

*The Northeast's Fishing Newspaper for over 33 years*  
**Commercial Fisheries News**  
Online Edition Updated Monthly A Compass Publication



Commercial Fisheries News  
Volume 35 Number 1  
September 2007

  
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**Port Clyde draggermen establish new co-op**

PORT CLYDE, ME – The picturesque Midcoast Maine town of Port Clyde is in the national spotlight these days, not just because of the health of summer resident Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, but due to some exciting changes for the local fishing industry.

Fishermen from Port Clyde – home to the state's second largest groundfish fleet – recently established the Port Clyde Draggermen's Co-op Inc. Nine draggermen and at least one gillnet fisherman have made a commitment to the new co-op, which is primarily aimed at marketing local groundfish and shrimp.

Already there is interest from fishermen in other Maine harbors about the new co-op, which got its start in June 2006 with the formation of the Midcoast Fishermen's Association. During subsequent meetings, the association decided to set up a co-op, and it became official when it was incorporated on Jan. 1, 2007.

With Glen Libby at the helm as president and Randy Cushman as vice-president, the new co-op is working toward saving the community's fishing industry.

Fish, shrimp

According to Libby and his brother Gary, so far, groundfish fishing has been better this year than in previous years in the areas they work off the Midcoast.

Typically, Greg Holmes of "Wa 2 Much Trucking" in Tenants Harbor trucks groundfish and shrimp landed in Port Clyde to Portland. The Libby brothers said that Holmes has been through thick and thin with local fishermen and is a big part of the new operation.

"Whatever we do, we want to continue to support the Portland Fish Exchange," said Glen Libby. "The Maine boats that have remained need to rally around the exchange."

In addition to groundfish, Port Clyde fishermen put a considerable amount of shrimp across their dock.

Preliminary data indicates 1,121,183 pounds of shrimp were landed in Port Clyde during the 2006-2007 season, according to Heidi Bray at the Maine Department of Marine Resources. Based on very preliminary data, shrimp prices ranged from about 28 cents to 39 cents per pound.

Said Libby, "We would like to keep working with Cozy Harbor Seafood in selling our shrimp, but we would like to set up additional markets."

Prices for Maine shrimp are at historic lows and market-imposed quotas are further hurting fishermen, he added.

Professional business help

Co-op members are focusing on the branding and marketing of Port Clyde fish and shrimp to boost revenues. Groups throughout the



US, such as the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute, an organization of Louisiana shrimp fishermen known as the White Boot Brigade, and the Maine Lobster Promotion Council, have all successfully marketed local wild-caught products to American consumers.

The members of the draggersmen's co-op, with help from Jen Levin, formerly with the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance, contacted Maine & Company, a privately funded, Portland-based, nonprofit corporation that attracts businesses to Maine and helps existing businesses expand.

"They came to me needing business help and asked me what I thought," said Maine & Company President and CEO Matt Jacobson of the draggersmen's co-op members.

After looking at the fishermen's businesses and seeing that their average price per pound remained constant each year, it was clear that, in the current regulatory climate, they couldn't make up their losses with volume, Jacobson explained.

This was a defining moment for the co-op members as they realized they could no longer live with the status quo. Selling less product at a constant price simply defied the law of supply and demand.

"What I did was put together an ad hoc team," said Jacobson.

The team consists of individuals who assist with the business and operations piece of the co-op, and address legal issues, public relations, and marketing.

The way Jacobsen sees it, these boats and people are worth saving.

"The story of Port Clyde – fishermen operating as stewards and fishing on small boats out of Maine – has a lot of appeal to certain segments," he explained. "It's these guys and this place – the village of Port Clyde."

#### Marketing, branding

Swardlick Marketing Group, which is based in Portland, is helping the Port Clyde Draggersmen's Co-op establish a unique brand identity.

Swardlick has worked on several successful commodity-branding campaigns but probably is best known for its work with the Wild Blueberry Association of North America to make the blueberry an icon of good health.

"We like to say that a brand is a 'commodity with a personality,'" said John Sauve, managing director of the group's Food and Nutrition Team. "We need to alter the model in which fish goes to market. In order to do that, we need to know how we can add value and build this product into one that people know about and recognize."

Sauve stressed that it's still extremely early in the process.

"But this is a fun project," he said, "and we are happy to be part of the team to make this happen."

#### Location

For the last several years, many Port Clyde fishermen have been unloading at the privately owned Zwicker family wharf.

But the plan is to move the Port Clyde Draggersmen's Co-op to a new extension that will be built this winter at a wharf across the way used by the long-established Port Clyde Fishermen's Co-op, which is a lobster co-op.

As part of a project partially funded by a \$250,000 Working Waterfront Access Pilot Program grant awarded earlier this summer to the Port Clyde Fishermen's Co-op to secure access to its wharf (see CFN August 2007), a building will be moved back and an up to 150' long by 30' wide wharf extension will be built. The

extension will be fitted with a concrete slab that can handle tractor trailers and adverse weather conditions.

“We haven’t received the money yet,” said lobsterman Gerry Cushman in early August. “A survey of the property needs to be done as well as tying up some loose ends.”

#### Securing access

Cushman, who also owns a dragger, has been a driving force behind the push to secure waterfront access for Port Clyde fishermen. As a fourth generation fisherman, he said he felt it is important that the property remain working waterfront forever, something that the working waterfront grant covenant will ensure.

“Not one of us has the right to sell that co-op or the land,” he said. “It was given to us by the founding fishermen and will continue to be used by future generations.”

Well-known marine builder Prock Marine Company of Rockland, which has experience building wharves with concrete inlays, has been working with Cushman and the Port Clyde Fishermen’s Co-op.

“If the permits and engineering go as planned, then we expect construction to begin this winter – most likely after the first of the year when lobster fishing slows down,” said Cushman.

Rosanne Mizzoni

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