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## **What's the catch with NOAA's catch-shares program?**

A year ago, Daniel Bubb worked as a fisherman in Gloucester, Mass., operating a fishing business with more than 60 employees. Government intervention has a funny way of turning success stories on their head, though.

"I lost 95 percent of my business over the course of a year. All of a sudden, I was in a system that's designed for the little guy to fail. The worst part? I've been fishing in Gloucester for 11 years - this is everything that my family and I have."

The culprit is the "catch-shares" -- i.e. individual fishing quotas -- program started in May 2010 by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Under the system, transferable vouchers entitle fishermen to a certain percentage of the total allowable catch of a given species of fish.

Implemented properly, catch-shares are allocated as individual fishing quotas, which give fishermen a property right in the stocks they fish. This gives them an incentive to ensure that fish stocks stay healthy and grow, as has happened in Iceland and New Zealand, for example.

However, that is not the model NOAA has followed. American fishermen have no property rights. Moreover, the total allowable catch has been set far below the level needed to sustain fisheries.

The result has been devastating to previously successful fishermen. In the year before the introduction of the quotas, Bubb netted 220,000 pounds of codfish. In the first year of the newly implemented catch-share policy, he netted 11,000 pounds, of which he was only allowed to sell 9,000 pounds under the new restrictions.

Bubb was forced to lay off six employees, sell a \$300,000 fishing vessel, and place a second mortgage on his home that he'll be paying for the next 25 years. Unable to pay the

hefty fees that are required in order to lease additional fishing rights, Bubb hasn't worked in more than six months.

This is not an isolated incident. In those American fisheries that have been subjected to catch- share regulations (excluding recently affected New England), Food & Water Watch magazine found that only 37 percent of boats survived the transition.

New England's fishing industry is similarly plummeting, despite being affected by the regulations for less than a year. In five months, over half of the Northeast's fishing fleet had been lost.

The trend is likely to continue, as catch-share permissions are being consolidated into just a few, wealthy, well-connected hands. Of the 247 ground-fishing vessels (which catch fish that swim close to the sea floor) in New England that are still active, 55 boats accounted for 61 percent of the revenue.

Even the fishermen in the nation's most lucrative fishing port, New Bedford, Mass., are suffering as a result of NOAA policies. Mayor Scott Lang blames a "human tragedy" on excessive regulations.

"The regulators at NOAA have enacted draconian policies that include much deeper cuts than what impartial scientists believe are needed to conserve our ocean resources," he said at a December meeting of the town's Ocean and Fisheries Council.

"With undue influence from powerful lobbies, they have taken actions that environmental extremists think might be marginally beneficial to some fish stocks, but which we know are hurting people."

A report prepared by Dartmouth College concluded that 14,500 metric tons (32 million pounds) of additional ground-fish could be brought to market without endangering the sustainability of fish stocks.

On Nov. 5, 2010, Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick submitted a report to U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke, requesting emergency allocations of additional vouchers in an attempt to slow the suffocation of the fishing industry.

Government has put environmental correctness ahead of people. Jane Lubchenco, the former vice president of the Environmental Defense Fund, had no experience working with fisheries before her installation as the head of NOAA and implementation of the catch-shares program.

Her "scientific" conclusions are out of line with those of the rest of the scientific community. But they are identical to those of her previous employer, which has received more than \$30 million in private-grant funding for pushing its catch-share agenda.

In fishing for a problem to support the regulatory agendas of the EDF and the Obama administration, Lubchenco netted a policy that has wreaked havoc on the fishing industry, and which will continue to put fishermen out of business until its repeal.

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