

# future of fish

## The hook for investing in the triple bottom line

An interview with Paul Parker, fisherman and advocate with the Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association

### Can you share with us your approach to establishing sustainable fisheries?

I've expended my career on three things: policy-based work to lobby government regulators, developing a model of community (co-op) harvesting, and reconnecting local communities back to the natural resource through permit banking. The Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association is a 501 c3 that aims to protect the environment and business. The goal is to realize the triple bottom line: social, economic, and environmental benefits.

### What triggered the inception of the Association?

We are a non-profit founded in 1991 in response to a crisis: fish stocks were plummeting and all types of fishing, from big industrial draggers to small skiffs, were being managed in the same way. So some modes of fishing were destroying the future viability of the resources, and we (the small scale community) were getting wiped out as a result of a lack of fish. The association came together to give voice to these small scale fishermen.

### What makes your organization unique?

We have a relevant voice. Who better to move policy on oceans—to deliver the message—than the people on the water themselves? We have invested time and resources to put our staff and volunteers on management boards, and have succeeded through diligence and the personalities of individuals who have taken those posts.

### So by being a group of fishermen, you get paid attention to?

Yes. But, we also stay focused on discussing what is feasible and come to the table with viable, workable solutions. We are not ideologues, not afraid to build out incrementally. Brokering partial success is really important. I see a lot of people standing on highly principled territory and they get nothing done.

### Can you provide an example of where this philosophy has proven successful?

Sure. Based on the success with community-based fisheries management in Canada and the Pacific Northwest, we felt it would make sense to zone the ocean here so people who live in one area get to harvest the fish from that area. But we recognized that the big draggers did not want to get boxed in, so instead of trying to lobby for policy change, where we knew there would be no hope,



PAUL PARKER

*Paul Parker has been working with Cape Cod fishermen since 1997 to restore depleted fish populations while bringing back profitable fishing businesses and communities. As the current Director of the Cape Cod Fisheries Trust, a program of the Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association, Paul is raising funds and buying cod, scallop and lobster permits in order to make sure there is a next generation of fishermen on the Cape. Paul's work with local fishermen has forged a new and promising model for other fishing communities that are working to save their fish, their fleets, and preserve a way of life.*

*Paul earned a BA in Biology from Cornell University and a Masters of Environmental Management from Duke University. In 2006, Paul was honored with the Duke Nicholas School Rising Star Award.*

<http://www.cchfa.org/trust>

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we adopted an alternative strategy. We said: “You guys do what you want, but our sense is that the management system is failing and so we are going to start a new system of management based on a cooperative harvest structure.”

## Can you explain how the cooperative structure worked?

For example: if 10 people each caught 0.2% of the cod quota historically, and they all joined our sector, then the sector would fish 2% of the annual quota.

## So you just went ahead and did it on your own?

Yes. This is a great example of incremental success because if we tried to lobby for a policy that made everyone join the sector, we wouldn't have gotten anything done. But, we said we're creating a solution that affects only us and allowed everyone else to keep screwing it up. It set an example that showed potential. Now, the entire fishery in New England will be managed under sectors by 2011. So we've catalyzed expansion of the concept to the rest of the fishery.

## So, is establishing sectors the answer to sustainability?

In part. But, there can be problems if permits are sold outside the community and become corporate-controlled. For instance, Chatham used to be a cod port, but now there is not a lot of cod there. So older fishermen are looking to sell their permits but nobody locally wants to buy them because there is no cod right now. So they sell them to folks outside of the area. The traditional wealth of the community is being exported and there is no plan for how this impacts the community in the future. We were envisioning rebuilding cod stocks in the future and then not being allowed to fish them because all permits had been sold to outsiders. Our answer has been permit-banking, a fisheries trust. We are a community-based entity that is prepared to purchase and hold permits on behalf of the community.

## How do you achieve this?

We needed a way to affix and connect the rights to catch fish back to the fishing community. Individuals who possess the permits have the right to sell them for a fair market value, so we've created the fisheries trust to fill the gap between the selling price and what local fishermen can afford. So, through the trust, we endeavor to buy permits and then lease them to local fishermen in the community at affordable rates, but we do so with specific restrictions: we make sure of the social, economic and environmental results. For instance, hypothetically, we could require that to lease our permits you need to be a boat captain who lives on Cape Cod and has to agree to using gears that have the least impact on the environment.

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