

Subsistence Fishing in Canada: A Note on Terminology

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ABSTRACT. Several terms (subsistence, domestic, harvest and food fishing) are used often synonymously in Canada to refer to fishing carried out to satisfy local food needs. To resolve the confusion and to provide consistency, it is desirable to consolidate the terminology. "Subsistence" connotes the appropriate meaning in both anthropology and economics, and is therefore favored here. It has the added advantage of being the term used in Alaska.

Key words: subsistence, domestic fisheries, food fisheries, harvesting, native people, Canadian North

RÉSUMÉ. Plusieurs termes (pêche de subsistance, pêche domestique, pêche d'exploitation, pêche pour la nourriture) sont souvent utilisés au Canada comme des synonymes de la pêche en tant qu'activité exécutée pour répondre aux besoins en nourriture de la population locale. Pour clarifier cette situation et pour en arriver à plus d'uniformité, il serait préférable de regrouper la terminologie. Le terme «subsistance» possède la connotation appropriée à la fois du point de vue anthropologique et du point de vue économique, et il est donc le terme préféré dans le présent contexte. Il a de plus l'avantage d'être le terme utilisé en Alaska.

Mots clés: subsistance, pêcheries domestiques, pêcheries pour la nourriture, exploitation, peuple indigène, Nord canadien

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INTRODUCTION

There is little agreement or consistency in the scientific/technical literature regarding the terminology used to describe local, non-commercial fisheries oriented not primarily for recreation but for the procurement of fish for consumption of the fishers, their families and community. In different jurisdictions in Canada, a number of terms are used: subsistence, domestic, food fisheries and harvesting. These reflect, on the one hand, the wording in laws and regulations, and on the other, the accepted terminology in the discipline (biology, economics, anthropology) of the authors of technical reports. In the United States, the term "subsistence" is almost exclusively used both in the technical literature and in the law (Lonner, 1980). As the term is applied in the statutes of the State of Alaska, subsistence use is the "customary and traditional uses in Alaska of wild, renewable resources for direct personal or family consumption. . . ." The definition in the U.S. federal law is similar in substance but includes the limiting language "by rural Alaska residents" (Kelso, 1982).

The following summarizes the different terms in use of non-commercial, local food fisheries in different geographical areas in Canada.

1) In Quebec, under the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (1976) such fishing would be called harvesting. As set out in paragraph 24.1.13, "harvesting means the hunting, fishing and trapping by the Native people . . . for personal and community purposes. . . ." Further, "community use" includes intercommunity trade (paragraph 24.1.6).

2) Ontario describes such fishing as harvest fishing under Article 3 of the defunct Ontario Native Fishing Agreement of 1982. According to the agreement, " 'harvest fishing' means fishing by an Indian as defined by the *Indian Act* . . . for food for himself, his family, or for band use, or for barter between communities. . . ." The term "harvest fishing" has been retained in the new round of Indian fishing negotiations that started in 1986.

3) In British Columbia, native fishing is called "food fishing." Although this term does not seem to appear in any legisla-

tion, the permit obtained by a native person to fish for his/her own use is called "Indian Food Fishing License." It is issued under the British Columbia Fishing Regulations, which is federal legislation.

4) In Saskatchewan, "subsistence fishery" includes those who fish to supply food for their families. Under the Natural Resources Transfer Agreement of 1930 between Canada and Saskatchewan, Indians' right to fish for food has been recognized. There are two kinds of subsistence fishery permits. The "Indian fishery" represents subsistence fishery for status Indians; "domestic fishery" represents subsistence fishery for all others, including Metis and non-status Indians (Murray and Clouthier, 1986:1-3).

5) In Manitoba and the Northwest Territories (N.W.T.), "domestic fishing" is the commonly used term for non-commercial, food fisheries (Green and Derksen, 1984:100; Science Advisory Board, 1980:16).

6) In the Western Arctic sector of the N.W.T., the Inuvialuit Final Agreement of 1984 terms such fishing "subsistence fishing." Paragraph 14(26) stipulates that "the Inuvialuit (people) may, without restriction, sell, trade or barter fish and marine mammal products acquired in subsistence fisheries to other Inuvialuit, regardless of residence. . . ."

The use of these diverse terms to refer basically to one kind of fishing practice is confusing for legal purposes (Bennett, 1982). It also makes it difficult for scholars to use consistent terminology (e.g., Berkes, 1979, 1983), and no doubt creates problems for readers as well. While the diversity of terminology is not frivolous (but is often related to the legal status of the fishery), it is nevertheless desirable to rationalize its use.

One way to evaluate the appropriateness of these terms is by resorting to their dictionary meanings. According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (7th ed.):

Harvest: Reaping and gathering-in of grain and other products; season's yield of any natural product.

Domestic: Of the home, household or family affairs.

Subsistence: Means of supporting life, livelihood, what one lives on or by.

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By contrast,

commercial: Of, engaged in, bearing on, commerce; interested in financial return rather than artistry.

From these definitions, it appears that a case can be made for each of the terms. However, "harvest" has agricultural connotations to many, or at least implies that the resource is being closely managed for the taking. "Domestic" has a narrower household sense not shared by the other two terms. In anthropology, "domestic mode of production" refers to the organization of productive activities at the household level (Sahlins, 1972). "Subsistence" is perhaps the most universally appropriate term among the three in referring to "what one lives on." In anthropology, "subsistence" is a technical term used to refer to just such kinds of food-getting activities (Sahlins, 1972). It is also the accepted term in economics used to distinguish a self-sufficient economy from a cash or market economy.

How do these terms fit with the day-to-day reality of these fisheries and from the point of view of the native concepts of food procurement? "Domestic" is perhaps too narrow to describe traditional fisheries because a substantial part of the catch often goes to other households and into the inter- and intra-community trade networks. This kind of community exchange is recognized, for example, by both the James Bay Agreement and the Inuvialuit Final Agreement, but not by provincial legislation, which limits subsistence fishing to personal use only (Bennett, 1982:9).

The term "harvesting" probably makes good sense to many native groups. For example, in the eastern James Bay Cree usage, the word *nituuahun* refers collectively to all types of hunting, fishing and trapping activities. By contrast, the term "subsistence" does not have an exact equivalent in Cree. This may also be the case in other native languages as well, as the difference between subsistence, commercial and recreational fishing may not be distinct concepts in such languages, while they are in English.

There is another term, "artisanal fisheries," which is in common international (e.g., FAO) usage to refer to small-scale, traditional fisheries in which the fishermen often keep part of their catch, selling only the surplus (Emmerson, 1980). The term is probably not appropriate to northern native fisheries in Canada, where there is a legal distinction between commercial and non-commercial fisheries for reasons of conservation and general administration. Commercial sale is allowed only when a fisherman is so licensed and is under government control. This is in contrast to Third World countries, where governments usually encourage artisanal fishermen to enter the cash economy. All Third World artisanal fishermen are basically incipient commercial fishermen; this is not the case for northern Canadian native fishermen.

In conclusion, the term "subsistence fishing" is favoured to describe non-commercial, local food fisheries. First, it conveys the key notion of self-sufficiency. Second, it is more widely used than the other terms. Third, it may be appropriately applied to non-native as well as to native fishermen engaged in mainly consumption-oriented fishing. Fourth, it is the logical technical term for economists and anthropologists. Finally, subsistence, meaning "what one lives on," describes fully and appropriately the northern native concept. The term "harvesting" is similarly appropriate for describing the *activity* itself. As pointed out by Usher and Wenzel (1987), this term appears to be in common use, as in "native harvest surveys."

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