



Accountability, transformative learning, and alternate futures for New England groundfish catch shares

Jennifer F. Brewer^{a,*}, Kyle Molton^b, Robin Alden^b, Carla Guenther^b

^a University of New Hampshire, Department of Geography, Huddleston Hall, Durham, NH 03824, USA

^b Penobscot East Resource Center, 13 Atlantic Avenue, Stonington, ME 04681, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 September 2016

Accepted 4 September 2016

Keywords:

ITQs
Privatization
Quota sectors
Fishing gear impacts
Capacity-building
Area management

ABSTRACT

Environmental change heightens the need for governance structures that enable transformative social learning across socio-ecological scales. Questions arise concerning the ability of audit-based accountability to deliver such adaptive outcomes, particularly if implementation is hampered by communicative divides between insider and outsider groups. In the New England region of the United States, groundfish policy and its catch share system present an illustrative case. Despite severe depletion of cod and other species, governance insiders prevent consideration of regulatory alternatives. An insider-outsider activist strategy based in the state of Maine aims to regain fishery access, intensify grassroots community organizing to support owner-operators attentive to conservation ethics, broaden participation within conventional science and management venues, and improve prospects for community-based area management through strategic policy networks. Adaptive, polycentric accountability therefore seems more feasible, but requires further development.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

After centuries of harvest, the New England groundfishery is an official disaster. Following 2010 implementation of market-based catch shares, federal managers issued the disaster declaration in 2012 and the US Congress authorized relief funding in 2014. Persistent fishery decline raises concerns about the relationship between accountability and adaptive learning. Existing research demonstrates that environmental complexity heightens the need for governance structures that foster transformative capacity and adaptive social learning across socio-ecological scales [1–5]. Other literatures question the value of audit-based standards of accountability favored by neoliberal policy, and offer inclusive and participatory modes of democratic decision-making as possible remedies [6–9]. This paper outlines problems with audit-based accountability mechanisms that discourage transformative learning by narrowing the scope of public debate in the groundfish case. It further considers an emerging proposal for governance

innovation, one offering polycentric venues for vigorous public discourse as routes to more adaptive learning and accountability. Specifically, broader integration of socio-ecological knowledge accumulated by fisherfolk¹ could reverse a dearth of locally-scaled information in regionally-administered catch share policy and stimulate more agonistic, or multi-polar, discussion. Although full implementation would require additional development, an insider-outsider activist strategy is advancing policy reform and grassroots community organizing around alternate visions.

2. Transformation, learning and accountability

Humans are inherently social; they learn from one another, not in a vacuum [10,11]. Adaptation to dramatic change further requires not only refinement of routine operations, in single-loop social learning, but evaluation of deeply held assumptions and longstanding organizational models, in multiple-loop or transformative social learning [3]. The flow of information among decision-makers can alter these prospects. A diversity of perspectives and associated opinions, expressed in a mutually respectful manner, can augment our ability to envision alternate futures [12]. By contrast, if deliberations are persistently compartmentalized such that some viewpoints are eliminated by suppression or inadvertent exclusion, resulting decisions may be deficient in analytical rigor or political viability [11].

Scholars increasingly assert related critiques of prevailing

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: jennifer.brewer@unh.edu (J.F. Brewer).

¹ New Englanders who fish commercially are predominantly male, and even fishing women usually self-identify as fishermen, so this paper follows suit. It occasionally uses the term fisherfolk to refer to both fishermen (male and female) and closely associated shoreside workers, particularly family members who provide essential fishing support services but may be unpaid and without recognized job titles.

bureaucratic approaches to accountability. Audit-based accountability mechanisms, including quantitative performance thresholds popular in neoliberal regimes, may protect bureaucrats against a relatively narrow suite of well-documented risks and insulate them from intra-agency criticism, yet fail to consider a broader array of public risks that are less clearly recognized or harder to quantify [7,8,13]. A simplistic emphasis on outcomes and reporting can displace professional ethics around due process and moral conduct, e.g., routinized achievement of minimum standards may deflect agency attention away from more nuanced shifts in public priorities [6,14]. If such standards become synchronized with staff performance reviews, vertical hierarchies facilitate strategic movement of information down a chain of command, as is operationally efficient in a static decision environment. Less helpfully, however, such arrangements can encourage administrative stovepipes that prevent the lateral and upward sharing of information that might otherwise spur innovation [15]. Similarly, social divides between organizational insiders and outsiders can sideline perspectives that have broad social utility but do not serve short term interests of insiders [16]. These tradeoffs between internal efficiency and public benefits become particularly problematic if socio-ecological complexity requires transformative learning [11].

