

## CHAPTER 7

# BETWEEN TOP-DOWN AND BOTTOM-UP GOVERNANCE: DUTCH BEAM TRAWL FISHERMEN'S ENGAGEMENT WITH FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

ROB VAN GINKEL

*Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Amsterdam, Oudezijds Achterburgwal 185, 1012 DK Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

### Abstract

Since 1993, the prime goal of Dutch fisheries policy has been to enhance a responsible way of fishing and a sustainable exploitation of fish stocks. That is, economic and ecological interests should be balanced in a viable way so as to achieve both economic and ecological sustainability. This policy, which encouraged new forms of cooperation, was superimposed on a system of individual transferable quotas that was officially introduced in 1985. To arrive at devolution of specific management responsibilities to fishermen, they had to organise themselves in co-management groups, the so-called 'Biesheuvel groups'. Individual fishermen bring their catching rights or quotas into these groups, and these groups are responsible for establishing fishing plans to achieve a better distribution of sea days and quota transfers within a group. The state's aim is to enhance fishermen's responsibility and social control through self-management. This chapter will address the experiences over the past ten years with this governance system, focussing especially on the conflicting views of fishermen, biologists and state representatives regarding its efficacy. Special attention will also be devoted to the perceptions of the beam trawl fishermen concerning the benefits and pitfalls of the present governance system.

## 7.1 Introduction

Fisheries management in the western world is usually characterised by top-down modes of policy design and implementation that involve centralised, hierarchical, command-and-control decision-making and monitoring to make up for market imperfections (Symes 1997:107; Dubbink and van Vliet 1996, 1997). The fisheries policy of the European Union (EU) is a prime example, where measures affecting the fishing industry are determined in Brussels with little or no involvement of fishers and their organisations. Such top-down policymaking often leads to a lack of transparency, high information, monitoring and enforcement costs, as well as discontent and a lack of legitimacy and compliance on the part of the fishing industry (McCay 1995:16). On the other hand, national governments have some leeway in arranging the specifics of governance structures for sea fisheries within the framework set by the EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

In the Netherlands, a devolved or co-management regime was introduced in the early 1990s, delegating considerable responsibility to the fishing industry for quota management, self-regulation and self-enforcement. Co-management usually refers to "a shift in the power for decision-making away from the government agency and a

scientific élite, and toward a group of resource users or a local community” (McCay 1995:14) or to forms of shared management responsibilities of state institutions and user groups (Nielsen and Vedsmand 1999:20). The idea in the Dutch situation was that the less legalistic approach of governing at this level would leave more discretion to the fishers and firms “to adapt their conduct to ‘the spirit of...public policy’” (Dubbinck and van Vliet 1997:183). This in turn would give a boost to the legitimacy of government and augment compliance to its rules and regulations (ibid:184). The present chapter will address the experience over the past decade with this governance system, focusing especially on the views of fishermen, biologists and state representatives regarding its efficacy. Special attention will be devoted to the perceptions of the beam trawl fishermen concerning the benefits and pitfalls of the current governance system.

The Dutch fishing industry is relatively small in terms of number of vessels and employees. In 2002, the fishing fleet comprised 393 cutters, 17 large pelagic freezer trawlers and 101 shellfish fishing boats (Taal *et al* 2003). Total employment in the fishing and shellfish-farming industry is approximately 2,650 jobs, excluding related sectors such as the processing industry, auctions, supply sector and retail trade that provide another 15,500 jobs. This only constitutes a tiny fraction of total employment in the Netherlands. However, although these numbers are relatively modest, the Dutch fish trade occupies an important position in Europe and the fleet is up to date in every respect. The value of total fish landings in the Netherlands amounted to 463 million euro in 2002; that of exports of fish and fish products was almost two billion euro. After a prolonged period of exceptionally good results in the 1990s, 2002 brought a seventeen per cent decrease of revenue compared with the previous year and a negative net result of four million euro.

The most important sector of the fishing industry is the capital intensive beam trawl fleet, which operates mostly in the North Sea to catch sole (*Solea solea*) and plaice (*Pleuronectus platessus*) on four to five-day trips usually starting on Monday. These species contribute approximately eighty per cent to the total revenues of beam trawling, a fishing technique that is applied by about half of the cutter fleet. The Netherlands holds a significant share of the EU Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for sole (roughly 75 per cent) and plaice (38 per cent). The larger vessels (exceeding 1500 horsepower engine power, with a length of 40-45 metres and crewed by six or more) land more than ninety per cent of the total market supply of flatfish. Vessels up to 300 horsepower are allowed to fish within the 12 nautical mile zone and the plaice box. In 1998, 43 of these multi-purpose Euro-cutters with a length of 20 to 25 metres and a crew of three or more were fishing for sole and plaice as the main target species. The majority of beam trawlers are family-owned and operated. Most flatfish fishing firms own one vessel, about a third own two or three, including several of the bigger beamers. Important concentrations of beam trawl fishers can be found in Urk, Goedereede, Stellendam, Arnemuiden, Vlissingen, Den Helder and on the island of Texel. Dutch beam trawl fishers operate under a share system of remuneration with crewmembers signing a partnership contract with the owner (*maatschap*), implying that all crewmembers earn a certain percentage of the net revenues.

The Netherlands was among the first countries to introduce individually transferable quotas (ITQs). This happened *de jure* in 1985, although *de facto* the practice of trading individual quotas developed in the late 1970s. Generally advocated by neoclassical fisheries economists as an effective and efficient mode of managing fisheries, the Dutch experience