The Fishing-Dependent Community

EVELYN PINKERTON

This chapter provides a description of one rural isolated fishing-dependent region that is characterized by both underdevelopment and persistent attempts to overcome underdevelopment. Following a brief description of the region as a whole, the first half of the chapter focusses on the community of Tofino, the decline of its fishery, and attempts to sustain a fish-processing facility there. The second half describes the Indian village of Ahousaht, where fishing provides the organizing principle for nearly all social life, in addition to being the major source of employment. In conclusion, the survival strategies and development possibilities of both communities are outlined.

The purposes of the chapter are: (1) to show something of the character of the communities and the extent to which social life and culture have been patterned around fishing; (2) to show what dependence on fishing means in both social and economic terms, and how people in this situation are affected by government policies related to fishing; (3) to recognize the potential that is demonstrated in the way people cope with underdevelopment; the efficiency of a small-scale fishery at Ahousaht, the locational advantages of a fish-processing plant at Tofino, and the degree of human effort mobilized to save the resource and the communities.

THE REGION

Beginning in February 1982, I lived for nine weeks in the region of the west coast of Vancouver Island. This region extends from Winter Harbour to Nitinat, 360 kilometres of coastline (see map, page 7). I concentrated mostly on Tofino, but also spent time in Port Alberni, Ucluelet, and Ahousaht, interviewing fishers and shoreworkers about their work histories, opinions, attitudes, and community relations. As well, I interviewed fish-plant managers, cash buyers, community leaders, local businessmen, local historians, and Department of Fisheries and Oceans personnel. At least seven other fishing-dependent regions on the coast share some of the characteristics of this region, and therefore this one may be considered representative.

For a high percentage of people in this and similar areas, fishing is a skill learned early in life, often to the exclusion of other job skills. For
some villages in these areas, particularly Indian villages, fishing is the
dominant activity around which life has always been organized, and it serves important
functions in distribution, socialization, social participation, and mutual
support.

Similar degrees of fishing dependence in these regions have produced
similar degrees of vulnerability to fleet rationalization policies and to
centralizing processing and services. With the exception of three villages
within the eight areas, all of these sites have suffered similar patterns of
decline in the number of salmon licences held by local residents (Figure
13.1).

These fishing-dependent villages have also been affected by capital
withdrawals from the regions, either directly, when in-plant jobs were
eliminated with the closure of a local cannery, or indirectly, when the
removal of a cannery or packing services influenced local fishers’ ability
to continue fishing. A locally sponsored study (Lewis, 1977) suggests that
many fishing licences were lost in these areas even before 1969 for this
reason. For example, when processing plants and/or packing services
were withdrawn from Queens Cove and Nuchatlaht on the west coast of
Vancouver Island, small-scale local fishers who could not afford to invest
in more sophisticated gear and mobile vessels had to abandon fishing. Part
of the reason for the withdrawal of services and processing facilities from
such isolated areas was the overexploitation and subsequent decline of
local stocks that made packing from these areas less economical, as will be
discussed later.

In sum, fishing-dependent regions tend to be exceptionally vulnerable.
Villagers often have few job opportunities and marketable skills apart
from fishing. Important features of their social organization are often
conditioned by fishing. They cannot always protect or maintain local
stocks, which may be overfished by the larger and more mobile members
of the British Columbia fleet. Local fishers tend to lose fishing licences.
Processing plants and packing and collecting services, without which it is
difficult for small-scale fishers to operate, have often been removed. The
two communities described below are both vulnerable in these ways,
though they differ in degree of fishing dependence, in fishing-related
social organization, and in apparent destinations.

**TOFINO TODAY**

Tofino is a district municipality of one thousand located on the Esowista
peninsula of the west coast of Vancouver Island at the terminus of the
Trans-Canada highway. It is a service centre and transportation link for
three outlying Indian reserves accessible only by water or air (Ahousaht,
Opitset, and Hot Springs Cove) with a combined populated of 850, and
for a scattering of some 50 to 100 settlers around Clayoquot Sound. One

logging camp employing one hundred men is located in Clayoquot Sound,
but it does virtually all of its hiring and servicing from the east coast of
Vancouver Island.

Tofino services a regional population of two to three thousand
people with a twenty-one-bed hospital, a two-hundred-pupil elementary
school, a post office, a Department of Fisheries and Oceans office, an Indian
Health office, a Royal Canadian Mounted Police office, a lifeboat station, a local telephone switchboard, and a bank. A small Forest Service office closed in 1984. Except for the school and hospital, however, these institutions employ only one part-time person to three persons each.

Tofino also supports about thirty small businesses, most of which have fewer than ten employees. The majority of these are restaurants and hotels, which depend on the tourists who visit Pacific Rim National Park between Tofino and Ucluelet twenty-five miles to the south during the two-month summer season. Since tourism is seasonal, these businesses need the patronage of Indians coming to and from outlying reserves, as well as nonresident fishers and fish buyers who come during salmon and roe herring season.

There are also a number of businesses with major clients in the fishing industry, such as fuel suppliers, marine services, construction, a marina, and some of the hotels and grocery stores. In a 1980 study conducted by the village office to measure the importance of fishing for Tofino, it was estimated that these enterprises depended on the fishing industry for 50 to 100 percent of their business, while the tourist businesses were 30 to 50 percent fishing dependent. The town also estimated that 40 percent of household heads are directly or indirectly dependent on the fishing industry and that all the 50 to 100 percent fishing-dependent businesses would cease to operate without the fishing-related industry.

In addition to these businesses, in 1982 there were two fish-processing plants and four fish-capturing stations in Tofino. One very large plant operated by B.C. Packers, with 2.5 million kilograms cold storage and 30 tonnes ice-making capacity, closed in 1983. During the mid-1970s it employed 250 people at the season’s height; in the 1980s there were fifty employees at the high point. The other fish company, Canako Sea Products, operates a small geoduck plant with a small freezer and two-tonne ice maker employing up to fifteen people. The fish-capturing stations consist of two small family-run operations based principally in Vancouver (Vancouver Shellfish and Longbeach Shellfish), a third station operated by B.C. Packers, and a fourth, operated until 1984 by Cassiar Packing through its subsidiary Tonquin. All of these stations made ice for fishers and for trucks transporting roe herring, salmon, and other products to Vancouver. The village of Tofino received $81,727 in property taxes from these six establishments in 1980, about 20 percent of the municipal budget. In addition, local shareworker and office staff wages circulated many times in the community, employing others as well. The activity of fish processing alone, then, contributes substantially to the local economy.

During roe herring season in February and March of 1982, Tofino was the centre of activity for the entire region. In the following two years Ucluelet was the centre. Fishers trucked their skiffs to Tofino and waited there for the announcement of openings. Fish buyers and major companies flew search missions and manned their radios from Tofino. During this time and in summer salmon season, the town buzzes with activity; restaurants, pubs, hotels, and docks overflow with fishers. At other times, public life is at an ebb, and socializing is confined to family gatherings, nights at the Royal Canadian Legion lounge and the Hotel Maquinna pub, or young people’s dances at the hotel. Fishers are the exception; they socialize year-round while helping each other work on their boats at the docks.

In winter the cash flow through the village is restricted; local businessmen measure their trade by the cyclic appearance of government cheques. They know they will do some business on “pogge day” (unemployment insurance) and on “pecker day” (family allowance). The social assistance trade is supplied chiefly by people who were formerly employed in fishing.

The political issues that dominated the town in 1982 centred around the question of who would bear the cost of providing water and sewer services for real estate and tourist development, and around persuading the province to place the region’s tourist development over the interests of two major forest companies. The companies intended to log Meares Island, a scenic area facing Tofino, much valued in its natural state by the Clayoquot Indians resident at Opitset on Meares Island and by the Ahousaths, who traditionally owned part of Meares Island. The first issue was the chief concern of the older, established fishing families who wished to prevent real estate developers from profiting at the expense of Tofino taxpayers, especially younger families who faced an unhelpful job situation in fishing. As real estate in Tofino began to approach lower mainland values, the older families feared the community would eventually serve as home only to vacationing and retiring urbanites, or the school and hospital professionals. The fears were overpowered, however, by the pressing need for more diversified economic development as fishing opportunities declined in the 1980s.

The preservation of Meares Island was supported by business people concerned about potential damage to tourism, by the Tofino town council, which wanted protection and expansion of its water-supply area on Meares Island, by people favouring maricultural development around the island, by Clayoquot and Ahousaht Indians involved in clamming and trapping on Meares Island, and by “alternative lifestyle” and other local environmentalists. At the 1984 Easter celebration organized by the last group, the Indians declared the area a “tribal park” and launched a court action to prevent logging, basing their claim on aboriginal title. Environmental protection and aboriginal title claims unite the community.

