

# Commercial Fisheries News

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## Newfoundland cod pot fishery looks promising

FOGO ISLAND, NEWFOUNDLAND – In September and early October, seven fishermen caught their 3,125-metric-ton (mt) quota of northern cod in baited pots from the waters around Fogo Island off the northeast coast of Newfoundland.

The cod pots, which were developed by the Centre for Sustainable Aquatic Resources (CSAR) of the Fisheries and Marine Institute at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland, allowed the fishermen to land an exceptionally high-quality product.

The fish remained alive in the pots until they were hauled, bled onboard, and packed in ice. They were processed separately from cod caught using conventional methods. For their efforts, the fishermen received C\$1.25 per pound compared to the 46-56 cents typically paid for gillnet-caught cod.

This new fishery has been a long time in the making. It all started during the cod moratorium in the mid-1990s, when CSAR fisheries technologist Philip Walsh was talking to fisheries researcher Pingguo He about developing a sustainable, alternative harvesting method for cod.

"All gears can be fished responsibly," explained CSAR Director Paul Winger. "But sometimes it's hard to get out to haul the gear in bad weather, whether it's with a longline, baited hook, or gillnet, and there can be a high level of destruction of the fish you've caught. If you can't get out for four to six days, the fish you caught the first day are not worth eating."

After a small cod fishery started again on Newfoundland's south coast in 1997, the provincial government provided support for CSAR's initiative to transfer the technology that was being used to

*Asked if cod potting would work in New England, Walsh said it should, as long as there is sufficient biomass and the cod are hungry.*



Centre for Sustainable Aquatic Resources, Marine Institute photo

*The cod pot is made of poly netting on a metal frame with a circular collapsible nylon funnel for the entrance, two non-return devices to prevent the fish from escaping, and a floating roof that significantly increases the size. The pot measures 6'x6'x41", and the floating roof adds a maximum of 8' in height. It is pictured here being hauled into Dennis Ivany's 28' vessel, Petley, out of Random Island, Newfoundland.*

catch Pacific cod in Alaska.

"We thought it was a slam dunk. We'd simply use their pots," recalled Winger. "But it didn't work. Atlantic cod didn't like going inside those designs."

With additional support from the

provincial Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the Marine Institute, and the Canadian Centre for Fisheries Innovation, Walsh and his CSAR colleagues designed and tested 12



prototypes before devising the circular funneled pot that has proven to be effective.

### Cod pot specs

The cod pot is made of poly netting on a metal frame with a circular collapsible nylon funnel for the entrance, two non-return devices to prevent the fish from escaping, and a floating roof that significantly increases the size.

The pot itself measures 6'x6'x41". The floating roof adds a maximum of 8' in height. The 170-pound units are typically fished from 28'-to-34' longliners equipped with a pot hauler and boom. Each cod pot costs about \$300 for materials, or \$700 including labor.

CSAR tested its designs in Meteghan, Nova Scotia and various locations in Newfoundland at different times of the year and learned that "cod won't chase bait into a trap when they can forage," Winger noted. "If you plunk it down on cod feeding on capelin, it won't work."

Rather, the pots, which are baited with squid, mackerel, herring, or a combination of these, work best in the fall when the cod are feeding heavily in preparation for spawning and food is scarce.

Fishing sustainably for cod fit well with the mission of the Shorefast Foundation, an organization that invests in the revitalization of the economy of Fogo Island and Change Islands by supporting social entrepreneurship.

Gordon Slade, chairman of the board and a former deputy minister of fisheries, facilitated the collaboration between the Marine Institute and the Fogo Island Cooperative, which is providing

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Centre for Sustainable Aquatic Resources, Marine Institute photo

*Centre for Sustainable Aquatic Resources Technician Rennie Sullivan, standing, and fisherman Rod Budden show the trap-caught cod aboard Budden's 34' longliner.*

participating fishermen and does the primary processing onshore.

With the assistance of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and other community partners, the co-op has supported the construction of cod pots by fishermen on the island.

Slade had developed the market with selected restaurants in Newfoundland, which pay a premium price for the pre-sold product.

Tent cards on tables in Bacalao Nouvelle Newfoundland Cuisine in St. John's and Nicole's Café in Joe Batt's Arm on Fogo Island feature pot-caught cod. The fishery is described as "a method of capturing cod using fishing gear that offers the best opportunity for sustaining ecosystems for future generations."

### Cod resurgence

George Rose, director of the Centre for Fisheries Ecosystem Research at the Marine Institute, confirms there has been "a resurgence" of cod on the northeast coast of the province, Grand Bank, and Flemish Cap, and reports that, in a section of 3K3L, the biomass has increased from 10,000 mt in the mid-1990s to 100,000 mt.

Rose said he would like to see the gillnet become "a very minor component of our overall suite of techniques rather than the major component it is today."

He recommended giving the cod stock further time to rebuild before significantly increasing the quota.

