

Lecture offers many views on crisis

by Garth Sweet

Last Saturday at the Rebecca Cohn, the Dalhousie Science Society and the Environment with noted broadcaster and environmentalist Dr. David Suzuki as the keynote guest speaker. The lecture was held on the evening of Saturday the 10th, and drew a packed house of over 1,000 people, filling the Rebecca Cohn to capacity. Sponsoring the lecture were the Dalhousie Science Society (DSS), business heavyweights Clearwater Fine Foods and MT&T Mobility, plus twelve other small local businesses and two other Dalhousie societies. Other guest speakers included Dalhousie's own Dr. Bob Fournier, noted oceanographer and CBC radio personality, John Risley the president of Clearwater and Mr. Gary Dedrick former President of the Southwest Shore Fixed Gear Association, representing the interests of the fishing community.

The focus of the discussion was mainly the Atlantic cod fishery, which has been facing a crisis for the last several years resulting in an indefinite closure of the fishery in August of 1993. Dr. Fournier opened the discussion by outlining the main problems of the fishery and discussing the five possible reasons for the severe decline in cod fish stocks. The five main possible reasons he cited for the decline are climatic changes (water too cold), increasing seal populations (they may be eating cod for food), natural cycles (in the past record low numbers of cod fish have been reported), and lastly over-fishing. He detailed how he sees the problem as going beyond simply having low numbers of cod fish. It extends to having fish that are very small compared to fish of years before and having populations so small that the ability for the schools to regrow has been severely compromised. He concluded by explaining how the closing of the cod fishery in Atlantic Canada has resulted in the largest group layoffs in Canada's history, with between 30,000 and 40,000 people losing their jobs directly or indirectly from the fishery's closure.



Dal's Dr. Bob Fournier, Dr. David Suzuki, and Clearwater's John Risley.

DALPHOTO: MIKE DEVONPORT

Next to speak was John Risley of Clearwater Fine Foods. Risley spoke on the Clearwater perspective of the cod fish problem and defended the use of dragger boats for fishing, citing the fact that there have been no conclusive studies showing them to be environmentally harmful.

A dragger boat uses a large fine mesh net dragged behind the boat either directly on or slightly off the bottom of the ocean. The net is held open by large metal bars, fish are scooped into the net through the large opening and later hauled into the boat. Dragners have long been condemned by environmentalists as they may damage the ocean floor with the nets they drag across the bottom. They may also scoop too many fish at a time, often all from a single school.

Fishermen have also condemned the dragners for the same reasons and because they require so few people to operate compared to traditional longline fishing methods.

Longline fishing consists of towing lines of baited hooks behind the boat, fish from the schools then bite the hooked lines and are caught. The longline approach is favoured by environmentalists and fishermen as it does virtually no environmental damage and employs many times more people both on and off the

boats.

Risley went beyond citing the lack of a conclusive study on dragners, and noted that in the years around 1790, 1890, and 1930 there were also record low cod fish stocks reported. He favoured foreign over-fishing and cool water temperature cycles as primary reasons for the cod fish declines. Concluding, he suggested one of the best solutions to the problem

The closing of the cod fishery in Atlantic Canada has resulted in the largest layoffs in Canada's history

is to allocate fish quotas to individual fishermen. Then they could buy out other fishermen's quotas to increase their own (any single quota wouldn't be enough to support a fisherman, so buying out other people would be necessary). Similarly, processing plants would be allocated processing quotas. This would allow them to purchase quotas from other plants until they had enough to support themselves. Risley felt this would

insure fairness and competitiveness in the industry as only the larger, more efficient operations would have enough capital to buy out quotas. Less efficient people would be forced from the industry. It's worth noting that Clearwater maintains the largest inshore fishing fleet and is the largest processor of cod fish in Atlantic Canada. They would be in excellent position to purchase quotas from private fishermen and smaller processing plants.

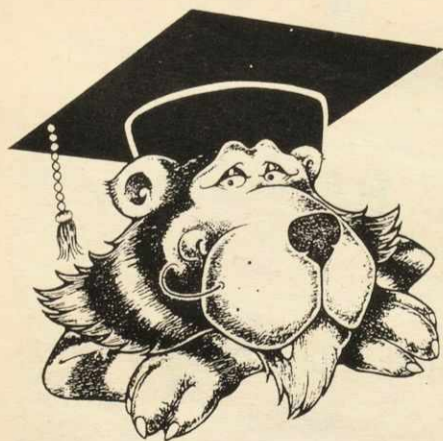
Third to speak was Mr. Gary Dedrick, past President of the Southwest Shore Fixed Gear Association. Dedrick spoke on behalf of the fishermen in general. Dedrick is notable as the spokesperson for the Shelburne blockade last year of a Russian fishing vessel which was carrying cod fish caught outside of Canada's 200-mile limit for processing here in Nova Scotia. He was a fisherman most of his life until forced out of the business by the closure of the cod fishery. Dedrick cited massive over-fishing by foreign vessels off Canada's 200-mile limit as one of the primary reasons for the decline of the existing fish stocks. Boats fishing off the 200-mile limit aren't subject to Canadian fishing laws, and the countries they are from may not have laws pertaining to over-fishing cod stocks. Dedrick also spoke of government

inefficiencies and lack of understanding of the fishery. He cited dragners as being a major problem, as they damage or destroy cod fish breeding grounds and take too many fish from the ocean too fast. Dedrick noted that a single dragger boat can take from the ocean in one month what the entire longline fleet does in a year. He concluded by saying the best solution in his mind was to let cod fish stocks rebound and insist on a purely longline fishing industry with tight controls on foreign fishing.

Dr. Suzuki was the last to speak and received generous applause as he reached the podium. He spoke of the issue in a broader context and related the cod fish crisis to other problems facing the world such as urban violence and deforestation of both British Columbia's temperate rain forests and the Amazon basin. He spoke of how the world has undergone its most massive changes not far back in history, but recently in our own lifetimes. He explained how the population of the world is growing at an exponential rate that may not allow us to provide for our needs unless our lifestyles and our governments change drastically. On the issue of declining fish stocks Suzuki cited government agencies each demanding to be involved in the decisions as being a primary reason why the problems weren't being looked at fully, but rather just in the context of each agency's turf. He felt dragners were a "stupid way to fish" and couldn't understand why people were still allowed to use them. He went on to say that our rate of technological advancement is exceeding by leaps and bounds our ability to use wisely what we have created. Speaking to the crowd in an entertaining and easy manner, he concluded by saying that unless we slowed our rate of progress, the Earth could be in deadly peril.

After a standing ovation from the crowd, the lecture switched over to a question-and-answer session. People focused questions on the continued use of dragners and on global environmental issues. Suzuki and Risley fielded most of the questions, with differing opinions on most of the issues.

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