

what's wrong with our fisheries

**New Zealand's
fisheries are still
being exploited for
short-term gain and
not long-term
sustainability.
MARK FELDMAN
looks at the disaster
of the Canadian cod
fishery and how we
can avoid continuing
down the same road.**

FIVE HUNDRED years ago John Cabot discovered the world's richest fishery – the Grand Banks off the eastern coast of Canada.

For the next four centuries, communities devoted to cod fishing sprung up all along the coast of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and New England as the Grand Banks were fished from small boats using hand-lines and pots. Humanity made little impact on the cod populations over that time: the Banks provided regular and seemingly permanent food and income for hundreds of thousands of people. There were occasional bad years, and the North Atlantic was always treacherous, but the communities and the cod continued to prosper.

Then technology upset the balance of life along the Banks. Diesel engines, nylon fishing nets, power haulers and sonar changed everything. Cod were no longer able to escape or spawn freely, and their populations began to drop. As the cod declined, technology continued to improve and fishers were able to catch more fish even though there were fewer in the water.

Finally the fishers developed the ultimate weapon – the pair-trawler. These two diesel-powered 20-metre trawlers were able to drag a huge nylon net between them and vacuum up every living thing in their path. By 1992 the cod were gone, the world's richest fishery was closed and remains so. It is doubtful the cod will return in our lifetime.

As well as being an environmental disaster, 50,000 Canadians are out of work, millions of dollars invested in boats, processing plants and distribution systems have been lost, and the social fabric of hundreds of communities has been destroyed.

In this age of environmental awareness, how could an advanced nation like

Canada manage a valuable resource so badly? Its cod fishery was controlled through a quota system like ours, it had plenty of fisheries scientists, and management systems in place that were as good, if not better, than our own. Despite all this, the Canadians destroyed their most valuable fishery. If we examine some of the blunders of the Grand Banks it will be easy to see how close we are to following the same path.

WHEN FISH ARE managed under a quota system like New Zealand's, a Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) is set by the government each year. The TACC is the total weight of fish that commercial boats are allowed to catch. But, in practice, no one measures how many fish are actually



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short sight