The “alternative lifestyle” residents have found an economic niche in Tofino. They came originally as refugees of urban alienation and from settlements in the area, which together became the Pacific Rim National Park in the 1960s. Since the early 1970s they have supplied seasonal or
part-time demand for work as chambermaids, shake cutters, tree planters, carpenters, waitresses, clerks, deck hands, and caretakers. They also support themselves on cottage industries such as carving and handicrafts, which are marketed in urban areas. Because their ideology and modest lifestyles permit them to survive with such irregular work, they usually do not qualify for, or do not choose to take, unemployment insurance benefits.

Only about 17 per cent of local residents do receive unemployment insurance benefits. At the January-February "high point" for unemployment in the Tofino-Otispet area in 1982, eighty-eight persons out of a labour force of about five hundred received unemployment insurance benefits; forty of these were fishers, comprising most of the approximately forty-five fishers in Tofino and Otispet. In Ahousaht, only twelve fishers out of thirty-eight vessel owners received unemployment benefits.

During a similar period in 1977 when Tofino had a slightly smaller population, a greater number received unemployment benefits (134), and only 32 per cent were fishers (43 people). The change in overall unemployment benefits and the fact that 1982 was a recession year suggest that fewer people had enough work in 1981 to qualify for unemployment. (To qualify, it was necessary to have worked at least twenty weeks in a previous year, followed by at least ten weeks in the year preceding application.)

Many fishers interviewed in the west coast area and in the fleet at large declared either that they "didn't believe in" unemployment or that they would not apply for benefits unless they had no choice. The total number of fishers receiving unemployment benefits on Vancouver Island and in metropolitan Vancouver increased by 210 and 211 respectively between 1977 and 1982, although the absolute number of fishers in both areas declined. The increase in fishers' use of unemployment benefits is thus a provincwide phenomenon, evidently related to the greater economic difficulties suffered in 1982 compared to 1977. The fact that the increase in use of unemployment benefits has been great in Vancouver and the Vancouver Island region while it has been relatively constant in Tofino suggests that off-season job opportunities have been curtailed more recently in these regions, while they have been a more long-term problem in Tofino. The unavailability of unemployment insurance data prior to 1976 made it impossible to quantify the statement made by many fishers that they did not collect benefits until large-boat payments became current in the 1970s.

HISTORY OF THE REGION:
THE DECLINE OF FIVE FISHERIES

Commercial fishing in Clayoquot Sound consisted of five fisheries, each of which declined: the salmon net fishery, whaling, the pilchard fishery, the herring fishery, and the salmon troll fishery. Whereas the first four fisheries were terminated by the failure to control overexploitation, the troll fishery is threatened chiefly by an international treaty.

Cayoquot Sound was first developed for commercial fishing when a canning factory was built on the Kennedy River in 1895 by Thomas Earle and sold in 1902 to a Victoria firm, Beckwith and Brewster. The Norwegian Fraser River gillnetters, who were hired to fish for this cannery, were among the first European settlers in this region. The Clayoquot Sound Cannery held a drag seine licence to intercept salmon entering the Kennedy River and bought salmon from the two or three other drag seine licensees in Clayoquot Sound. Purse seines replaced drag seines about 1920 when commercial net fishing in the river was closed. In addition to the three company-owned seines, about fifteen Clayoquot Sound residents acquired and operated seine vessels in the area. This local fleet was composed equally of Ahousahts, Clayoquot, and Tofino residents, who mainly fished sockeye salmon in August and chum salmon in September and October.

World War I brought a high demand for sockeye and chum, which kept eight canneries in operation on the west coast of Vancouver Island until 1921, processing over 84,000 cases in 1920 (Lyons, 1969). By 1919 there was a certain concern over the reduction of the chum stocks that the fishers and residents of Barkley Sound (immediately south of Clayoquot Sound) demanded an inquiry (Roberts, 1970). This did not occur, and by 1924 there were 277,267 cases of salmon processed in this area (Lyons, 1969). Separate records for the area at later dates could not be found, but production probably increased as demand picked up between 1926 and 1929, and six new canneries opened on the west coast of Vancouver Island (Roberts, 1970). As more nonlocal packers came into the area to buy fish, Clayoquot Canning was eventually forced to close its local operation in 1932.

At the same time, the seine fleet was increasing and more nonlocal seiners began to fish Clayoquot Sound at the height of the season. The fishery inspectors felt that "one great menace to the salmon fisheries of the province, particularly the fall varieties, is the huge increase in the number of salmon purse seine operators." These boats increased from 143 in 1922 to 223 in 1923 (B.C. Annual Departmental Review, 1926–27). A partial reason for the increase was pilchard and herring seiners who were permitted to fish for fall chum salmon using smaller nets. The fishers and canners alike expressed such discontent in 1928 that by 1929 the Department of Fisheries devised the Transfer System to limit the effort of the increasingly mobile purse seine fleet. Clayoquot Sound became one of twenty-seven salmon purse seine areas in which the local fisheries guardian was empowered by order in council to shorten the fishing time if more than (in this case) fourteen seiners entered the area. One seine was equivalent to eight gillnets; vessels were required to check in with the local guardian upon entering an area and check out when leaving (ADR 1929–30; interviews).
Although the Transfer System remained in effect for over twenty-five years, it was not successful in saving the chum stocks, which were the traditional staple of the area (Drucker, 1951). The first catch records for the area were made only for seine catches between 1934 and 1949. Five-year average catches in Clayoquot Sound during this period show a dramatic and relentless decline from a 79,198 piece average (1935–39) to a 32,681 piece average (1945–49) (see Table 13.1).

In 1951 nylon gillnets were introduced and gillnet effort in the area began to increase. In 1953 the Department of Fisheries began closing the area for a week or two at a time, but no stock recovery resulted. Since by this time escapements (fish not caught that return to the creek to spawn) as well as catch were recorded, it is possible to estimate more accurately the decline of chum stocks (catch plus escapement) as a whole. Between 1951 and 1968, the total chum stock in Area 24 declined from an average of 134,315 (1951–55) to an average of 36,981 (1965–69).

The most important reason for the reduction of this already-depressed stock to one-quarter of its early 1950s size was the increased efficiency and political pressure of the mobile seine fleet. Seiners became more efficient as the use of the puret block and the snap purse ring made three to seven sets a day practicable, replacing the former three or four sets. A decade later the drum and modern winch made up to eighteen sets a day possible.

Table 13.1
Chum Salmon Catch and Escapement, 1935–1983:
Clayoquot Sound (Tofino Area)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Catch (in pieces) (5-year averages)</th>
<th>Escapement (pieces) (5-year averages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1935–39</td>
<td>79,198</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940–44</td>
<td>59,545</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945–49</td>
<td>32,681</td>
<td>18,425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950–54</td>
<td>47,940</td>
<td>86,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955–59</td>
<td>33,990</td>
<td>53,205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960–64</td>
<td>13,990</td>
<td>41,590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965–69</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36,981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970–74</td>
<td>7,352</td>
<td>58,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975–79</td>
<td>39,240</td>
<td>59,257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980–84</td>
<td>24,011</td>
<td>71,340</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n/a — not available

1For reasons of space, five-year averages are reported. Given the cyclical nature of salmon, this procedure can sometimes distort the true pattern; in this case it does not.
2From 1935 to 1949, the catch was by seine only; from 1950 to 1984 the catch was by seine and gillnet. Zero catch from 1965 to 1969 was the result of a fish closure.

Source: Roberts (1970); Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

In 1957 the Transfer System collapsed as a result of increased pressure for fishing time from the mobile seine fleet. By 1964 local chum and other net-caught salmon stocks were so depleted that Clayoquot Sound was completely closed to net fishing. Since then, only an occasional one- or two-day fishery has occurred. Despite this closure, there is little improvement in chum escapements in Clayoquot Sound.9 The reduction of this fishery constituted a severe blow for local fishers who depended on the fall fishery for a good percentage of their catch. It had been the custom of many local trolls to mount a small table scene on their vessels for the chum season, thus rounding out their fishing season. Overfishing inside Clayoquot Sound also caused local sockeye stocks to collapse after 1969, although closures since then have permitted some recovery (but no fishing).

Whaling was also introduced to the region early, but disappeared more swiftly. In 1905 a Victoria company established whaling stations in Barkley Sound to the south and Kyuquot to the north. The Norwegian-style scim whalers, hiring mostly Norwegian crew on a share basis, brought in five hundred whales between April and August 1908. In a relatively short time, the whale population was radically depleted, and the plants were converted to pilchard-reduction facilities (Scott, 1972).

Meanwhile non-Indian ethnic groups and other fisheries became established. British settlers populated the surrounding islands, while Scots from the Isle of Skye and Japanese Canadians from Steveston settled the area around the turn of the century (Bossin, 1981). In 1917 or 192610 the Japanese set up a small fish “camp” in Tofino through their Tofino Cooperative Fishing Association, which purchased troll-caught salmon and transported it to fresh-fish markets in Seattle via their own packer. Some of their thirty-three-member cooperative were Scots, who also took up trolling. This method of capture, which predominated in later years, was thus introduced to the region very early. Small but numerous runs of local chinook and coho salmon, combined with the fall chum fishery and the interception of passing stocks offshore, kept local trolls working much of the year.

