

Don't Drown the Cod!

It is a truism that sometimes you need to work backwards to identify the bottom line in order to go forward with a solution.

In the current Northern Shrimp Crisis, the issue of the survival of coastal communities has been widely raised and debated.

While there are anti-rural distractors who have lost their Newfoundland heritage plot, many will agree that the survival of coastal communities is a top priority. As a society and in every community day in and day out we work towards that goal.

Our outports are the heart and soul of our province and they defined us a people. If they are left to dry up, we will no longer be who we have been since our creation; and to quote Zita Cobb, *To give up would have meant that the lives of the people who came before us would have been for nothing*

There are those who have differing opinions of how to deal with the current crisis in the shrimp industry and in shrimp communities – but there is only ONE truism - our coastal communities need fish.

This fact is elegantly and directly espoused by the late great Dr. Les Harris in his masterful piece “The Outport Phenomenon”

Throughout the past 150 years successive governments have wrestled with those intransigencies. The railway, that was to have been our salvation, has disappeared into oblivion. The paper mills and mines represent bright spots but have not transformed the provincial economy. Newfoundland is still, by and large, a society whose shape and form and ethos is determined by the nature of the outport. And the outport cannot survive without fish. Either there are fish, or the community dies. There is no middle ground.

The issue of the sustainability of fish stock is part of the current debate. We have a duty to ensure our fishery is rebuilt back to where it needs to be. But as one observer and promoter of the fishery has stated the definition of a sustainable fish is If it can Sustain a Community. No truer words have been spoken.

In a recent conversation on sustainable fishing practices, a rhetorical question was raised – would you drown your Cod ? ... to make the point that Cod needs to be caught alive to get a good-quality raw material.

We have over 500 years tangled up in the fishery here in our wonderful province and over 1,000 communities spawned. Over time, many have not survived, but the ones that have deserve the breath of their life – fish.

If decision-makers in Ottawa assure us that coastal communities are important to them as they are to us, then they have no other choice but to guarantee that our outports have their share of available fish - OR they are working deliberately to destroy our communities, our lives.

They just have to go back to the bottom line - we have no future if fishing communities are disconnected from the fish that swim by their door (ADJACENCY). To reiterate Dr. Harris, *Either there are fish, or the community dies. There is no middle ground.*

So, don't drown the Cod!; for, as the old saying goes, where goes the fish/fishery, there goes Newfoundland...

“Outport is the characteristic Newfoundland word, the place removed and away, half sanctuary and half exile, sea dependent and sea-conditioned, generous with challenge, scant with opportunity, a place at once of intense welcome and hospitality and yet desperately exposed, precarious and vulnerable. Newfoundland doesn't have Outports. Newfoundland is the Outport.” | Rex Murphy

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