

THE FISH LOCALLY COLLABORATIVE NARRATIVE

*The purpose of this document is to express a **shared understanding** of the current realities facing fishing communities, the context in which Fish Locally Collaborative (FLC) collaborators work, and our collective efforts toward a better future. This narrative does not necessarily express the truth for every fishing community, but rather tells a story of our shared truth. As a network that relies on **decentralized collaboration**, we embrace a diversity of views and experiences. However, our diversity* makes it all the more important to have a clear and mutually agreed-upon set of values and vision. This narrative serves to identify our **common ground**, orient and align with new collaborators, provide a 'north star' for direction, and help partners outside the network understand our work and identify room for alignment.*



The Big Problems We Face

For thousands of years, fisheries have provided sustenance, livelihoods, and cultural traditions for coastal communities. With the introduction of global trade, industrial revolution, and increased collective capacity, people fished farther, deeper and in higher volumes. Fish transportation increased around the globe, reaching more people and disrupting marine ecosystem balance.

Today the momentum toward industrialization, globalization, and market capitalization further undermines marine, food, social, and economic systems that depend on fishing.

Import and export markets and production outsourcing have severed the connection between the fishermen*, the consumer and local seafood infrastructure. As a result, seafood products often travel thousands of miles away from the ports where they are fished, contributing to fossil fuel emissions and increased use of preservatives and chemicals, often compromising the nutritional value and safety of the seafood brought to market.

Livelihoods, working waterfronts, marine ecosystems and traditional knowledge have been eroded as a drive for so called “efficiency”, or the cheapest cost of production, consolidates the industry into fewer but bigger boats, and aggregation, processing, and transportation companies. Many companies in and outside the US are not held accountable for violating workers’ rights. Commodity markets often drive over-consumption and deplete profitable fish stocks. Species that yield little to no profit in the current market structures yet are healthy and abundant, either remain in the ocean, are caught and thrown overboard dead, or are transformed into fish meal for pet food, livestock feed or fertilizer.

Management systems are mostly oriented to the global market and continue to compromise marine ecosystems and fishing communities by, among other things, consolidating fishing operations into single species, high volume, low-value fleets.

Policies that promote so-called “rights-based fishing” are rapidly turning fisheries access* into monetary assets that act as private-property. Similar to cap-and-trade models, the ability to purchase quota and permits has consolidated upward to those with the most access to capital, which are often distant corporations. The current generation of community-based* fishermen are rapidly losing fisheries access and in addition, the high cost of access is making it nearly impossible for the next generation to enter the fishery and replace the shrinking numbers.

Illegitimate representation, funding opacity, and conflicts of interest are present at all levels of the fisheries sector and have a crippling effect on necessary reforms to promote sustainable livelihoods, marine conservation, and collaboration.

Compounding all this, climate change, mineral and fossil fuel extraction, deforestation, toxic pollution, runoff from industrial agriculture, and other threats are eroding the regenerative nature of the ocean. The dominant narrative focuses on ocean resources as the engine to power the next great economic leap forward (energy generation, transport, mineral extraction, bio-resource development/ extraction for the health industry). This approach marginalizes fishing communities, the role they play in protecting marine ecosystems, and risks displacing community based fishermen while empowering the factory fishing fleet that has the fiscal and physical mobility to roam the globe looking for the next fishing boon.

Efforts in the name of conservation which focus on separating humans from nature are leading to the commodification of polluting rights and speculative investment.

This approach undermines true conservation efforts and displaces those who are best poised to protect marine resources.

Solutions We Are Working Toward

The Fish Locally Collaborative participants stand committed to the preservation and restoration of fisheries that are in balance with nature, provide healthy, fresh fish and shellfish to the public, and rebuild vibrant and resilient fishing fleets and port communities. The FLC believes that:

- The well-being of all people working along the seafood supply chain, seafood eaters and the health of the ocean are **inextricably linked** and should provide the framework for restoring and strengthening marine ecosystems.
- We must ensure **fair prices** to fishermen, and fair pay to crew and fishworkers, as well as safe working conditions.
- Seafood supply chains should match the **rhythms of the ocean** and its varied wild food production capacity.
- Seafood supply chains must be **transparent, fair and accountable** to all.
- We must create support for fishermen to adapt to rapidly changing marine ecosystems and climate change that in many cases disrupts and displaces fisheries livelihoods.
- All humans have a **right to good food** and food from the ocean should not be accessible only to the highest bidder nor should wealth be the sole determinant for access to seafood.
- We promote **community-based management**.* Government policies must be transparent and provide opportunities for meaningful public participation emphasizing input from indigenous and community-based fishermen, rather than the few who benefit from consolidation, privatization*, and commoditization.

- Although the ocean and its resources are held in **public trust** many management systems treat fisheries access as private property. **We stand against attempts to privatize** access and recommit to upholding the public trust doctrine.
- **Future generations** of community-based fishermen and indigenous communities must be guaranteed access to the fisheries resources.

Looking Forward

With these values and beliefs in hand, participants of the FLC are co-creating a sustainable and equitable future for the fisheries. We work towards a healthy ocean and an engaged population of community-based fishermen, workers along the supply chain and the broader public. Together, we are envisioning and collaborating toward resilient fisheries based on local ecosystems, cultures, and economies. Through our individual and collective work we are rebuilding the connection between harvesters and consumers through a spreading movement of Farmers Markets, institutional buying, and other boat-to-plate projects. We promote responsible and accountable community-based management, opportunity for future generations of community-based fishermen, protections for local access, and reasonable restrictions on consolidation. We advocate for governance and policy frameworks that assert all of our values.

