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## Views on Adjustment Programs for Displaced Canadian Fishermen

Last month, MPA News reported on the development of alternative livelihoods for fishermen, particularly those displaced by closure of fishing grounds, either for fisheries management or as part of an MPA. We cited a CDN\$4-billion (US\$2.8-billion) effort by the Canadian government since 1992 to help communities in Atlantic Canada adjust to cod fishery closures, through a license buyout, early retirement, skills training, and other programs. The case focused on insights from the government agencies that provided these programs.

Afterward, we spoke with other members of the community. Earle McCurdy, president of the Fish, Food and Allied Workers' Union, the leading fishing union in Atlantic Canada, says some aspects of the adjustment programs were useful. "The license buyout [for fishermen] and the early retirement programs [for processing plant workers and crew members] were quite helpful, generally speaking," says McCurdy. "They helped some of the older people get out of the industry with dignity, while allowing younger workers to avoid being laid off."

Job retraining, though, was less effective, he says. Some fishermen were able to retrain to work on offshore oil platforms, lay deep-sea cable, or work as long-haul truck drivers, but the transition for the remainder, particularly older workers, proved difficult. "The economy doesn't want older people," he says. "You bring in someone who is 53 years old to discuss his career prospects, and he doesn't have any. No one will hire him." Although the government programs helped some find a niche in the changing economy, says McCurdy, "For the others, it was just money thrown at a problem. If anything, the government should have put more of the money into the license buyout and early retirement."

Debbie MacKenzie, an independent fisheries scientist in the coastal province of Nova Scotia, worked as a public health nurse in Atlantic Canadian fishing communities in the 1990s. "Except for the cases where exploitation of now-depleted fish species has been shifted to still-abundant crustaceans, successful retraining and new endeavors have been relatively few at both the individual and community levels in Atlantic Canada," she says. "A hitch with retraining in rural communities founded on fishing is that there is very little that one can realistically be retrained for. Attracting new manufacturing industries to these locations is very difficult, due to added transportation costs resulting from the remoteness."

MacKenzie recalls one government program, known by its acronym "TAGS", that provided income support to displaced fishermen in the mid-1990s. It was intended to help community members until the cod stocks rebounded to sustainable levels, but that rebound has not occurred. "The TAGS payments seem to have functioned only as a stopgap measure, delaying the inevitable," she says. "TAGS would have worked just fine if the scientific projections [of stock recovery] had been correct, but the predictions were dead wrong." Although federal fisheries managers are determined not to let the crustacean fisheries go the way of the cod, MacKenzie says she worries the shrimp and crab are another stopgap "until the crustaceans bottom out, too."

### For more information:

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