The Japanese also established a number of salteries, processing chum salmon and herring for the Chinese market. These were closed when the Japanese were evicted from the coast during World War II (Scott, 1972). The Japanese never re-established themselves in Tofino after the war, perhaps because of a 1947 village resolution forbidding their ownership of land or businesses (Bossin, 1981). Many Japanese attending the Tofino 1982 homecoming celebration were visiting for the first time in forty years.

The west coast of Vancouver Island was the area of the coast where pilchard were most plentiful and where processing of this fish was first established in 1918. Between 1925 and 1948 the “pilchard boom” was the reason for the operation of twenty-six pilchard reduction plants between
Barkley Sound to the south and Kyuquot to the north. Six of these were in Clayoquot Sound. The most notable and long-lived of the west coast plants (Kildonan, Port Albion, Hecate, Eecole) also had attached salmon canneries, and, in the case of Kildonan and Port Albion, later added cold-storage facilities. During these years, the larger plants could be six- or seven-month operations, providing employment to fishers (who often worked in the reduction plants in the winter after fishing season) and to Indian women, who might work a season in more than one cannery if working times overlapped, and to Chinese labour brought from Vancouver. One local historian reports that seventy-five seiners, one hundred tugs and scout boats, and fifty packing scows kept some five hundred fishers and five hundred shoreworkers employed in 1927 (Nicholson, 1965).

Whatever interest the companies operating these plants (B.C. Packers, Canadian Fish, Nelson Brothers, Nootka-Bamfield, Tod) had in fresh, troll-caught fish appears to have diminished during the 1930s. Buying stations in Quatsino and Kyuquot were closed, and Kildonan would only accept fish delivered to the plant. The troll fishery was sustained, however, by the formation in 1931 of the Kyuquot Trollers Association, which acquired its own packers and transported fresh salmon to Seattle until 1955, when a market failure in Seattle caused it to be taken over by the Prince Rupert Fishermen’s Cooperative Association. The PRFCA continued to operate the KTA’s cold storage facilities at Winter Harbour and Victoria (later moving the Victoria facility to Vancouver), and the buying stations at Kyuquot, Esperanza, Hot Springs, Tofino, and Ucluelet (Hill, 1967).

B.C. Packers redeveloped its interest in troll-caught salmon in 1940 and reintegrated with Edmunds and Walker, a Vancouver firm specializing in fresh fish. Canadian Fish at this time also bought the herring-reduction/cold-storage plant at Port Albion from the Nootka-Bamfield Company and used this plant to purchase trolled salmon until herring reduction ended in 1967 because of fears of overfishing. Both companies set up “troll camps” (supplying ice by packer from their main cold-storage plants and buying fish) all over the west coast of Vancouver Island (Kyuquot, Nuchatitl, Queens Cove, Esperanza, Hot Springs Cove, Ahousaat, Tofino, Ucluelet). They were followed in the 1950s by competitors Blaine Myers and Malcolm McCallum, both of which were later acquired by B.C. Packers, and, in the late 1950s and 1960s, by Tulloch-Western, which was acquired by North Coast Fisheries in 1964, and was in turn acquired by Canadian Fish and Norpac Fisheries.

After World War II, Tofino fishers returned home with enough capital to buy trollers. As fresh and frozen salmon markets improved in the post-war period, many former salmon seine fishers turned to trolling by the late 1940s. (Some seiners fished fall chum salmon in combination with seasonal herring or pilchard operations.)

The build-up of seiners during the pilchard boom, followed by the herring reduction fishery on which the seiners then concentrated after pilchards disappeared in 1948, also led to drastic overfishing of herring and the termination of the herring fishery in 1967. This left the west coast of Vancouver Island little but the troll fishery. (Halibut had been largely depleted, and groundfish markets had not yet achieved the modest rise that occurred in the late 1970s.) Even the troll fishery was damaged by the seine build-up because chinook stocks, which had flourished in areas of herring concentration (chinook feed on herring), declined sharply after herring stocks were reduced, leading to the closure of highly productive local chinook salmon fisheries and of local troll camps dependent on them (Roberts, 1970).

The local troll fishery survived, however, because it was only partially based on local stocks, and because it was able to diversify by catching sockeye and pink salmon. Much of the fish taken by the large troll fleet that focussed on the west coast of Vancouver Island consisted of passing stocks, intercepted on their way to the Fraser and other Canadian and American rivers. Fraser sockeye and pink salmon stocks were protected and built up by the International Pacific Salmon Commission.

By the 1970s, however, the large companies that had serviced areas where salmon were traditionally trolled were withdrawing. In 1973 Canadian Fish withdrew its last troll camps from the region, and B.C. Packers retained its troll camps only in Winter Harbour, Kyuquot, Tofino, and Ucluelet. Kyuquot camp was closed in 1983.

The last surviving traditional fishery in Clayoquot Sound may be threatened by the ongoing negotiations of the 1985 Canada-U.S. treaty. The general intent of the treaty is to reduce Canadian interceptions of U.S. chinook and coho and to reduce U.S. interception of Fraser River sockeye and pink, thus giving each country greater incentives to improve its own stocks. By 1984, international arrangements for the conservation of chinook salmon established an area-species closure that reduced fishing time on the west coast of Vancouver Island. The 1985 treaty terms limit the chinook and coho catch in the area for the next two years. The chinook ceiling is well below average catches, while the coho ceiling is slightly higher than average. These ceilings will be renegotiated every two years through the new Pacific Salmon Commission. The implied expectation is that local enhancement effort in the next eight years will be so successful that locally produced fish can replace intercepted fish.

From the turn of the century to the 1960s, the Clayoquot Sound area thus witnessed the disappearance of four fisheries: salmon seineing, whaling, pilchard reduction, and herring reduction. Even trolling now appears endangered. Trolling, however, can survive under very different conditions from those that existed for the other fisheries. The first four fisheries had been propelled by the local existence of processing and collecting facilities, which required a high-volume production, and which therefore shut down as stocks were reduced. Trolling produces a high-quality fresh or frozen product, which does not require high volume to be viable, either in fishing
or in processing. The construction of a road to the west coast of Vancouver Island and the growth of frozen seafood markets would change processing economics and create new opportunities for the area.

**THE EXPLOITATION OF LOCATIONAL ADVANTAGE**

The structure of competition among processors for the trolled fish was to change completely in the 1960s, with the advent of a road to the west coast of Vancouver Island. The area had previously experienced some population growth from military personnel who, stationed at the airforce base constructed during the war, remained afterward. But more growth occurred because the logging road connected Tofino to the east coast of Vancouver Island in 1959 (consequent to the development of large-scale logging by major forest companies), and brought regional administrative offices and services into the area. Tofino grew from 89 households in 1951 to 182 households in 1961 to 202 households in 1971. The Canada Postholders directories listed 27 per cent of household heads as fishers in 1961 and 24 per cent in 1971 (Table 13.2). The populations of Tofino and Ucluelet increased steadily and comparably during this period, but the proportion of fishers continued to decrease, at least partially because government and services were increasing in economic importance. A hospital, government services, and tourism became important in Tofino, while logging was more important in Ucluelet.

Once road connections leading to the Vancouver ferry had been established, the area enjoyed an advantage peculiar to fish processing. Had the industry at this point be geared exclusively toward canned markets, the process of urban centralization of production would have continued. However, the expansion of fresh and frozen markets created demands for fish products that had neither the same economies of scale nor the same technological constraints that existed for canned products. Whereas large companies could mass-produce canned salmon more cheaply by transporting it to centralized locations, such was not necessarily the case with frozen salmon, groundfish, shellfish and, in the 1970s, herring roe. (Herring stocks recovered sufficiently after a five-year closure to support a roe herring fishery in the early 1970s: the roe were brined or frozen.)

When the fishery on the west coast of Vancouver Island came to depend chiefly on intercepted troll fishing, it relied on a product delivered at a higher price. This could best be sold on the fresh/frozen markets where salmon commanded a higher price. The large Vancouver canners did not have all the advantages in acquiring and processing trolled fish, which they had in net-caught fish. In fact, the eventual processing strategy of smaller firms became the exact opposite of the large firms’ centralization and concentration strategy (Chapter 4). These larger firms closed their last outlying canneries in the B.C. central coast area in the 1960s and 1970s and their herring reduction in the 1960s. They declared that they would need a much larger supply or combination of supplies than presently existed on the west coast of Vancouver Island to warrant establishing a plant there. Troll fish alone held less interest for them and, with the exception of Barkley Sound, locally based net fishing had largely ceased in the region.