Fundamentally, we support the creativity, innovation, and collaboration of indigenous people, fishermen, port communities, and scientists, as they work to restore healthy fisheries. This includes habitat preservation and restoration, diversified catches, value added products, and making use of the whole animal. We work to restore coastal and ocean abundance by rebuilding regional seafood systems, advocating for policy changes, educating and engaging a broad public, and partnering with non-traditional land based allies who recognize their interconnectedness with healthy marine ecosystems.

FLC participants connect across many different communities, share our wide ranging knowledge, align around shared values, and take action for a healthy fisheries future.





*** DEFINITIONS**

We care about the words we use to communicate our beliefs, values and practices. We recognize the limits of language, and want our collaborators and allies to understand the intent of our speech. To that end, here's what we mean when we use certain terms:

Fishermen

For the purposes of this document and being concise, we use this as an inclusive and gender-neutral term, in keeping with standard usage among most people who fish. It encompasses terms like fish harvesters, fisherwomen, watermen, fishers, intertidal gatherers, as well as those practicing aquaculture.

Diversity

This refers to the variations of culture, marine biology, and fishing fleet attributes that embody the fisheries in which we work. Cultural diversity means the various economic, racial, ethnic, geographical, and experiential backgrounds represented within the FLC and beyond. Biodiversity refers to the variety of life forms within the ecosystems in which we work. And fishing fleet diversity refers to different forms of gear types, species caught, boat sizes, and geographical locations within a given fishing community.

Community-based fishermen

Community-based fishermen live and work in the communities where they fish. They are typically either crew members or independent owner-operators and the bulk of the boat's earned income circulates within close range of the community. This contrasts with fishing operations that extract money and resources from coastal communities and circulate them elsewhere, often carried out by large corporations or investors without community ties. Community-based fishermen fish at a scale that matches the scale of the marine ecosystem. They are ecological experts attuned to the nuances of ocean rhythms, fish migration patterns, and spawning habitat. Community-based fishermen are part of the social fabric that builds identity and culture within a community.*

Owner-operator

Owner-operators are holders of fishing rights (through licenses or other legal means) who also operate the vessel fishing, thus ensuring a direct connection between fisheries resources and the fisherman. Examples of non owner-operators who hire captains and

crew include: speculative investors, retired fishermen financing their retirement plan, or industry processors looking to secure access.

Although we believe fisheries access should not be privatized, in regions where privatization policies have been implemented, the owner-operator principle has prevented some of the most negative effects, keeping speculation and consolidation somewhat at bay, and keeping fisheries access in the hands of community-based fishing fleets, which for many rural coastal communities is the largest private sector employer.

The owner-operator principle also applies to businesses along the seafood supply chain whether it's processing, operating a Community Supported Fishery (CSF), or a wholesale operation. We value control over these businesses remaining in the hands of those who are working the business, rather than far-away investors or companies that have no stake in the health or welfare of the fishery.

Access

Access refers to two distinct concepts. The first is related to access to fisheries resources for community-based fishermen. Due to regulations (e.g. area closures and privatization) and non-fishing impacts (e.g. climate change and pollution), access for community-based fishermen is constantly threatened. Access also refers to food accesses for low-income and working class communities as well as communities of color.

Privatization

Privatization is the conversion of a public resource into private property that is owned and controlled by an individual or firm. The act of transforming fishing access rights into monetary, private-property assets, consistently allows those with access to capital to purchase and consolidate permits and quotas. Similarly, privatizing the ocean's bottom and/or water column to accommodate extractive industries such as oil and gas exploration compromises the health of the ocean commons. The ocean and its resources should be held in public trust for current and future generations. Policies should be designed to prevent further consolidation and ensure that coastal communities maintain access to marine resources, and protect against extractive non-fishing activities.

Local Seafood

Defining "local seafood" is difficult and complex because "local" means different things depending on location, ecosystem, and more. Therefore rather than propose an all encompassing definition of "local seafood," we provide some considerations we make when defining local in the context of our individual fisheries and communities.

- *Customer proximity to where the fish is landed*
- *Customer proximity to where the fish was caught*
- *Customer proximity to the fisherman*
- *Distance traveled by product in the supply chain*
- *Management boundary of the fishery*
- *Relationship (even when mediated by a fishmonger or a fish transformer) between the fisherman and consumers*
- *Fairness and dignity within the entire value chain*

Community-based Co-management

Based upon our network's discussions and relying heavily on research aligned with Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrom and many others, we offer the following definition:

Community-based co-management is an approach toward managing fisheries resources as a public commons. This collaborative approach centers around local ecological knowledge as the backbone for decision-making. Emphasis is placed on both the fishing community and the government having an equal voice and vote throughout the decision making process as well as an increased sense of co-responsibility amongst the full range of people affected (typically the government and/or regional authorities, fishing communities, scientific community, and the public). Core attributes of this management approach include:

- *Clear management areas.*
- *Rules that govern and protect fisheries resources are matched to local needs and conditions.*
- *Those affected by the rules can participate in modifying the rules.*
- *Rulemaking and rules are respected by outside authorities and third parties.*
- *Rulemaking includes monitoring members' behavior and is carried out by the community members themselves, sometimes with the help of trusted others.*
- *Graduated sanctions for rule violators.*
- *Accessible, low-cost means for dispute resolution.*
- *Responsibility for governing the fisheries resource is nested in tiers from the lowest level up to the entire interconnected system.*
- *Prominent community leadership, verified legitimate representation, and social cohesion.*
- *Clear incentives that, for example, include a fair and accountable system where fleet diversity is respected and collaboration is emphasized.*