Chapter 19
Governance for Global Competitiveness:
The Future of Aquaculture Policy in a World Turned Upside Down

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It may help here to recall Humphrey Lyttleton’s rejoinder to someone who asked him where Jazz was going: ‘If I knew where Jazz was going, I’d be there already’ (Winch 1958: 93–4).

Introduction

There is no shortage of technical innovation in Canadian aquaculture. There are new farming techniques and new products, and whole new industries are emerging based on breakthroughs in the farming of new species. This chapter, however, is not about innovation in aquaculture but about the kind of innovative public policies that are needed to release the potential of aquaculture to contribute to our economy and to our quality of life.

The argument is a simple one. Aquaculture presents special problems of policy coordination that urgently require a more collaborative, less “top-down” approach to policy-making than traditional governing arrangements are able to deliver. Aquaculture is not alone in presenting this challenge to conventional government and there is now considerable, though mixed, experience with alternative “governance” relationships from which we can learn. Among the lessons that have been learned from other resource policy areas is that governance is an increasingly important component of comparative advantage, so getting governance right is central to the present and future global competitiveness of the aquaculture industry in Canada. Getting governance right is a combination of understanding the problems facing the industry (which is relatively easy) and understanding how these problems can best be addressed in the new governance context in which aquaculture and other resource industries must operate (which is rather more difficult).

The chapter is organized as follows. In the next section, I introduce the idea of governance and explain its special relation to comparative advantage in a globalized economy. I then outline the most pressing problems of Canadian aquaculture that
will need to be addressed by new governance arrangements, and identify lessons to be learned from the experiences of other jurisdictions and other resource policy areas. Finally, I want to draw special attention to the new political context in which aquaculture must operate and the implications of this context for how problems are identified and policy solutions formulated and implemented. This new context is characterized by a poorly understood reversal of a number of familiar and important relationships: it is a world turned upside down.

One implication of the argument needs to be stated clearly at once. If the chapter is correct, no amount of scientific and technical innovation can address the fundamental problems of Canadian aquaculture – not abandoning net pens for closed container systems, not polyculture, not submerged offshore mariculture, not new species, not better marketing, more rational planning nor new end uses – all of them will simply reproduce the same governance problems in new forms and some will create new governance problems as well. This chapter is a plea for a better appreciation of how to use the full range of different modes of coordination to turn innovation into comparative advantage.

Governance and Comparative Advantage

“Governance” is a protean term. A recent study (Van Kersbergen and van Waarden 2004) lists no fewer than nine broad contemporary meanings whose very lack of precision indicates the scope of the breakdown in traditional governing mechanisms and their replacement by a coordination mechanism at once much looser and more all encompassing. Governance implies certainly a new and perhaps also a diminished role for governments, while at the same time stressing expanded roles for private corporations, civil society and international actors, whose own “good governance” thus becomes a matter of public concern. In this paper, I mean by governance the effort to sustain co-ordination and coherence among a wide variety of private and public actors with different purposes and objectives (Pierre 2000:3).

In the past, governments aimed to achieve co-ordination and coherence in resource policy largely by exploiting aspects of their authoritative relationship with society. Governments acted either directly by exercising ownership over public lands or other assets, or indirectly through subsidies to private enterprises and authoritative regulations with penalties attached aimed at correcting market failure, particularly the failure to value key elements of the global commons such as air and water. For a number of reasons, still poorly understood, there has been a general loss of confidence in both of these forms of authoritative coordination as the basis for public policy. In part, this loss of confidence stems from a growing realization that authoritative coordination of resource exploitation has not been especially cost-effective, failing to deliver environmental protection and other public goods while simultaneously distorting markets and encouraging rent-seeking behaviour. Right across the developed world, the “regulatory state” is in retreat (Jordan et al. 2005).