

**Carmel Finley**

**All the Boats on the Oceans: The Politics of Fishery Subsidies**

Government subsidies are generally recognized as one of the major factors that has led to overcapacity, or the building of too many fishing boats. All of the major studies on overfishing recognize the political problems that come with attempting to curtail or eliminate fishing subsidies. But why were the subsidies created in the first place?

I'm a former newspaper reporter, I'm married to a retired commercial fisherman, and I've lived on the Oregon coast in a fishing community. My work seeks to identify the causes for overfishing. My dissertation, which formed the basis for *All the Fish in the Sea: Maximum Sustained Yield and the Failure of Fisheries Management*, looked at the role of politics in the development of fisheries science. Between 1949 and 1958, the U.S. State Department used fishery science as a political tool to prevent the establishment of territorial limits over fishing that might set a precedent for restrictions on military travel. I conclude that the political and legal developments around MSY have made it impossible for new scientific understandings to be incorporated into fisheries policy. Current fishery policy is based on assumptions about the ocean dating from the 1950s, which we now know are incorrect.

This current project seeks to understand the assumptions about the ocean that were inherent in fisheries development after the war. Scientists throughout the 1960s engaged in exercises to gauge how many fish could be caught on a sustained basis. Even the most conservative estimates were far in excess of what we now know are the sustained catch. Based on these expansive estimates, governments created a range of incentives to build fishing boats and processing facilities.

Part of the impetus was the hunger crisis immediately after the war, a humanitarian goal of ending world hunger by increasing the harvest from the sea, and enormous faith in the technologies (such as radar and sonar) that were developed during the war and were now being transferred to private industry.

There were domestic reasons to expand fishing. The Canadians, for example, wanted to provide employment in coastal communities and produce fish products for export. There were foreign policy reasons as well, including territorial claims, for Japan, the Soviet Union, and the United States. Fishing is never just about fish, there is always another agenda.

This project seeks to explore the reasons for the creation of government subsidies, and their persistence, long after fish stocks have been severely reduced or even eradicated. By examining the assumptions behind government actions during this period, I hope to offer an explanation of how overfishing happened. With this explanation, perhaps we can chart a new understanding of the human relationship with the sea, based on principles of conservation of fish stocks, not just estimating the maximum harvest.