



‘Slow Fish - Light Bites’ Event Report¹

The Too Big to Ignore (TBTI) project (toobigtoignore.net), in partnership with the Ecology Action Centre (EAC) (ecologyaction.ca), the Food Security Network (FSN) of Newfoundland and Labrador (foodsecuritynews.com) and Slow Fish Canada (www.slowfish.ca) organized a “Slow Fish - Light Bites” event on Wednesday, October 2, 2013, at The Rocket Room (www.rocketfood.ca) in St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), Canada (Picture 1). The aim of this initiative was to introduce the ‘Slow Fish’ concept to NL and to discuss the importance of accessing local sustainable seafood in the province. It also aimed to raise public awareness about the key role small-scale fisheries play for society and to support sustainability of small-scale fisheries in NL. The event was attended approximately by 75 participants from wide ranging backgrounds.

Picture 1: Ratana Chuenpagdee (TBTI Project Director) and David Adler (EAC Community Supported Fisheries Coordinator) welcoming participants to the ‘Slow Fish –Light Bites’ event.



The initiative consisted of a “Light Bites” menu created by the Rocket Chef Darryl Hammond with local, sustainable seafood including Artic char from Nain, cod from Placentia Bay, snow crab from the Southern Shore, and fish cakes made with salt cod

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from Bonavista Bay (Picture 2 & 3). The event also included local music by Jason Simms, and gave people an opportunity to network and discuss issues and opportunities in the local fishery (Picture 4).

Picture 2: “Light Bites” menu created by Chef Darryl Hammond of Rocket.



Picture 3: Participants tasting the local and sustainable seafood bites created by the chef of Rocket.



Picture 4: Local musician, Jason Simms, performing at the ‘Slow Fish - Light Bites’ event.



An interesting and informative ‘kitchen table’ discussion about the future of small-scale fisheries in NL was initiated by the guest speakers Tom Best (Petty Harbour Fisherman’s Co-operative), David Adler (Off the Hook Community Supported Fishery project), Kristen Lowitt (Food Security Network), and Susanna Fuller (Ecology Action Centre).

Tom Best, president of the Petty Harbour Fisherman's Co-Op, shared the story of how small-scale fish harvesters and workers in the Co-Op have been successfully harvesting, processing and selling sustainable local seafood in Newfoundland for many years (Picture 4). He explained that the Co-Op’s initiative to create areas for the conservation of marine resources and to ban gears that affect the marine environment has proven to be a successful approach to managing fisheries resources in the waters adjacent to Petty Harbour.

The project “Off the Hook” (www.offthehookcsf.ca), presented by David Adler, is an excellent example of connecting consumers to locally and sustainably harvested and fairly traded seafood. Developed in Nova Scotia, this project enables consumers to buy and reserve a percentage of seafood before it is caught and provides money upfront to the fish harvester to support operating expenses. Fresh and traceable seafood is delivered to consumers weekly. By creating a direct link between the fish harvester and consumer, “Off the Hook” provides opportunities for small-scale fish harvesters to enhance their livelihoods and wellbeing, while consumers obtain fresh, high quality fish caught with low-impact gears.

Kristen Lowitt further emphasized the importance of small-scale fisheries to food security and the need to encourage discourse throughout the Province about the important protein source that fish provides. The last speaker, Susanna Fuller, explained that small-scale fish harvesters are ready to engage in discussions about the challenges faced in their sector along with creating viable solutions. Based on her experience, small-scale fish harvesters

are proud of harvesting sustainable and high quality seafood. She explained, however, that small-scale fish harvesters need an engaged and aware public that will support their efforts.

Picture 5: Ratana Chuenpagdee and Tom Best speaking about the Petty Harbour Fisherman's Co-Op and fisheries in Newfoundland over time.



A lively and interesting discussion followed the opening statements, highlighting some of the barriers to accessing local sustainable seafood and current issues being experienced in the small-scale fishing sector (Pictures 6 and 7). A couple of restaurateurs expressed their frustration about not being able to access local seafood and explained how important it is that their customers, especially tourists, have access to fresh in-season seafood. A major barrier to accessing seafood in the Province is a current regulation that prohibits an individual or restaurant owners from buying local fish directly from a fish harvester. According to a participant, the Province does not prosecute individuals who buy local catches directly from fishers even though the regulation is in place. Another attendee explained that the regulation protects consumers especially in restaurant situations where traceability and food safety may be an issue. Changing this regulation may not be easy since creating a direct market between consumers and fish harvesters could possibly marginalize workers in the fish processing industry. One solution to address this issue would be the creation of more co-operative-type arrangements similar to the arrangements in Fogo Island and Petty Harbour.

It was also acknowledged that the small-scale fishing sector is important to the viability of coastal rural communities in NL by providing both direct and indirect economic, social and cultural opportunities. However, some concern was expressed that small-scale fish harvesters and their communities may not have appropriate knowledge and resources to market their fish in the most effective and profitable way. Collective action projects such as “Off the Hook” can support innovative marketing initiatives for small-scale fisheries and allow this sector to overcome policy barriers and competition from the larger industry

players by creating direct and open lines of communication between consumers and the fish harvesters.

Another issue raised during the discussion concerned the retention of young people in the small-scale fishery sector in the Province. In addition to educating the youth about the history and relevance of the fishery, it was also acknowledged that the cost of buying quota and licences is a barrier that needs to be addressed. A current resident of Petty Harbour is currently trying to address the former issue by establish a learning program for youth in her community. The latter issue requires direct interventions to enable youth to access the sector through such initiatives as low-interest loans. It was also highlighted that occupational pluralism needs to be recognized as a viable and necessary component of small-scale fisheries, which should not be penalized by existing professionalization practices and employment insurance regulations. It was recognised that a better understanding of these issues was warranted and that the Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union that represents all fish harvesters in the Province should play a leading role in recruitment processes.

Pictures 6 and 7: Participants discussing local sustainable seafood and small-scale fisheries issues during the event.





Special Notes

For more information about the event, you can listen to CBC “The Fisheries Broadcast Thursday” of October 3, 2013, titled “Is a smaller fishery really better?”

[\(http://www.cbc.ca/fisheriesbroadcast/episodes/2013/10/03/is-a-smaller-fishery-really-better/\)](http://www.cbc.ca/fisheriesbroadcast/episodes/2013/10/03/is-a-smaller-fishery-really-better/).

Acknowledgments

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