In contrast, the smaller firms preferred to locate plants near the supply source rather than near markets. By processing the fish at the supply end, and only transporting them to market later, they could realize four locational advantages, as follows.

1. **The capture of quality.** By processing the fish immediately instead of transporting them to Vancouver for processing, a much higher quality product could be achieved. Hence a higher price or a larger share of the market could be realized. Transpacific Fish in Ucluelet, for example, has gradually increased its share of the frozen salmon market through its reputation for quality.

2. **The capture of shrinkage.** By processing the fish immediately, a greater portion of the fish was usable, and there was less weight loss. Since fish are sold by weight, the reduction of the 14 per cent shrinkage or weight loss normally experienced in packed fish would represent considerable savings.

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**Table 13.2**

Demographic Profile for Tofino and Ucluelet, 1950–1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tofino</th>
<th>Ucluelet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951–51</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Households</td>
<td>16 (18%)</td>
<td>56 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Household heads fishing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960–61</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Households</td>
<td>50 (28%)</td>
<td>77 (28%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Household heads fishing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970–71</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Households</td>
<td>48 (24%)</td>
<td>87 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Household heads fishing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980–81</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Households</td>
<td>88 (40%)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Household heads fishing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n/a — not available

Source: Canada Census (various years), W. Sinclair (1971), J. Burns (1976), Tofino Village Census, personal interviews.
3. *The lowering of transportation costs (based on weight)*. The final
dressing and processing of the fish at the supply site meant that no excess
weight was transported to a distant processing site. Specific orders were
often filled on site. This factor proved particularly important when on-board
holding techniques improved sufficiently for net-caught fish to be dressed
for the frozen market (Appendix B, Pinkerton, 1983a).

Clams, oysters, crabs, shrimp, prawns, abalone, food herring, and several
species of groundfish could not be economically harvested or processed
unless the plant was near the capture site. Small shellfish plants on the east
coast of Vancouver Island had already demonstrated that discarding the
shell and processing close to the capture site produced a viable operation.
Weight, quality, available quantity, knowledge of fishgrounds, knowledge
of markets, and labour flexibility all played into the way a small, local
plant with an interest in pocket markets could effectively exploit these
species.

What developed in this particular area was thus a regional specializa-
tion of production by small firms, which was possible because there were
no significant economic or licensing barriers to entry into fresh and frozen
processing. Vast capital outlay was not required, because it was possible to
rent cold storage in Vancouver for excess product and to purchase relatively
small-scale ice-making equipment. In the 1970s, government optimism
about increasing supplies fostered a liberal licensing policy for new plants.
The success of this strategy had been evident since Seafood Products
began operating a small canning and freezer plant at Port Hardy on the
northeastern end of Vancouver Island in 1966. This plant acquired troll
fish captured in the northern area of both the east and west coasts of
Vancouver Island and specialized in quality production. The west coast of
Vancouver Island was the only other isolated and plentiful fish-supply
area (roe herring, groundfish, shellfish, trolled salmon) of the coast with-
out a plant and that was now accessible by road. The way in which other
forces played into the attempt to establish a plant that would exploit local
advantages is examined later, when I sketch the most recent stage of
the development of fishing and processing in this region.

**LOCAL ICE STATIONS AND FREEZER PLANTS**

Ice stations were established by local businessmen in Tofino and Ucluelet
in 1961, a decade before plants were constructed.14 These made it pos-
ible to truck fish to Vancouver for two cents a pound, rather than pay the
packing cost of seven cents a pound. The large companies followed suit
with ice stations of their own. By 1981 there were several ice stations in
Tofino and in Ucluelet. Four of these purchased for small Vancouver-

based companies, two purchased for cooperatives (one local, one the
PRFCA), and two purchased for major companies. In this respect, all the
companies with ice stations enjoyed the locational advantages of ice plants,
and they all transferred the bulk of production (freezing) to the urban
centre. Tofino was in a particularly advantageous location, since it was the
nearest town with a connecting road to service the entire northwest coast
of Vancouver Island (except Winter Harbour to the extreme north, which
also had a road connection). It was thus the collection point for a large
supply area, where packers from the northern troll camps transferred
their fish onto trucks to get into Vancouver quickly.

**TOFINO FISHERIES LTD.: HOW BIG CAN A LOCAL PLANT GET?**

The first big plunge into building a local processing facility in the area was
taken by a third-generation Tofino businessman in 1972. Perhaps to his
disadvantage, he began in a period of expanding markets when the federal
and provincial governments and even individual banks were willing to
make large sums available for the construction of fish plants in isolated
areas, especially (in the case of government) if they employed Indians
(Foodwest, 1979). In the 1960s and earlier, a firm establishing itself in an
isolated region began cautiously, fully aware of the slowness with which
processor reputations and loyalties are built with fishers, and the unpre-
dictability of supplies and markets. But the mood of the 1970s was far
more optimistic and expansive.

In an attempt to understand why a man experienced in the fish
business had built a very large plant and gone into receivership in a few
years, only to be eagerly bought out by a large, long-established firm that
likewise could not make a profit on the plant, I undertook a detailed
investigation of the events surrounding this conscious venture to capital-
ze on locational advantage. I interviewed two of the three partners in
the Tofino company, three of the nine committee members on the spe-
cial ARDA (Agricultural & Rural Development Agency) federal-provincial
team that funded the plant, numerous Tofino residents involved with the
plant's operation, managers of Canadian Fish and B.C. Packers, which
later purchased the plant, and managers of smaller buying and process-
ing ventures in the area. I read the provincial government file on how
the decision was reached not to fund an Indian purchase of the plant after
the first failure.

There were differences of opinion about the plant's viability. The
Tofino businessman was convinced the plant was operational and was
hindered only by delays in funding. Managers at Canadian Fish, a large and
long-established firm, were convinced the plant was viable when it made
the purchase, but later concluded it was not. Personnel at Special ARDA
had solidified their determination to go independent after their initiative and willingness to take risks had earned Canadian Fish a bonanza on the 1972 Nitinat chum run.

Wingen's original caution about expanding the business gradually was dispelled by Tulloch's optimism and ARDA's interest in funding a $1.6 million plant that would employ a significant number of Indians. Building a larger plant than they had originally intended involved considerable risk for the firm, however, since funding only covered 34 per cent of capital costs, and the firm had to operate through the 1974 slump in groundfish, salmon, and shellfish prices before construction was complete and funding could be obtained. Although Wingen adopted a number of innovative strategies (such as flying fishers on reconnaissance to develop new fisheries and persuading the Department of Fisheries to open small pocket fisheries), and Tulloch brought with him some of Canadian Fish's highliners, the firm was in financial trouble by August 1974. This was exacerbated by the fact that ARDA delayed half of the $500,000 subsidy (the first half was paid in June 1974) because of doubts raised about the operation, and banks refused to pay creditors for fear the firm would go under. Some of these doubts may have been raised to the government by the major processors, who had made no secret of their position that subsidies to small firms constitute unfair competition and increase the problem of provincially overcapacity in processing (B.C. Packers, 1981). According to several informants, this was "standard industry practice."

Tofino Fisheries offered the plant for sale at $3 to 4 million (including land and vessels) in September 1974. The provincial government considered assisting the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council in purchasing the plant. A provincial study was favourable, but the province abandoned the idea after consultation with the Prince Rupert Fishermen's Cooperative. Canadian Fish did not share the co-op's negative assessment, however, and, after a complex series of biddings and negotiations, purchased the plant from the receiver at $1.9 million in January 1976. Its operation did not prove lucrative, however, and by 1978 Canfisco sent roe herring from Tofino to its Vancouver plant for popping. B.C. Packers purchased the plant "cheap" as part of its acquisition of Canadian Fish's northern operations in 1980. I was informed in 1982 that neither it nor Canfisco had ever made money on the plant. From that time to the present, B.C. Packers has apparently been willing to sell the plant, but not to a competitor. Both the buying of the plant and the subsequent unwillingness to sell it suggest that the company was engaging in pre-emptive buying and/or pre-emptive holding of a facility that might be viable in the right hands (for discussion of pre-emptive buying see Schwindt, 1982).

One very small nonunionized geoduck plant still operates in Tofino. In Ucluelet there are two plants owned by Vancouver-based companies: one is a small salmon-roe herring-groundfish operation. A larger plant

(the unit focussing on Indian employment) believed the plant was viable and blamed the failure on problems among the partners. Smaller processors and fish buyers who worked in the area termed the plant a "white elephant," too large to be sustained in the long run by local supplies. They pointed to a smaller plant that was later established in Ucluelet as a more appropriate size for the region.

