.
- There is a need for further research to look into the factors contributing to the decline in seafood consumption over the past five years that this survey has indicated along with recommendations for addressing this decline.

- Marketing ideas outlined in this report to improve the availability of local seafood to the tourism sector could encourage consumption of seafood among local people as well if there is adequate supply and prices do not go too high. To inform the development of any new local markets more specific research should look at the supply and demand for seafood in local markets, including how much residents are able and willing to pay for seafood, along with the types and volumes of species being harvested in the area.
- There is a need for cross-sectoral policy making in which health, nutrition, and food security considerations can be integrated into fisheries management decisions. Efforts to promote local seafood consumption that target the schools, seniors clubs and other groups and emphasize its nutritional and other benefits and the rich fishing heritage of the region could play a key role.

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Project steering committee: Ken Thomas, Roxanne Decker, Joseph Reid, Walter Nicolle, Joanie Cranston, Carolyn Lavers, Colleen Kennedy, Marion McCahon, Barb Neis and Anita Best. Barb Neis and Marion McCahon supervised the project.

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All photos by Kristen Lowitt unless otherwise indicated.

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