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LETTERS

Fisheries policy is breeding an industry beset by corruption

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AS AN organization led by commercial fishermen, we have long been concerned that the drive to consolidate the industry would lead to the kind of collusion and corruption alleged in the case of a local fishing mogul ([“Seafood sting hauls in a big fish,”](#) Page A1, Feb. 27).

Fisheries policy makers have claimed that programs such as catch shares would lead to fewer, more easily regulated fishing operations. Not surprisingly, fewer players, such as New Bedford-based Carlos Rafael, who was arrested in an IRS-led sting operation, now own and control more of the fishing industry, including permits, quotas, and shoreside facilities.

These policies painfully resemble those that led to the consolidation of “too big to fail” financial institutions, which led to taxpayer-funded bailouts, despite clear criminal activities. We have offered proposals to address our concerns, and to ensure sustainability of both marine ecosystems and our fishing communities, only to be shouted down. While we have had microphones turned off and expletives thrown at us during public meetings, the powerful few, such as Rafael, have had unbridled access.

Many of the fishermen we work with have been intimidated, bullied on the water, and threatened with economic blackmail if they speak up. Last September we helped organize a walkout by fishermen to send a message that we will not stand idly by.

Regardless of the outcome of the charges against Rafael, it is clear that the current state of fisheries management and the continued marginalization of the majority of fishermen is destroying the future of fishing while erasing decades of conservation. We urge the public to stand with community-based fishermen.

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