Both Robert Wingen, the Tofino businessman, and one of his partners, Andrew Tulloch, had worked for Canadian Fish for years. Wingen had operated all of Canadian Fish's troll camps north of Tofino on a contract basis since 1962, and since 1965 he had run a small oyster- and clam-processing plant next to the family boatworks in Tofino. Because he had already been selling salmon roe from trolls to the Japanese, he began processing herring roe in 1972 with an established market, hiring some forty-five local people, mostly Indians, during the two-month season. Wingen was well versed in using location to best advantage through managing the Canadian Fish troll camps. By living year-round in Tofino and hiring and dispatching packers from there instead of Vancouver, he was able to operate a less costly and more efficient collecting service than otherwise would have been possible. Because of Wingen, Canadian Fish continued to offer this service for some years in locations that other companies had abandoned as too expensive. They discontinued it in 1973 after Wingen became completely independent.

Wingen intended to expand gradually over the next five years and had developed forecasts for the increased capital and labour required for his venture. He planned to process shrimp, crab, oysters, abalone, clams, roe herring, food herring, salmon, salmon roe, and groundfish in quantities large enough to make the operation year-round, claiming that none of these species alone or in fewer combinations would have made a viable operation. Wingen's strategy was to combine many small fisheries, whose supplies he knew well, and which were largely unexploited by Canadians. (U.S. shrimp boats exploited grounds twenty miles off Tofino, and the capture of groundfish by foreign fleets within Canadian waters was later turned into a scandal by the UFAWU.) This was a strategy not favoured by the larger companies, which were interested predominantly in roe herring, salmon, and only some species of groundfish, profitable commodities for which markets were large and established. Wingen also believed there were ways to economically service the Indian communities north of Tofino, from which the large processors were withdrawing packing services. It was in fact largely through frustration with the production and marketing decisions of the large companies that Wingen and Tulloch decided to go into business.

Wingen was considered "competent at anything he touched," and Tulloch, then production manager for Canadian Fish, and formerly operator of his own west coast troll camps, was termed "dynamic." The two
operated by Central Native Fishermen's Co-op received some government protection because it employed Indians, but experienced severe supply problems and financial difficulties in the 1980s. By 1985 it was leased from the receiver by a group of former CNFC trollers and operated chiefly through inventory financing from Booth Fisheries, a Seattle firm that sold all its products. (By 1986 McMillan replaced Booth and the plant was unionized.) Operating at 60 per cent capacity for three months (10 per cent for 9 months), it survived by custom processing and purchasing from smaller buying stations. The plants as a group clearly suffered from supply competition once they were all established in the late 1970s.

Whereas the failure of the Tofino plant may have some unique causes, its failure suggests the operation of larger principles when considered in a regional context.

Optimistic predictions about fish supplies and buoyant markets encouraged government funding or assistance to three plants in the Tofino/Ucluelet area between 1972 and 1979. These plants competed against each other as well as the major companies with ice stations in the area for the regional supply of roe herring, groundfish, and trolled salmon. This level of competition and its resulting undersupply to each facility tended to eliminate the locational advantage one or two small- to medium-sized plants could potentially enjoy in this area.

The species harvested in this area did not require economies of scale in order to be profitable. Large investments became, in the case of Tofino Fisheries, a long-term liability; a smaller investment or a more gradual expansion might have stood a better chance. Large companies may have thought of the operation also in terms of economies of scale, and later learned that a large plant capacity under such competitive circumstances was not warranted.

The volatility and cyclical nature of fish markets (often related to fluctuating supplies as other countries overfish their domestic stocks and seek new suppliers while domestic stocks recover), create high-risk conditions in fish processing. It is particularly inappropriate for government and new firms to assume the existence of large and stable markets, supplies, and fishers' loyalty if they cannot offer financing to them.

A significant opportunity for long-term development in the region may exist for one or two fish-processing plants, but the policy of licensing and offering assistance to three plants in the region, while yet a fourth exists, appears to have weakened the position of all the plants, and largely dissipated the advantages the region could potentially enjoy.

LOCAL EMPLOYMENT IN FISHING

Records of fishing employment in the region are available only after the introduction of licence limitation, and the whole Clayoquot Sound area and adjacent northern area, Hot Springs Cove, residence of the Hesquiaht Band, are grouped together. Between 1969 and 1981, salmon licences in the area declined from 106 to 61. The loss of fishing jobs to traditional fishing families is even more severe if one calculates that some of these jobs went to new local residents who left other professions (e.g. teaching) to take up fishing, and who could afford the rising cost of licences because of earnings elsewhere.

In Tofino the fishing labour force was bifurcated into two groups: one that had grown up with fishing and the newcomers, usually people in their thirties or forties. Unlike the newcomers, people who had grown up in fishing, whether young or old, had begun their apprenticeships between the ages of nine and twelve, deck handing with a father, uncle, or brother for five to seven years before acquiring their own boat in their early twenties. Many had not held other jobs, except very sporadically or seasonally, and perhaps 50 per cent had not applied for unemployment insurance benefits until the late 1970s when times became exceptionally difficult.

The majority of fishers interviewed in this category had also learned conservationist attitudes and skills: they viewed conservation practices as enlightened self-interest. They avoided areas that were known to be frequented by juvenile fish at specific times and otherwise fished in ways that minimized damage to rearing areas. They supported the use of barbless hooks (to permit release of immature fish) when this regulation was proposed. Young people found themselves without job opportunities in fishing when they were of age to enter the industry as skippers.

Another phenomenon related to local licence holders can be observed in Figure 13.2. At the same time that salmon licences were declining in the area, other licences (herring roe, groundfish, crab, shrimp, halibut) were increasing. Whereas in 1969 the total number of local licences was only one more than the number of salmon licences, in 1981 the total number of licences included sixty-five licences other than salmon licences. Because the same fisher often owned both a salmon and herring licence, the increase in licences might not indicate an increase in the number of fishers. The separation of fishing privileges that had formerly been included under a single salmon licence also increased the number of licences. (Halibut, for example, was separated from the salmon licence in 1979.) Therefore the larger number of fishing licences does not necessarily indicate a greater number of fishers, since many fishers simply acquired two or three licences. (Some fishers own two herring licences.) About 62 per cent of Indians possess both salmon and roe herring licences, for example. This percentage is higher in isolated Indian villages. In Ahousaht in 1983, forty-six people held sixty-one salmon and herring licences, an overlap of 75 per cent.15

The remaining salmon fishers are of course in a different economic position than were those who fished in 1969. A comparison of landed
Figure 13.2
Salmon Versus Other Licences

Area: Clayoquot Sound

![Data Graph]


The value of catch between these years (Table 13.3) indicates the virtual elimination of low-income marginal fishers who delivered in 1969, as well as the greatly increased differential between the earnings of the lower quartile and the upper quartile of local fishers. The local fleet became more highly stratified with the increase in fishing effort.

### Table 13.3
Gross Income Ranges for Local Salmon Fishers: Selected Years, 1969–1981 (Tofino Area)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of salmon licences</th>
<th>No. of “B” category licences</th>
<th>Income range</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mean bottom quartile</th>
<th>Mean top quartile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>$6.00–$13,599</td>
<td>4,435</td>
<td>$605</td>
<td>$8,805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>$90.00–$33,433</td>
<td>4,814</td>
<td>$810</td>
<td>$16,188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>$97.00–$45,498</td>
<td>18,362</td>
<td>$3,705</td>
<td>$27,301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$817.00–$95,432</td>
<td>30,852</td>
<td>$6,069</td>
<td>$53,560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>$13.00–$103,625</td>
<td>15,830</td>
<td>$5,200</td>
<td>$53,599</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Delivered less than $2,500 worth of salmon.
2 Although incomplete data exists for this year, the incomes are probably representative of all licences.

Source: Department of Fisheries and Oceans, licensing and catch statistics data, unpublished.

### AHOUSAHT: THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

While Tofino can, to a limited extent, soften the impact of job losses in the fisheries because of government services and tourism, and partially redistribute the same labour force into these industries, this opportunity does not exist for Ahousaht. Like many Indian communities, Ahousaht is both more dependent on fishing and more vulnerable to programs such as licence limitation than its non-Indian counterparts. As with many present-day Indian reserves that were established on traditional winter village or summer fishing sites, people do not live in Ahousaht because of new job opportunities, but because of old ones. The Makitsois Reserve, as it is sometimes called, has been home to several once-separate tribes (Kelsemat, Ahousaht, Manahousaht) since boat moorage became an important issue in the 1940s. Prior to that time, many people still fished commercially from canoes that could be drawn up on the beach. An Ahousaht elder, born in 1908 in a traditional longhouse on Vargas Island just north of Tofino, declares that he grew up in a world “much like that which existed before contact with Europeans” (Webster, 1983:17, 41). People still pursued the seasonal fishing, hunting, and food-gathering round of activities in a variety of sites, and “it was very difficult for anyone to make a living in the industries run by the Whites.”

