

Turning the Tide: Addressing the Graying of the Fleet & Loss of Rural Fisheries Access in Alaska

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Context of the Problem

Alaska is facing a growing problem of fisheries access that threatens the healthy succession of fishing as an economic and cultural mainstay across the state. In our recent *Graying of the Fleet* study, we found that the need to purchase permits and quota has created large financial and related barriers to entry for the next generation of fishermen and has especially impacted small rural fishing communities. Some regions like Bristol Bay have lost over half of their local fleets. Here in the Kodiak Archipelago, the six Alutiiq villages have reached a crisis due to lost fisheries access and the cumulative impacts of restricted access management. Within one generation, there's been a:

- 75% decrease in families fishing [1]
- 70% decrease in individual halibut IFQ holdings^a
- 100% decrease in individual sablefish IFQ holdings
- 85% decrease in the number of young people owning state fishing permits
- 70% decrease in the number of state permits overall

Declines in fishing access greatly affect community life and sustainability. In Kodiak city many young fishermen find themselves unable to access federal fisheries. They struggle to support high costs of living and are at great financial risk with their undiversified fishing portfolios. In the region's villages, small boat harbors are empty. Communities are depopulating and facing social problems. Schools are closing. In our study's survey of secondary school students, less than 25% of Ouzinkie youth have ever had any commercial fishing engagement (despite nearly all students having multi-generational family ties to fishing); less than 10% of students in Ouzinkie see a positive future for young people in their community [2]. Ouzinkie is just one example of a long-standing, culturally rich fishing community where lost access to their fisheries threatens future viability. For the Alutiiq peoples whose culture and economy has been built around fishing for 7,500 years this recent dispossession is especially egregious.

Social scientists have generated decades of research demonstrating that privatizing fishing access has predictable and differential impacts on various groups of fishermen and fishing communities across the globe. This robust body of scientific data provides compelling evidence that the negative impacts of privatized access programs are not merely unintended consequences or inevitable outcomes of changing conditions, but rather are built into the system. As an economic allocation tool, IFQs are designed to encourage fleet consolidation and privilege those with access to capital and those who are best able to profit from fisheries harvests. Two recent global reviews of the social effects of IFQ programs conclude that crew and skippers, small-scale fishermen, new entrants, and rural and indigenous communities systematically experience the negative impacts of IFQ programs [3,4]. Rural and indigenous communities are disproportionately affected by the outflow of historic fishing rights, great disparities in access to capital, and by the fundamental lack of fit between IFQ programs and rural community fisheries that are not profit-maximizing but rather based on subsistence livelihoods and cultural values embedded in fishing ways of life [4].

These differential impacts have created environmental justice concerns (E.O. 12898). In the halibut IFQ fishery, for example, low-income and Alaska Native fishermen are more likely to sell quota and less likely to purchase quota [5]. A large-scale survey of halibut IFQ holders also showed that residents of small rural communities in the Gulf of Alaska showed the least support for the IFQ program [6]. Community members describe negative impacts to core fishing values; disempowerment of crew and the next generation; and long-lasting conflict and community divisiveness [7]. The NPFMC tried to address some of these inequities by implementing the Community Quota Entity (CQE) program. Nearly half of the eligible CQE communities have lost 50% or more of their halibut quota share since initial issuance (seven of these have lost 100%); to date, this program has been largely unsuccessful in bringing back halibut fishing opportunities for village fisheries [8]

^a This figure differs from what is presented in the IFQ Program Review. There is an error stating that residents of Akhiok held 191,130 quota share units in 2015; Akhiok holdings in 2015 were 0. Recent holdings attributed to Larsen Bay are holdings by an individual whose residence is in Kodiak city, not Larsen Bay.

Addressing the Problem

Our project team recently released the report: [Turning the Tide](#). This report provides recommendations and reviews policy responses that other fishing regions and nations have developed to address these problems of lost fisheries access. As similar patterns of dispossession in rural fishing communities and future generations of fishermen have occurred worldwide when fishing rights have been limited and monetized, we gathered what has been learned as management programs have shifted to address these problems. Largely, programs have been amended to include provisions to facilitate special provisions for small-scale fishermen, rural communities, indigenous peoples, and youth and future generations. Some examples of these types of programs include:

Small-scale fishing operations

- *Open group fishery (Norway)*: targets small-scale fishermen who did not qualify for IVQs; only for vessels under 11m & with annual non-fishing income of less than roughly \$40,000 USD [9]
- *Coastal fishing/quota-free fishing (Iceland)*: allows up to four jig machines to harvest up to 650 kg of cod, saithe, and rockfish in day fisheries without purchasing ITQs [10]

Rural communities

- *Adjacency to the resource (Atlantic Canada)*: community-based organizations in three remote coastal regions receive shrimp allocations. Similar to the CDQ program these organizations can use royalties from offshore fisheries to develop local infrastructure and community-based fisheries diversifying local and regional economies [11]
- *Island limited entry (Maine)*: Designed to maintain local lobster licenses; island residency required to hold license; islands have authority to manage entry and their own fishing territories; island licenses have lower trap limits.

Provisions to protect indigenous access

- *Annual set-aside for Sámi regions (Norway)*: cod and crab quota that is available only to open group fishermen living in Sámi districts. These provisions favor small-scale fishermen and have catalyzed the revival of some fjord fisheries since 2010 [8,12].

Youth and future generations

- *Recruitment quota program (Norway)*: allows fishermen under the age of 30 to apply for recruitment quota at no cost. Recruitment quota cannot be sold. The program has been well received by young fishermen wanting to enter the industry [8].

We describe other amendments to quota and permit programs in our report. Our findings support a vast body of research that strongly suggests new entry points are necessary in Alaska to address this crisis of fisheries access. Shifts in access management for both federal and state fisheries are needed. A few of our key recommendations include:

- *Provide supplemental forms of access to commercial fishing that are not market-based to facilitate entry and provide diversification options.*
- *Establish youth permits or student licenses and mentorship or apprenticeship programs to provide young people with exposure to and experience in fishing and a pathway to ownership.*
- *Develop mechanisms to protect and diversify community-based fishing access, including provisions to protect local access.*

Graying of the Fleet project team

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More details about the project are available at: fishermen.alaska.edu.

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