

Rhode Island Commercial Fisheries Blueprint for Resilience Launch Event

May 7, 2018

Notes from the Civic Engagement Breakout Group

Moderator: Elizabeth Rush

Notes: Peter Burns

Participants: Jason Jarvis (F/V Old Jake), Paul Records (candidate for South Kingstown harbormaster position), Peter Burns (NOAA), Mary O'Rourke (Trawlworks), Ken Booth (RI Commercial Rod and Reel Association), Sunshine Menezes (Metcalf Institute), Elizabeth Rush (Brown University), Fred Mattera (Commercial Fisheries Center of RI)

Goal: Increase coordination among members of Rhode Island's fishing industry to speak collectively on issues that affect them

The purpose of this breakout discussion was to come away with a clear understanding of:

- What do we need to do? (the key issues, barriers, next steps)
- How are we going to do it?
- Who needs to be involved?

Summary: The Civic Engagement breakout group included four members of the fishing industry and representatives from NOAA, Brown University, and the Metcalf Institute at URI. Fishermen in the group said there is a general feeling among the industry that fishermen's concerns are rebuffed by regulatory entities, and their observations dismissed as anecdotal. Organizing fishermen can be like "herding cats" because there is a perception that industry leaders are acting in their own self-interest, not in the broader interests of the industry. Fishermen in the group agreed that to be effective, industry members need to get (and stay) engaged, learn about how decision making processes work, control their frustration, learn to work together on the issues where they agree, and learn to listen to each other and people outside of industry even when they disagree. Working at various different levels (from the local to the federal) has proven effective for some participants. While environmental NGOs are often perceived as adversarial to fishing interests, some participants highlighted examples where there may be common ground that should be nurtured. The NOAA representative said that fishermen sometimes have more influence that they realize, and they should learn to leverage it more; participatory efforts like cooperative research can help.

Notes:

- One civic engagement opportunity is to comment on ocean use policy as presented by BOEM. Cutting the ocean into a grid that has impacts for fishing areas. Concerns about industry being pushed out of fishing grounds and loss of waterfront infrastructure.
- Fishermen need to learn the process and write to those whom are in the leadership positions to let them know what they think and help steer policy. Important to attend meetings and stay engaged. Need to control frustration and now more calm and able to contribute more effectively. Fishermen don't want to come to meetings because they feel beaten down by the process and feel like their concerns aren't being heard.
- Towns need to understand the value of fisheries. Fishermen in Westerly have had some success with town council and have had them agree to include commercial fishing needs as part of the town's harbor management plan. Many in town, including leadership, had no idea of the historical significance of commercial fishing in the town and that there is still a fishing industry based in town. There are 36 vessels under 30' landing an ex-vessel value of \$800k in town. None of the 20+ restaurants in town serve local fish.
- Important to educate the public on the good that the fishing industry does for conservation and sustainable fisheries and sustainable food. One participant shared a recent account of his experience lobby against offshore drilling. He was surprised that after expressing fishing industry's concerns at a public meeting that environmental NGOs such as Oceana and the Conservation Law Foundation expressed interest in partnering with the industry on the issue.
- NOAA is making an effort to learn how the agency help fishing communities be less vulnerable to changes in economics and environment due to climate change, changes in fishery distribution, loss of waterfront, regulations.
- Urge fishermen to continue to submit comments and attend meetings despite frustrations. Each side needs to know where the other is coming from. Many common goals but different perspectives. Fishermen should not underestimate the power of their presence and comments which are assets that the government and process takes seriously. Sometimes nothing can be done to address the comments because of statutory limitations. Fisheries is a bottoms-up management structure and fishermen can have a lot of influence on outcomes.
- Encourage continued development of cooperative research activities because the states and federal government have limited funds for expanded sampling. Cooperative research helps fill critical data gaps and leads to better policy and

management and helps fishermen have better buy-in to the science – this addresses a long-standing lack of trust on the part of industry because there is a disconnect between what the science reflects and what the industry is seeing on the water.

- Fisheries issues aren't just black and white. Can disagree but need to listen to others' opinions whether they are in the industry or outside of it. Fishermen feel like their ideas and concerns are rebuffed. Important to write letters and communicate with leaders and elected officials. We put them in office so it's important to let them know what we need.
- Organizing fishermen is like herding cats – hard to get everyone on the same page even though goals are somewhat similar. Those in the industry are not always trusted by other fishermen as leaders because they fear they have a specific agenda that could work against other sectors of the industry.
- Some rule changes could help industry be more competitive at the local level. State allows fishermen to sell lobster and crabs at the dock but not finfish. May reduce localized markets for finfish as a result.
- Important for fishermen to understand scientists and managers and vice versa. Public is quick to villainize the fishermen for overfishing, whale interactions and other problems because of negative portrayals in the press. They don't know all the sacrifices and accomplishments that the industry has provided to address fishery problems such as conservation engineering. Improvements to nets have helped conservation and reduced bycatch.
- Major frustration is the lack of unity and consistent/coherent voice among members of the industry. Can't find common ground and makes them less effective overall in fighting for what they need from the system.
- Certain interest groups such as conservation NGO's and legal foundations provide biased science that damages the industry. Fishing industry lack leaders who are willing to engage in the management process. Council process is flawed because it won't fully consider industry's concerns and say the information provided by the industry is anecdotal and doesn't carry enough weight. Need a better way to document what is happening on the water and create a better link between science and management. Lack of consideration by the Council/states/ federal government is reason why fishermen won't go to meetings anymore. Process needs to change to allow more engagement of industry and more involvement on fishermen's observations.