Nonetheless, during the height of the pilchard boom, some forty to fifty Ahousahts worked in the reduction plants at least part of the year. After the collapse of this fishery in 1948, a number of Ahousahts went out a considerable part of the year to work in logging camps in Kyuquot,
Tahsis, Nootka, and Ucluelet. According to an Ahousaht elder, the conversion of most of these camps in the 1960s to nonresidential camps, drawing labour from family-based company towns, severely curtailed this job possibility for Ahousahts. Those who did continue to find jobs had to contend with a company policy of giving fishers last priority in hiring (Sparrow, 1976). Ahousaht was thrown back upon fishing for its survival.

Ahousaht is not accessible by road, and water transportation to Tofino is across open ocean often rough in winter storms. Hence it is unusually difficult to live in Ahousaht and commute dependably by small craft to a job in Tofino or further afield. It is not surprising, then, that almost half of the Ahousaht band (which totals about one thousand people) live off-reserve. Three-quarters of off-reserve residents live in Port Alberni, Tofino, Ucluelet, and Victoria. The two main reasons for off-reserve residence, according to the Ahousaht Education Study (Cannon, 1980), are lack of employment and lack of educational opportunity.

The most important employment opportunity is fishing, which also provides transportation for the fishing-boat owner that is more dependable than that of a small craft. The drop in on-reserve residence after the 1971 buy-back program is said to have resulted from loss of fishing employment and from the dependence of smaller, less mobile boats on larger boats for packing.

The availability of on-reserve housing has been an important limiting factor, since many people move back to Ahousaht as soon as a house becomes available. Population has been expanding faster than housing. A young person who stands in line for a fishing boat may also leave Ahousaht to make money to buy the family boat at lower than market price, usually from an older male relative who is graduating to a larger boat.

Despite the losses in fishing employment related to the Davis Plan, Ahousaht is the largest of the fifteen Nuu-chah-nulth bands and has the largest number of fishers. Of the eighty-five trollers owned by Nuu-chah-nulth fishers in 1981, thirty-eight were operated by Ahousahts. In addition, some fifteen to twenty unlicensed (contrary to DFO regulations) small trollers—punts, speedboats—called "putters" operate out of Ahousaht, making it also the largest "putter" fleet on the west coast of the island. Only two salmon trolling licences are actually possessed by Ahousaht putters.

The putter fleet fishes close to the village, but the majority of the licensed troll fleet also prefers to fish locally, even if there are larger supplies elsewhere. The Ahousahts consider that their style of fishing is efficient because they spend less time travelling, spend less money on fuel, and because their small, less-capitalized vessels apply fishing effort in a manner that adjusts itself to what local stocks will support.

A larger troller or sciner could be considered more efficient than these small trollers if there were a local supply large enough to support its much larger investment. Even if a larger vessel had to travel great distances to catch enough fish, it could be highly efficient, if fuel were cheap relative to the price of fish. But if fuel prices rise (as they have in the last five years), and if supplies are low and thus openings are less frequent in any one area (as they have been in the last five years), fish prices must be very high for many large, highly capitalized vessels to remain viable operations. The smaller vessels have often been better able than the larger ones to survive low supplies, fluctuating prices, and high fuel costs in the 1980s.

According to one of the licensed putter fishers, his costs are about $4,000 a year on an engine, and another $3,000 on fuel and gear. Depending on how many days of good weather he gets and how many weeks he works, he could theoretically clear up to $16,000 (four days a week for thirty weeks). In a 1977 study, it was estimated that putter fishers’ net income ranged between $500 and $10,000 (Lewis, 1977). The variance in these estimates may be because of a combination of seasonal supply of fish and seasonal availability of licensed trollers through whom the unlicensed putters can deliver. At the height of the season, the highly capitalized trollers who normally deliver fish for the putter fishers have to move farther away from local territories for their fish, and thus cannot service the putters as often. This phenomenon of a little-capitalized, small-boat fleet surviving in an isolated area on low costs and local supply is similar to that at Bella Coola in the central coast region. There, as well, some of the local fleet have eventually become more highly capitalized and more mobile during part of the year in an attempt to try their luck at competing in the larger, more distant openings around the coast. They did so, however, only in the late 1970s and early 1980s when local fish supplies were low. In Ahousaht, this greater capitalization of some of the local fleet seems to have occurred somewhat earlier.

Skippers on the larger trollers (about forty feet) have low opportunity costs in a strictly commercial sense. However, in the off-season, they use their boats to service local needs in several ways. They provide free transportation to guests at community events that occur on a monthly basis (marriages, funerals, memorial services, sports events, and various celebratory feasts and meetings). These events are crucial in maintaining ties with off-reserve relatives and friends and in enabling participation in wider cultural and political events. They provide transportation at cost (covering fuel expenses) to community members for food fishing and commercial clanning trips; clanning is an important source of winter income, and food fishing significantly lowers the cost of living. The distribution of food fish to elderly and disabled people also plays an important role in informal social assistance and in the affirmation of cultural values. In some food fisheries, the band allocates fish to different families and can thus play an important redistributive role to partially compensate for the inequalities in access to job opportunities and job success. Skippers also provide a means to transport freight, beachcombed firewood and
other resources, and to conduct hunting trips. These are important inputs into the local subsistence and informal economy.

The licensed trollers also demonstrate an unusually high use of labour per resource unit harvested (Lewis, 1977). That is, the Ahousaht fleet does not catch a higher percentage of fish per boat (in fact, incomes per boat are well below the provincial average on 93 per cent of the trollers), but it does employ a greater number of deck hands per boat than the coastwide average. While the overall troller average is 1.2, in Ahousaht, where the deck hands are usually close kin, it is 2.3. The Ahousahts thus employ more people on fewer resources. As capital investments in fishing boats are used to provide multiple nonmonetary inputs, so capital investment is used to provide more jobs in the community.

Multiple deck-hand hiring serves important functions in simultaneously apprenticing several sons. Inheritance rules dictate that fishing boats and gear are to be shared as equitably as possible in a family. As there are more sons than boats in one family, brothers leapfrog each other into a series of boats, which are passed down in the family as older brothers are able to acquire other boats. The extended family, not the individual, is the unit of survival. The youngest of five brothers in one family, for example, deck handed for nine years on an uncle’s boat before owning a boat in partnership with his brother.

Ahousaht fishing careers tend to begin earlier than Tofino careers, sometimes at age eight, and apprenticeships also tend to be long: nine to twelve years is common. The putter troller can also be an apprenticeship route, as well as a retirement route for an older fisherman who makes way for a son to run the boat.

While inheritance of fishing boats and deck-hand jobs is usually confined to the extended family, the unit of information sharing and mutual aid on the fishing grounds is the entire local fleet and community. In the case of Ahousaht, a few friends and in-laws from the neighbouring Hesquit and Clayoquot bands are also part of this support network.

The major network of communication is the ship’s radio, used in intravillage communication (more than the telephone) as well as ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore communication. In fact, the technology that seemed most central to the Ahousaht household besides the stove and the automatic coffee-maker is the ship’s radio.

The village community has relevance to fishing in ways more important than information sharing. Perhaps the most important way in which the community acts as a unit is in its shared perception of being disadvantaged as a group by fish-management policies, such as the Davis Plan, and the failure to settle aboriginal claims (Chapter 11). Ahousahts believe that the people who benefited from fleet rationalization were not themselves and that they were disproportionately disadvantaged by the elimination of the marginal fishers. Their marginal fishers had no occupational alternatives and were either forced to leave the community or to go on welfare. This inevitably created more work for the rest of the community, who then had to support them and experience the effects of demoralization, as well. The Ahousaht fleet has declined from a situation where “every person that was able fished: it wasn’t the best boats going, but they didn’t have to go far,” as an Ahousaht welfare officer remarked. By 1977, sixty-five local residents with skippering experience sought entry into fishing but did not have licences (Lewis, 1977).

The community has reacted to government policies as a group, whose survival is threatened. They acted in defiance of the Davis Plan, opposed the Pearsay Commission, practised tax resistance, and pressed charges against a multinational logging company that was using a herring-spawning area on their island as a booming ground. Their political ideology unified them, even as their unequal job opportunities divided them. Their sense of common stake mitigated the stratification created by job loss among those who had been unable to retain fishing licences after the Davis Plan and among those who were competing less successfully.

The tension between financial independence and the necessity of supporting other community members was expressed as follows by one fisher: “I bawled him out when I found out he stole my net, but I didn’t take it back, because I was doing OK and he was barely making it. It was punishment enough my speaking that way to him.” This same fisher publicly berated the author of the Davis Plan for “making criminals of us by depriving our low-income fishermen of licences,” and challenged Commissioner Pearse when he was in Ahousaht to correct the situation. As the Ahousahts’ chief counsellor put it: “Nobody here thinks their fate is sealed. We all believe in struggle.” The “we” in this statement expressed the identification of the whole community with the employed segment, and their sense that as the fate of the fishers went, so went the fate of Ahousaht.

