

*I have a hangnail, and my heart is - what? What's that? What's that you say? You say today is . . . Saturday? G'bye, I'm going out to play! - Shel Silverstein*

# VINEYARD GAZETTE ONLINE

Current Edition ▶ June 26, 2009 ▶ Article

70° F, Mostly Cloudy on Martha's Vineyard

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## VINEYARD GAZETTE

Island of Martha's Vineyard, seven miles off southeast coast of Massachusetts.

Winter population: 15,882 in summer, 73,035.

Twenty miles from city of New Bedford, 80 miles from Boston and 150 miles from New York.

Devoted to the interest of the six towns on the Island of Martha's Vineyard, viz:

Edgartown, Oak Bluffs, Tisbury, West Tisbury, Chilmark, and Aquinnah.

These, with Gosnold, constitute Dukes County.

**Martha's Vineyard's newspaper of record since 1846**

Current Edition: Friday, June 26, 2009



## Vineyard Fishermen Win Sector in Fisheries Management Overhaul

By MARK ALAN LOVEWELL

Vineyard commercial fishermen scored a key win in the struggle keep them from being squeezed out of the groundfish industry yesterday when the New England Fishery Management Council voted to adopt the sector system, granting the Vineyard its own sector.

The vote came after three days of meeting in Portland, Me. The meeting was attended by a small group of Vineyard fishing activists.

"We got right up at the table," said Tom Osmers, the West Tisbury shellfish constable and pioneering commercial fisherman who is largely responsible for the Vineyard's place at the table in the first place.

Mr. Osmers prepared the sector application to the council last year by himself.

And while it will likely be some time before groundfish stocks are restored and fish landings will dominate dock-side commerce like years ago, the council decision yesterday clears the way for an overhaul of the way fishermen will be regulated next year as they go out in search of cod, haddock and a variety of flounders.

"We are happy, but we still have a long way to go," Mr. Osmers said.

There will be 17 new sectors, which essentially will work like fishing cooperatives and will be an alternative to the former system of days at sea and restrictions on numbers of permits. Fishermen assigned to sectors will regulate themselves, with strict penalties for exceeding quotas. The new management regime, which will not take effect until 2010, has the support of conservation groups and fishermen, especially small fishermen.

The current management regime is thought to favor the larger, corporately-owned boats.

Unable to compete with the larger fleets out of New Bedford, Vineyard commercial fishermen have been all but shut out of the groundfish industry. Now through the sector plan, they will develop their own quotas.

The Vineyard sector will be named the Northeast Coastal Community Sector and may also include fishermen from Maine or from Long Island.

"We may take in some other fishermen from outlying fishing communities. We are open to the idea of having Long Island fishermen be a part," Mr. Osmers said yesterday.

Though federal fisheries regulators will continue to take additional conservation steps to bring back troubled fish like cod, yellowtail and winter flounder, the sector regime turns over most of the fishing restrictions to the fishermen themselves. It also is expected to dramatically cut down on the current practice of catching excess

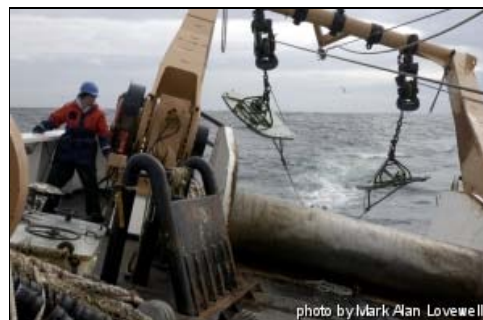


photo by Mark Alan Lovewell

Commercial fishermen hope for better days at sea.

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fish that cannot be landed and in the end is dumped overboard, dead.

"There will be significant reduction in fishing effort for all parts of the industry. But at least we, on Martha's Vineyard have a part. We have a place," Mr. Osmer said.

Without the sector system, Mr. Osmer said his fear was that the Vineyard fishermen would be locked out, and an important cultural and economic engine in the community would be lost. The Vineyard used to have as many as 50 commercial federally permitted fishermen and now has five. There is one Menemsha fishing boat left that can fish the waters of Georges Bank.

The New England Fishery Management Council oversees many species of fish that swim in federal offshore waters. The council has been charged since the mid-1970s with regulating fishermen to ensure that the resource is not overfished. But the council's track record has not been good, and many of the stocks remain in deep trouble.

The sector management strategy has been talked about for years. The Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen Association, based in Chatham, has had two sectors for two years. Their success is being used as a model for future management.

Pat Fiorelli, a spokesman for the council, said the meeting this week, attended by between 80 to 100 fishermen, represents a significant shift. "What is missing from this meeting is the rancor of the past," she said, adding: "This new management strategy may not help us rebuild the fish stocks faster but it is set up to make for more stable fisheries management for the long term. There will be winners and there will be losers."

The system of limiting a fisherman to a certain number of days at sea each year, plus limiting federal permits, will continue. But fishermen can now elect to join the sector system. In the simplest terms, sectors are groups of fishermen who are charged with managing their own quotas, and they must not exceed their limit. Sectors are not restricted to geographic areas.

The Vineyard sector is expected to include fishermen from Penobscot East Resource Center in Maine. Mr. Osmer and Warren Doty, a Chilmark selectman and an advocate for Vineyard commercial fishing, will oversee the sector.

"We don't know how many people in the end will be in the sectors. But it looks like it includes the whole gamut from fishermen in large ports to those in small communities," Ms. Fiorelli said.

Yesterday Mr. Doty said he is pleased by the final outcome. "They were slogging through a lot of fine details to make sure the programs work. They made sure everything is legal and that the science is respected," he said, adding: "We've had a good exchange with fishermen from Rhode Island. A lot of good networking is taking place."

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Mr. Osmer agreed. "This is a time for great change," he said. "We are switching to a different system, that will hopefully move into less discarding of fish. That has been my biggest issue in fishing. So much has been thrown overboard. It benefits nobody. It is almost a crime."

*The Dukes County Martha's Vineyard Fishermen's Association meets at 3 p.m. today with Cape and Islands Rep. Tim Madden. Topics of discussion are expected to include state legislation that has been filed to give striped bass game fish status in Massachusetts. The meeting is at the county building near the airport.*

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