



Lipstick and catch shares in the Western Pacific: Beyond evangelism in fisheries policy?

Seth Macinko*

Department of Marine Affairs, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI 02881, USA



ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 19 November 2012

Received in revised form

29 March 2013

Accepted 2 August 2013

Available online 27 August 2013

Keywords:

Catch shares

Rights based fishing

ITQs

Fishing communities

ABSTRACT

The push for catch shares is on in the United States, nationwide generally, and in the western Pacific specifically. The prevailing understanding of catch shares emphasizes individual private property rights and changes in fisher behavior are understood to result from changes in rights in accordance with a long-established canon in fisheries economics. It is argued that this orthodoxy misses the causal factor in catch shares and thus constricts the range of policy options for catch shares. Moreover, this standard understanding of catch shares fosters opposition. Opposition to catch shares in the western Pacific can be understood as a specific variant of a generic pattern of opposition that is often centered on concerns for distributional impacts. Blind to the fact that their own misunderstanding fuels opposition, proponents of privatization resort to explaining opposition in terms of a simple, but inaccurate, for-or-against-catch-shares dichotomy. Perpetuation of this dichotomy has become a tool in the promotion of one particular ideological conception of catch shares and is a disservice to the public policy process. A possible path forward in the context of the western Pacific is presented that is based on diminishing the role of outside policy experts while encouraging local design of programs to meet local goals. Such an approach is consistent with the nature of development as local people adopt and adapt outside influences on their own terms.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Fishery management is an exercise in applied development theory. From this perspective, the central management question is where does a particular society want the rents from the fishery to flow? That is, a fishery represents a publicly held asset and it is a public policy question as to how a particular society elects to manage the wealth of the fishery for the benefit of the society as asset owner [1]. Catch shares, or rather particular forms of catch shares, explicitly affect the range of policy options regarding rent distribution that are available to a society. Ideally, a discussion of options and goals for rent distribution ought to precede the design of a management program that might constrain, or even dictate, the range of distribution options available. It would appear, however, that in the United States this ideal sequence has been precluded by events. That is, catch shares, or to be precise, a specific variant of catch shares, have become a goal in themselves rather than a tool in service of goals set by society.

The push for catch shares is on in the United States, nationwide generally, and in the western Pacific specifically, as evidenced by the mere convening of the workshop. The cultural context of the

western Pacific, relayed by local participants at the workshop, makes this a particularly interesting example of cross-cultural diffusion. To explore this example, this paper begins with a brief introduction to catch shares, and then looks at the history of concern for the distributional impacts associated with the shift to catch shares and other “rationalization” programs. Opposition to catch shares in the western Pacific can be understood as a specific variant of a generic pattern of opposition. In both specific and generic forms, opposition to catch shares is exacerbated by, and a response to, the prevailing manner in which catch shares are conceptualized and proffered—the reigning orthodoxy insists that catch shares work because of a stewardship interest created by owning a valuable private asset. Indeed, it is now common to see open discussion of “the privatization of the oceans” [2] where individual private property rights are seen as the only alternative to unenlightened opposition and resulting chaos and decline in the world’s oceans [3,4]. Only by ignoring the linkage between the specific form of catch shares offered and resulting opposition can a simple, but inaccurate, for-or-against-catch-shares dichotomy be perpetuated see, e.g., [3]. Perpetuation of this dichotomy has become a tool in the promotion of one particular ideological conception of catch shares—that they must be essentially perpetual private property—and is a disservice to the public policy process. An alternative approach to consideration of catch shares in the western Pacific would offer more, not less, policy options

* Tel.: +1 401 874 4820; fax: +1 401 874 2156.

E-mail address: macinko@uri.edu

and would be based on diminishing the role of outside policy experts while encouraging local design of programs to meet local goals.

2. What are catch shares?

IFQs are not property rights-based fishing, they are catch share-based fishing... Ideologically-infused beliefs have obscured this simple observation for too long... Once this conceptual breakthrough is realized, the tool (catch shares) can be liberated from the ideology (private property), and in the process open up the menu of available policy options. Full liberation of catch shares from the property rights ideology will require abandonment of the term “IFQ,” which has become irretrievably contaminated by the “rights-based” dogma... Once free to contemplate catch shares unencumbered by all the conditions imposed by the rights-based campaign... it is possible to focus on designing a management system that is compatible with the existing property regime ([5], p. 29).