THE LOCALLY RELEVANT FUNCTIONS OF FISHING AND FISH PROCESSING

As is evident from the preceding discussion, fishing has a social significance in Ahousaht that goes beyond employment. Fishing in Ahousaht is close to being a total institution: it involves a complete pattern of living, a comprehensive organization of behaviour. To a lesser extent, this is also true of fishing and fish processing in Tofino. In order to compare the social importance of the fishing industry in these two communities to each other, and potentially to other places, we need to consider the major social functions of fishing-related activities. Warren (1972) identifies five major social functions that are dimensions of community when these functions are organized on a locality basis: production-distribution-consumption, socialization, social control, social participation, and mutual
support. In Ahousaht, fishing performs these functions in a manner that has a high degree of locality relevance.

1. **Production-distribution-consumption.** Fishing in Ahousaht is central to the overall organization of all three of these functions. Although much of production from commercial fishing is exchanged for cash and spent on the welfare of the fisher’s family and the fishing boat, that vessel and even the labour of the family can also be called upon by the rest of the community at important times. To the extent that there is distribution in the community outside the welfare system (which is now the principal means of support for unemployed families), it occurs through fishing or the fishing industry. Food fish is distributed through corporate band mechanisms. Fishing boats provide the means for distributing transportation, jobs, and access to subsistence goods. The consumption of food fish at feasts symbolizes the identity of the band, the contributions of individual members, and the rights band members exercise over the labour of other members.

2. **Socialization.** Fishing is the chief means by which young men are socialized into work roles and social responsibility toward family and band. Young women participate less than men in commercial fishing but just as much in clam digging, and more than men in fish processing and preparation of feasts. Providing for family and other band members in this way is the most important way Ahousahts achieve social competence.

3. **Social participation.** Being part of the work of fishing and fish processing and being part of the conversation about the entire enterprise, including boat building and maintenance, successful gear, weather, fishing boats, strategies, and financing, are the most important ways a resident of Ahousaht identifies with the community and as part of a social group. Fishing includes old and young alike. Both the apprentices and the elderly can assist in providing food and a little cash by their participation in the putter fleet. All ages also sort on the boats to dig clams. The ability to contribute fish to feasts is an important form of social participation, as well.

4. **Mutual support.** Aside from the obvious function of mutual support provided by the contributing of food fish, fishing is the activity around which much mutual support is organized. On the fish grounds, this consists of sharing information about the location of fish. It also involves any assistance required by a fisher in distress on the grounds or in need of advice or loan of tools for boat repair. Any member of the Ahousaht community will drop any activity to assist an endangered band member. This mutual support is of course widespread throughout the entire B.C. fleet. Ahousaht differs in that greater attention is paid to the whereabouts and conditions of the local fleet at all times. The Ahousaht fleet may also act as a bargaining unit at times, such as the 1979 herring season, when fishers were able to get a higher price by bargaining together and delivering their fish to one buyer during the most important opening.

5. **Social control.** The obligations entailed by having a fishing boat constitute a form of social control of fishers by the community. Fishing provides the main arena in which community members have rights over one another’s labour and even capital. In sum, fishing and related activities in Ahousaht perform crucial social and economic functions that serve to organize much of local life.

In Tofino, fishing also has some degree of locality relevance, but there are more choices and a greater degree of social reference to the outside economic and social world than exist in Ahousaht.

The locally relevant functions of Tofino Fishers’ plant are less easily distinguished, since this plant generally operated according to the world system of markets and finance. To compete successfully against larger companies with ice stations in Tofino, however, the plant needed to adapt to local conditions and use local resources, human and natural, in a relevant fashion. The simple fact of organizing packing and collecting on such a basis enabled Wingen to continue these operations when it had become uneconomical for other nonlocal companies. Wingen attempted to involve fishers in the exploitation of new local fisheries in which they would have a natural advantage. He also organized payment schedules and credit in ways adaptive to local circumstances, permitting local people to manage their jobs more effectively. On the occasion of the receiver attempting to stop plant operations and take possession of all the goods, Wingen organized shoreworkers to picket the plant and prevent seizure of undelivered frozen fish, in order that they might receive wages from the sale of this fish.

**PLANS FOR THE FUTURE OF TOFINO AND AHOUSAHT**

As the local fleet continues to shrink (three repossessions occurred in 1982 and others have followed), the Ahousahts seek alternative paths of economic development. A corporation that would own the licences and retard the repossess process is being considered (Chapter 11), as is renting licences from the Northern Native Fishing Corporation. The legalization of the putter fleet, which may show a larger catch per unit of effort, would reinforce local attempts at efficiency.

The Ahousahts have practised small-scale salmon enhancement of nearby Anderson Creek since 1980, when they began releasing an average of 20,000 chum salmon fry per year. High school students and band members work with a school project on this enhancement, collecting the eggs from the Atleo River each fall, fertilizing and incubating them in Ahousaht over the winter, releasing them in the spring. It is hoped this will grow into a larger project in which young people become involved in stream clearance, stock inventory, and eventual management of streams.
in the Ahousait area. The Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans built a larger hatchery on the Kennedy River in 1984, from which “satellite” operations on many nearby streams are conducted; eggs from very small runs can be taken to the hatchery to incubate and the fry released into the stream of origin.

Tofino fishers also have been involved with salmon enhancement, at first through the Thornton Creek Enhancement Society, which organized around the hatchery near Ucluelet. This hatchery was originally run by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, but was later taken over by the local society, which hires a manager. Through the efforts of the Tofino and Ucluelet trolls involved in the hatchery, it was eventually possible to use the hatchery for satellite enhancement of depressed chinook and coho runs in adjacent streams. The department was at first reluctant to support these efforts, since chinook and coho require longer incubation periods than do chum and are therefore more difficult and expensive to raise. By 1984 the society was releasing chinook and coho fry in two creeks in Barkley Sound and two in Clayoquot Sound. They intend to continue the enhancement of three more cycle years in these creeks and also begin the enhancement of chinook and coho in additional creeks in Clayoquot and Barkley Sounds. In the last two years, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has been highly cooperative and supportive of these plans. By 1985, the Thornton Creek Enhancement Society, the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council, and the Hesquiat Band had released 73,000 chinook and 307,520 coho through various contracts with DFO and Canada Manpower.

The fishers in Ahousait and Tofino involved in these projects pin their hopes on being able to increase the local supply of fish before negotiations within the Pacific Salmon Commission reduce the interception of the salmon on which they now depend. (The roe herring fishery in this area was closed in 1985 and 1986 to allow stocks to recover.) The main reason for west coast reductions or closures is that a large provincialwide salmon fleet concentrates there. However, if local stocks do not recover rapidly enough before 1992, and if sufficient intercepted stocks are not allowed, it will be essential for the west coast area to develop a means by which at least their own fishers’ futures can be protected. (The Nuu-chah-nulth fleet took 4.2 per cent of the salmon in Areas 23 to 26 in 1982; by extension, the entire locally resident fleet might take less than 10 per cent of the salmon caught in Area 24 and in the entire region.) In addition, a mechanism could be developed whereby nonresident trolls with a strong commitment to the area could be incorporated into local developmental efforts.

The desirability and probable necessity of making a transition from an interception fishery to a locally supplied fishery suggest that the successful Alaska Regional Aquaculture Association model could be fruitfully attempted on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Alaska responded to historical low salmon catches in the mid-1970s with area licensing and legislation permitting the formation of user-group regional associations for building hatcheries. These created the incentive for fishers in the local area to improve the stocks in that area without having to share the improvements beyond it. (Only licence holders in the area may fish there, although fishers may own licences in more than one area and may buy and sell licences. Licences were originally issued to area residents on a point system.) Fishers licensed in the southern southeast Alaska area contributed 3 per cent of their catch income toward stock enhancement (in this case, coho, chinook, and chums), while the State of Alaska supplied a thirty-year loan to set up hatchery operations. The first loan payment fell due in six years, following the first return from the five-year-cycle fish. But in the southern southeast area, returns to the hatchery through the terminal harvesting of fish and the 3 per cent royalty had already produced enough to make the loan repayment by the fifth year.

Through development of a harvesting plan approved by the Board of Fish, a citizen’s policy-making body, the Southern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association fishers can decide where to harvest the fish — either further out at sea or terminally — as the fish reach their streams of origin in the smaller Special Harvest Area over which the association has exclusive rights. Thus there is some incentive for fishers to invest in competitive gear and large boats, since they have a mechanism to catch terminally through their association. They are motivated to harvest in the most efficient and cost-effective manner and also to judge which fish give a better return — because of higher quality — when taken farther out.

The Southern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association has also created a united fishers’ force that has considerable voice in regional policy decisions through the Regional Planning Team for the area (deciding what species to enhance and planning the overall development of the area). The association provides half the membership of the Regional Planning Team, and their agreement is necessary for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (the other half of the planning team) to finalize plans. This has proved a powerful incentive for fishers to work together in planning the development of the region.

