

Sitka Declaration

Sitka Workshop, March 16–18, 2005
Sitka, Alaska

Coastal fishing communities are in trouble. The sense of place and the traditional connection of community residents to marine resources are vanishing. Current management systems are undermining the ecological, social and economic basis of community sustainability. In many cases this has contributed to the exhaustion of resources, decreased biological diversity, and the loss of a way of life that forms the basis of much of our region's history and culture. Increased absentee ownership and capital costs deny the traditional entry of future generations from coastal communities. The community's knowledge of, economic dependence upon, and attachment to fisheries resources is essential to promoting a strong sense of stewardship. There is a national and an international interest in maintaining healthy, dynamic and diverse coastal communities.

I. Marine Resource Sustainability

Preamble: Healthy coastal communities and coastal marine ecosystems are interdependent;

Whereas;

- Communities are defined in terms of specific geographic place, character, and practice relative to their adjacent fisheries;
- Conventional fisheries management systems have contributed to the failure of the overall health of the marine ecosystem; are not designed to address issues on a local scale; and need to consider the integration of local ecosystem dynamics with community needs;
- Demands for fisheries resources can outstrip local ecological productivity;
- Coastal communities are vulnerable to nearshore marine ecosystem failure, and have a responsibility to maintain those ecosystems;
- The quality and joy of life in coastal communities is dependent on healthy ecosystems sustaining diverse living resources and traditional fisheries;
- Communities are deeply concerned about the loss of traditional use patterns in fisheries and the loss of associated traditional and local knowledge, and;
- Communities are struggling with economic systems that deny the traditional entry of future generations of community-based participants.

Therefore: We, the undersigned, propose that the emerging approach known as Community-based Fisheries Management (CBFM) shall have the following attributes and requirements:

- That the precautionary principle mandates that conservation of fisheries resources comes first;
- To ensure the enduring character of community, ecological, and economic vitality, community based management must include both modification of existing management approaches including direct allocations to communities;
- That community-based management will promote diverse, selective fisheries;
- That community-based fisheries will maintain habitat integrity through the use of low impact gear and practices;
- That successful fisheries management depends on an inclusive process that starts at the community level, integrates science, government, local and traditional knowledge and stakeholders, and addresses the appropriate scale of the management issues;
- That stakeholders are held responsible for stewardship;
- That all users are responsible for full accounting and monitoring of catch and landings information; and,

- That communities are the most appropriate entities to promote the restoration of impaired fisheries resources and habitats on an appropriate local scale.

II. Access to Fisheries Resources

Whereas:

- Absentee ownership compromises local stewardship, reduces employment opportunities, and removes resource rents from the local communities and the fishing industry;
- The marine ecosystem is a public resource and access to this resource is a privilege, not a right; (with the exception of aboriginal and treaty rights)
- Fisheries should be managed to sustain local communities and ensure future generations have an equal or better opportunity to access fishery resources;
- Loss of access disrupts the ecological and economic relationship of communities to the marine ecosystem;
- Rural community residents are having increasing difficulty gaining access to local commercial fisheries due to limited access programs and increased capital costs.

Therefore: We, the undersigned, propose that the emerging approach known as Community-based Fisheries Management (CBFM) can address issues of access to fisheries resources in the following ways:

- Endow communities with access privileges and the authority to make subsequent allocations;
- If used, individual access rights are defined for a finite period (not in perpetuity);
- Discourage absentee ownership;
- Recognize the specific rights of, and honor prior commitments to, First Nations, treaty tribes, and indigenous peoples;
- Management structures and practices be transparent;
- Recognize all users, including aboriginal and customary and traditional users, commercial and recreational sectors;
- Promote active participation by 2nd generation access privilege holders;
- Provide affordable entry level opportunities for coastal community residents;
- Provide incentives for conservation practices;
- Protect access privileges of crew and skippers;
- Prohibit processing shares or linkages;
- Ensure that the privilege of access shall be complemented by a clearly defined and binding schedule of enforcement;
- The design of limited access programs should not disadvantage those who fished conservatively (including not fishing at all for conservation and economic reasons)

Produced by the Sitka workshop, March 18, 2005