By contrast, in polycentric, broadly participatory social structures, multiple decision centers at varied scales can allow multi-directional flows of information and accountability, including laterally and upward [16–19]. While any associated contestation between decision-makers around knowledge claims or jurisdictional authority may appear administratively inefficient over short time frames, in the longer term, if integrated with mechanisms for broad accountability, such negotiations can advance collective benefits by stimulating public debate around existing assumptions and patterns and offering diverse alternatives to outmoded policies [3,15,16]. Some political theorists therefore call for decentralized notions of accountability wherein ample opportunities for civic participation and inter-organizational scrutiny ensure that active engagement with public concerns around values and ethics becomes a professional norm [9,15]. In particular, Chantal Mouffe proposes agonism or agonistic pluralism, advocating vigorous but mutually respectful debate among adversaries as a permanent condition of democracy, and thereby rejecting both neoliberal faith in voting as summative aggregation of individual preferences and utopian ideals of consensus [12].

This paper explores these arguments as they manifest in the groundfishery of the northeastern United States. Following brief coverage of methodology and legal case context, it discusses failures of catch shares as implemented pursuant to a neoliberal policy agenda. These include continued depletion of fish populations, industry consolidation, and disenfranchisement of coastal fishing communities, as well as apparent regulatory violations, a narrowing of public discourse, and marginalization of dissenting voices. The paper then considers an ongoing effort by coastal fisherfolk and their supporters to develop more robust policy alternatives. Significantly, this latter work involves both investments within existing governance structures and mobilization of broader publics: an insider-outsider strategy. To demonstrate this, the following sections trace a brief policy history, consider the technological and socio-political positions of policy critics, and describe efforts to interject alternate viewpoints into a central decision-making venue. Evidence reveals substantial barriers that prevent such sharing of more diversified information and opinions. Nonetheless, small boat representatives and advocates persist in raising key concerns among audiences across local to international scales. They have attracted support for a still-evolving proposal to reform fishery decision-making through decentralized structures for learning and accountability. These efforts

have the potential to blur distinctions between governance insiders and outsiders, an outcome that could have broader utility for reformation of the neoliberal regime.

3. Methods and case overview

The following discussion takes a modified grounded theory or constant comparative approach whereby data collection and analysis iterate between synthesis of existing research and comparison with ongoing fieldwork [20]. Formal data collection by the lead author has involved a series of overlapping projects in New England fisheries, all of which inform the present analysis, either directly or indirectly. These projects incorporated periods of participant observation from 1990 to 2016, including attendance at more than 40 meetings and workshops focused on fishery management and ranging in length from one hour to four days. They also included more than 175 interviews with more than 200 informants, mostly fishermen, but also fishery managers, NGO staff, and others involved in the fishing industry. In addition, 95 phone, mail, or internet surveys collected by the lead author conveyed information about the experiences, perceptions, decisions, and actions of fishermen as they relate to fishery management, fished ecosystems, and the social context of fishing. Review of documents and website content produced by government, news media, NGOs, and trade organizations also provided essential information. Additionally, among the four co-authors, experiential field observation as non-academic marine policy professionals totals more than 60 years.

Our case includes historic New England groundfishing ports and associated management discussions from local to federal levels. Over centuries, boats homeported in dozens of harbors from the Canadian border to the mid-Atlantic US states deployed hooks or nets to catch bottom-dwelling finfish such as cod, haddock, halibut, flounders, pollock, hake, whiting, and redfish in the waters of the northwest Atlantic. Today, the remaining industry has concentrated into two Massachusetts ports: Gloucester and New Bedford. Our study focuses more on eastern Maine, where the fishery declined decades ago and local groups have organized to propose collectivist strategies for the recovery of both fish populations and fishery access.

4. Policy failure

The federally-managed New England groundfishery has experienced a gradual encroachment of neoliberal policy, despite widespread opposition at the grassroots [21]. Audit-based accountability mechanisms have become entrenched, regardless of their apparent ineffectiveness. The following paragraphs trace this history and some of its problematic outcomes. They illustrate how groundfish policy manifests four decades of faith among government officials that the predictive capabilities of fisheries science coupled with the economic engine of private property will produce socially optimal outcomes, even as decision-makers disregard dissenting voices.

In 1976, after expelling foreign fishing fleets from its 200 mile EEZ, the US Congress allocated funds to incentivize domestic investment, optimistic that increasingly quantitative biological assessment techniques could sustain an economic boom by determining maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and regulatory strategies to achieve it. Total allowable catches (TACs) calculated in relation to sustainable yield seemed to offer clear standards for accountability audits, targets against which to compare management outcomes. Congress also created eight Regional Councils to advise the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5118106>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5118106>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)