The increased predictability of production and the corporate ownership of the product when terminally harvested have created different and more stable marketing arrangements and an opportunity for the group to sell to the highest bidder. A marketing arrangement for chums has developed with Korea, as a result. Formerly this was not possible for individuals, who might be obliged to sell all their fish at lower prices to companies to whom they were indebted (Chapter 6). In their terminal harvest within the Special Harvest Area, the Aquaculture Association charters some of its own fishers to harvest for the group or takes a higher percentage (30 to 50 per
cent) of the catch of individuals to repay the loan. But trollers and others who choose to fish farther out also benefit from the increased returns (e.g. six million coho were expected to be released as smolts in 1985, representing an estimated return of 900,000 adults of which 675,000 will be caught in the common-property fishery and 225,000 will be caught in the terminal harvest area). Many fishers keep their traditional arrangements with processors when they harvest outside the Special Harvest Area (Langdon, 1984; W. Griffioen, 1984 & 1985 pers. comm.; SSRAA 1985 Harvest Management Plan; Pinkerton, 1985).

The Alaska Regional Aquaculture Association model suggests a route whereby fishers can achieve greater equity and efficiency in their harvest, while organizing themselves to improve the resource base and participate fully in its management. Such a route allows efficient small-scale harvesters to persist alongside larger harvesters and fosters rather than diminishes the development of the entire region. Such a route empowers fishers, rather than nonfisher outsiders, and creates incentives for existing fishers’ groups to work together. And, as Jackson (1984) notes, there is no inherent contradiction between such a user-group development corporation and unions.

West coast trollers may be persuaded to this route by world markets if nothing else in the near future. Norway’s expanding production of pen-reared Atlantic salmon, and its ability to put fresh salmon of any size on the market at any time of year had already made inroads into B.C.’s traditional fresh and frozen European markets; it now threatens even their North American markets. In 1983 and 1984 Norwegian salmon were the price leader in the Seattle fresh/frozen salmon market, and approached west coast chinook in actual price (P. Heggeland, 1985 pers. comm.; see also Chapter 7). Atlantic salmon are already farmed on a small scale in the western U.S. and in B.C., and the original half-dozen B.C. farms for Pacific species had increased to thirty by 1984. By spring 1985 a salmon farm in Clayoquot Sound was being operated by a nonresident nonfisher, and applications for pen-rearing sites on the B.C. coast soared in the following year. If fishers do not organize themselves for a vital role in such new developments, these may occur anyway, and in a fashion not necessarily in the best interests of local fishers. Development that will be in the interest of the local communities will, however, require the full support of the state, especially in enabling legislation (orders in council) and in making long-term loans available.

CONCLUSION

In examining the nature of fishing dependence and the socio-cultural and economic effects of policies that disadvantage isolated rural fishing communities, I have simultaneously considered how people in two fishing-dependent communities organize fishing and fish-processing activities to exploit the natural and human resources of the region. Focusing particular attention on fishing in Ahousaht and on fish processing in Tofino, I have shown ways in which the industry in these locations provides both a livelihood and a social fabric for communities. I have also shown that significant opportunities for development of the local fishery exist, within a framework of appropriate local involvement and government support.

NOTES

1. I returned to Tofino for the month of August 1982 with coworkers to administer survey interviews to shoreworkers in Tofino and Ucluelet, and in January 1983 spent two weeks in Tofino and Ahousaht doing survey interviews with fishers. As time permitted, I used the survey interviews as an ethnographic instrument, eliciting other information, as well. Since the interviews were lengthy and demanding, however, ethnographic research was fairly limited during these later visits. I returned for a weekend of final interviewing in April 1984.

2. There are also many geographic areas that are fishing-dependent in a different sense or to a lesser degree: areas such as the Gulf Islands, which have difficult transportation links and few occupational opportunities, are excluded. Areas that have long histories of fishing dependence (such as many areas of the east coast of Vancouver Island) but are within commuting distance of less-dependent areas are excluded. The discussion is restricted, however, to those areas that have an extreme dependence on fishing, that have in the past been culturally defined by fishing, and whose future existence may be actually threatened by changes in fishing policy or the location of fishing-related facilities. These regions are: (1) the Queen Charlotte Islands, including the village clusters of Old Masset/Masset and Skidegate/Queen Charlotte City, (2) the Nass River, including the villages of Aiyansh, Greeneville, Canyon City, Kinsolit, (3) the isolated north coast villages, including Port Simpson, Kitkatla, Oona River, Hartley Bay, (4) the upper Skeena villages, including the Hazeltons, Kitwanga, Kispiox, Moricetown, (5) the central coast, including Bella Bella, Kleetu, Bella Coola/ Hagensborg, Rivers Inlet, (6) the islands and isolated coast off the northeastern coast of Vancouver Island, including Alert Bay, Sointula, Simoo Sound, Kingscome Inlet, Minstrel Island, Sullivan Bay, (7) the northern Georgia Straits area, including Blind Channel, Stuart Island/ Big Bay, Surge Narrows, Refuge Cove, Mansons Landing/Squirrel Cove. A few of these areas have experienced logging booms for periods of time and minor logging for longer periods. Yet logging has been unable to sustain the majority of the population in the long run.
3. The local saying, “You can’t make it on tourists alone,” is becoming less true in 1984. An $8 million federal grant to supply sewer and water to the entire district municipality—seven kilometers, including the area between the former village of Tofino and the park—will establish the infrastructure for the expansion of tourism.

4. As a submission to the Pearse Commission.

5. The circulation of shorework wages was not studied, but Jeffrey Halpern’s (1984) study of local versus capital-intensive tourism in an isolated small town in western Ireland showed that income from small-scale locally owned tourist facilities circulated seven or eight times in the community.

6. Lemmings Inlet on Meares Island has been identified as the most suitable site for maricultural development in the region. If logging occurs, mariculturists believe mariculture will not be possible.

7. In 1985 this injunction to prevent logging on Meares was at first denied, but an appeal was later upheld on the grounds that logging would destroy evidence of continuous aboriginal use, which the Indians claimed in their negotiations with the government.

8. This is an estimate based on an area population of about one thousand.

9. Between 1976 and 1985 there were five commercial chum fisheries, of one or two days each, taking between 22,000 and 125,000 pieces annually. Whether as a result of this or not, escapements after 1980 remained below 73,000. Low chum abundance in the 1960s was a coastwide phenomenon.

10. Two elderly Tofino residents disagree on the date.

11. Edmunds and Walker had been a part of B.C. Packers up until 1931, at which time they took over all of B.C. Packers’ fresh and frozen operations, and worked as a semi-independent company for the next nine years (Bell, 1981). It would appear that the larger company did not wish to divert capital during the 1930s into fresh and frozen operations but that it maintained the option of re-entering this market as it became more profitable in the 1940s.

12. The International Pacific Salmon Commission was a joint Canada-U.S. body, set up under a 1940s treaty, which collected data on the pink and sockeye stocks of the Fraser River and ensured that they were divided equally between the two countries.

13. After 1978, when enhanced stocks were first taken by the net fleet, Barkley Sound supported a growing gillnet and seine fishery, largely assisted by a major chinook hatchery on Robertson Creek, and successful fertilization for sockeye on Great Central Lake. Fertilization of Kennedy Lake in Clayoquot Sound has not succeeded in increasing the sockeye there significantly.

14. An ice station is a modern troll camp, consisting of a small storage shed on a moorage facility with an ice-making machine and road access. The ice station merely supplied ice to vessels, purchased fish, iced it in small tote containers, and trucked it to brokers, to public freezers, or even to a company’s plant in Vancouver.

15. However, in the Tofino area, there are a number of fishers specializing in crab and other species, and to a limited extent the total number of licences in 1981 (126) does reflect greater employment in fishing than indicated by salmon licences. I estimate that seventy-five to eighty licenced fishers-skippers live in the Clayoquot Sound area, including sixty-one salmon fishers. Most of the difference between 80 and 126 is made up by personal herring licences applied to herring skiffs, however (see Figure 14.2).

16. Evidence for the preference for local fishing emerges from both interviews and statistics. The catch of the entire Nuu-chah-nulth fleet is in direct proportion to concentrations of fishers and in inverse proportion to the size of the fishery. In 1982, 41 per cent of the Nuu-chah-nulth catch was off Clayoquot Sound (Area 24), while only 24 per cent was off Barkley Sound (Area 23). Thus 65 per cent was taken in areas 23 and 24, while 91 per cent was taken in areas 23 to 26, covering 158 miles of the west coast of Vancouver Island. In 1982 the Nuu-chah-nulth fleet took less than five per cent of the overall salmon troll catch in Areas 23 to 26, but 7.6 per cent of the catch in Area 24 (calculated from Department of Fisheries and Oceans, James, 1984).