It is ironic that a term (catch shares) specifically offered up to escape the rights-talk afflicting the literature on individual transferable quotas/individual fishing quotas (ITQs/IFQs) [5], has now been co-opted by what one notable observer called “fisheries economists with an extreme ‘property rights’ interpretation of harvesting quotas” ([6], f.n. 2). The vocabulary has changed but the underlying causal analysis has not, thus perpetuating the conceptual confusion regarding cause and effect that plagues the fisheries literature in this area. Behavior changes when fishing under catch shares because the rules, not the rights, have changed. Assertions of the powers of ownership and property rights represent exhibits of faith, not analysis. When rules change, operating incentives usually change too. Pre-assigning a share of the total catch instantly removes the incentives to race that characterize a fishery where individual catch is competitively determined, not assigned.

If “the ownership fetish” [7] can be set aside, both innovation and clarity are possible in policy design. As originally proposed, catch shares are simply assigned shares of an overall catch [5]. There is room for much variation in how, and to whom, the shares are assigned but from this simple definition, certain clarifications can be brought to bear on contemporary discussions of fisheries policy. First, programs featuring assigned effort allotments (e.g., individual transferable trap certificates) are not catch shares. By definition, catch shares involve both a (total) catch and (assigned) shares of that catch. In contrast, under effort assignments, there may be no limit at all on total catch and, in any case, there is no assignment of catch to specific entities.

Second, TURFs (territorial use rights fisheries) are not catch shares (and vice versa) for similar reasons. Under TURFs, total catch and shares of that total are both not necessary conditions. Additionally, while TURFs, by definition, are rights-based, catch shares require no necessary basis in rights. The causal explanation of why catch shares work does not depend on an appeal to “rights” but simply rests on the fact that catch is pre-assigned [5,8]. Catch shares will work with or without the creation of specific property rights, thus, rights are not needed, and hence catch shares may be observed to be working (in terms of their designed objectives) just fine in the U.S. where they have been defined in statute as mere privileges. Of course, fashioning catch shares as rights may be preferred by some for ideological reasons, but that is a different argument.

Despite these fundamental differences, it has become commonplace, as at this workshop, to see TURFs talked about as a form of catch shares. This conceptual confusion has now been enshrined as national policy in the United States in the form of the definition

of catch shares presented in the NOAA catch shares policy document [9]. While this may be a case of economists appropriating a concept to add conceptual diversity (and cultural sensitivity?) to their tool kit, it is probably best to keep conversations of catch shares and TURFs separate because they *are* separate tools. Policy-making and policy evaluation are both enhanced by conceptual clarity.

3. Who's Afraid of catch shares (and why)?

Given the simple concept outlined above and the extreme flexibility in design that simplicity affords (e.g., shares could be held by individuals, groups of individuals, whole communities, or even regional or national governing bodies), it might seem surprising that the concept would be met with skepticism, fear, or even hostility in the early phases of policy development. Yet, apparently, catch shares have not been enthusiastically received by many in the audiences at outreach efforts conducted by staff from the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (as described by staff at the workshop, see also [10]). As has been argued elsewhere [11], this kind of reaction to the conventional presentation of catch shares is not surprising.

The critical feature to understand is that the source of concern lies not with the generic concept of catch shares, but with the specific form of catch shares put forth by proponents. The standard approach to catch shares is a self-proclaimed enclosure movement:

[Catch shares] are part of one of the great institutional changes of our times: the enclosure and privatization of the common resources of the ocean. These are now mostly the exclusive property of the coastal states of the world ([12], p. 3).

Conceptualized in this way, catch shares are not, contrary to their usage in much of the fisheries literature, about filling a property rights vacuum, but rather, a self-acknowledged overthrow of an existing property rights regime. The movement to privatize what is currently a public asset—not the fish, but the right of fishing and the fishery—usually engenders concerns for the distributional effects of such a policy shift. These distributional concerns are focused on both communities and individuals with ties to the fishery. Ironically, the standard responses by catch share proponents to these distributional concerns fuel further resistance to the programs. To understand resistance to catch shares, it is thus useful to understand “their” history in terms of distributional issues.

3.1. Distributional effects: communities

An exchange over the effects of a proposed catch share program on communities in Alaska aptly illustrates the conventional treatment afforded such concerns:

Fisherman/Mayor: “I wonder what the effect the share quota systems... [would have on] Alaska’s coastal communities or industries?” ([13], p. 145).

Economist: “Well, I suppose I don’t know. To some extent, I’d like those questions to be on the other side of the ledger. What I’m interested in and what I think we need to focus our attention on is the aggregate effect over the entire U.S. economy, initially ignoring the question of how particular groups, and particular individuals and particular regions come out.” ([13], p. 145).

Given the community related concerns expressed at the workshop, it is not hard to imagine the first part of this exchange being articulated throughout the western Pacific. As for the second part of the exchange, the dismissal of concerns over community impacts involves the classic distinction in economics between allocation and distribution. If distribution is, by definition, a

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7491406>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7491406>

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