

Sectors: It's time to do things differently

In 2010, our groundfish fishery here in Maine and the rest of New England will take a dramatic turn and move in a new direction. For most of us, days-at-sea will be gone. They will be replaced by a management tool called sectors.

A group of fishermen from Port Clyde and other ports in Maine will be part of this change. As is only natural, when something new and different is proposed, there is some confusion and concern among fishermen.

Amidst the confusion and doubt, however, we need to ask ourselves one simple question: "What do we have to lose by trying this?"

There is a strong desire among the fishermen I have the privilege of working with as chairman of the Midcoast Fishermen's Association not to be the last fishermen from Maine.

There also is a strong desire not to lose our local, community-based access to this resource. When you consider that the number of days-at-sea most of us are allowed to go fishing this summer is a meager 39, the "What have we got to lose by trying something new?" question makes sense.

Days-at-sea ...

Days-at-sea have changed the way fishermen fish – and not for the better in many circumstances.

The bottom line is that a fisherman must do what he can to feed his family.

Under sectors, fishermen will be able to fish again instead of just trying to beat the clock.

—Glen Libby

If you have only 39 days to fish and you happen to start your trip in an area where there are a lot of juveniles, for example, you will keep fishing because you have to make that paycheck.

The days-at-sea clock does not care if you want to look for something better. It keeps ticking whether your nets are on bottom or on the reel. Fishing opportunity is lost and discarded fish are wasted.

If you reach a trip limit on cod the first day, but the weather is good and you need more fish to pay the bills, you have to keep fishing, throwing dead cod over the side, wasted.

You can't steam home until expenses are met, and even the act of returning to port costs fishing time. A fisherman from Port Clyde easily loses 20% of his days-at-sea each year handling gear and steaming to and from the grounds. The operation must be as efficient as possible under this system, which usually means heavier gear, more ground cables, larger nets, more fuel burned, and more discards of small fish.

... vs. sectors

In contrast to this, under a sector system, fishermen will be charged for what they catch, not how much time they spend away from the dock.

If you encounter juveniles, looking around for larger fish will cost a little for

fuel. But if the hunt is successful, the larger fish will net a higher price. So if you come upon a large school of cod, you can catch them and sell them, not waste them.

GUEST COLUMN

by Glen Libby

Fishing by definition is a hunt for a desired catch. Under sectors, fishermen will be able to fish again, instead of just trying to beat the clock.

Under sectors, fishermen will have a share of the catch that is "theirs to catch." This should lead to a sense of

stewardship of the resource and could lead to experimentation with gear that has less impact on fisheries habitat and has a lower discard rate.

Days-at-sea did not create a sense of ownership of the fishery, only a race to get in and out as quickly as possible.

What's fair is fair

There will be hard catch limits on all species for the fishermen who are in a sector. They will not be bound by days-at-sea, but it will be vitally important that they pay attention to what they're catching and in what quantity.

When a sector's total allowable catch (TAC) is reached on any one species, the sector will have to acquire more quota

from another sector or stop fishing.

Discards will count against the quota as well, so using more selective gear that has a lower discard rate will become very important. Fewer discards will mean more usable quota and less juvenile fish wasted.

Implementing all of this and making it work will not be simple, but it has already succeeded in other ports in New England. Again, what do we really have to lose at this point?

Common pool

For fishermen who are still undecided about sectors, there will be an option called the "common pool." Fishermen in
See GUEST COLUMN, page 15A



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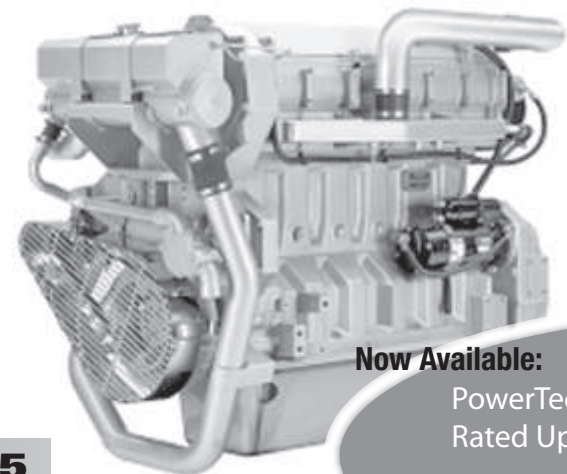
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