"If the quota were raised to 10,000 tons," he said, "that's all you're ever going to get. But if you let it rebuild

*See COD POT FISHERY, page 3*





# Small-boat fisherman reports live catch, less waste with new pots

FOGO ISLAND, NEWFOUNDLAND – Rod Budden, 52, has lived in Seldom on Fogo Island all his life. Since 1977, he has been fishing lumpfish, herring, lobster, blackbacks, capelin, snow crab, toad crab, and codfish. But for the last two years, he's been trying something new. After using gillnets for most of his career, he is setting and hauling 15 cod pots from his 35' longliner.

Budden noted with interest that the pots target all different sizes compared to the four-to-five-year-old fish he used to catch in 5-1/2" gillnet mesh.

"With the gillnet," he said, "you're targeting all the prime spawners and also the prime males."

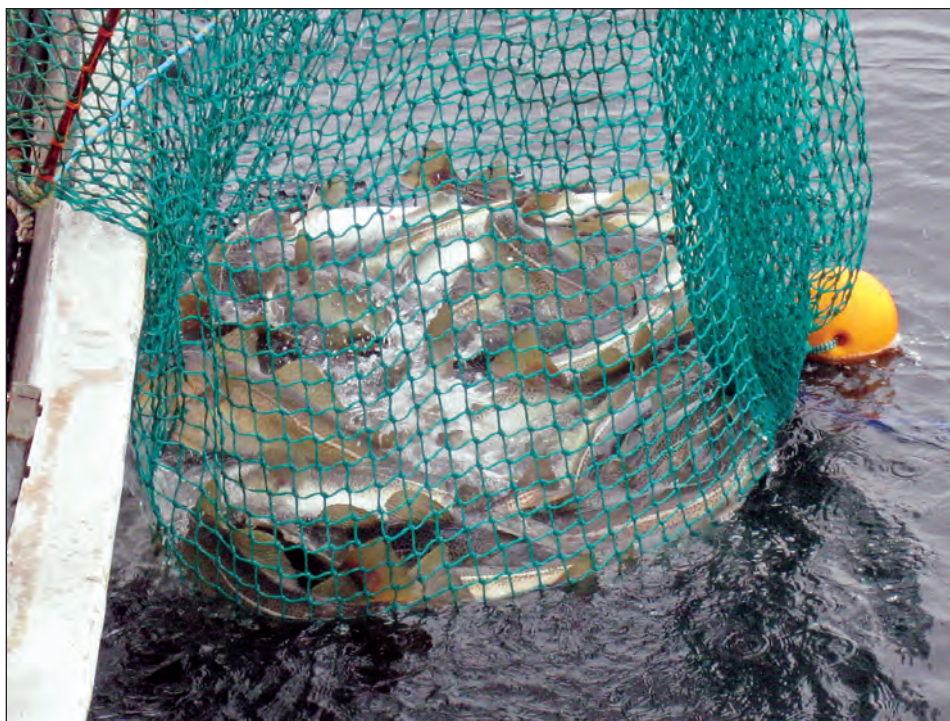
The pot-caught codfish averaged five-to-eight pounds this year, Budden said, compared to three-to-five pounds last year.

When he used gillnets, high winds would prevent Budden and his wife, Beverly, from going out to haul the nets. After two days, if they hauled in 1,200 pounds, they'd have to discard 800 pounds.

The Buddens caught their first full quota using cod pots in the summer of 2009. They started by putting their 15 pots on the edge of a shoal in 20 fathoms of water.

There were only 90 pounds of fish in them the next day, so they moved the pots to a level bottom. The following day, they collected 280 pounds, and the day after that, over 500 pounds. The couple left the pots from Friday to Monday and then hauled 1,200 pounds.

"If I had put gillnets down on



Centre for Sustainable Aquatic Resources, Marine Institute photo

*Codfish in cod pot being hauled into Rod Budden's vessel.*

## Cod pot fishery

*Continued from page 2*

to a million tons, you could take 100,000 tons every year."

While praising the sustainability of cod potting, he pointed out that "it's not the be-all and end-all answer to the future of the cod fishery" because there is only a niche market for this high-value product.

"Perhaps that's something that should grow," Rose added. "There may be more demand for that kind of very high-quality fish than we're taking advantage of right now."

Walsh noted that the cod captured

Friday and left them to Monday," he said, "I would have had to throw most of the fish away."

The cod pots were designed by researchers at the Centre for Sustainable Aquatic Resources (CSAR) of the Fisheries and Marine Institute at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland (see story page 24). Since then, CSAR has modified the design to work on uneven ground.

Budden also learned from a CSAR

technician how to properly bleed the fish – taking care not to cut the heart, which is needed to pump out the blood – before gutting and packing it on ice.

Now that six other fishermen have caught their quota this way, Budden is convinced the cod pot fishery is here to stay.

"Hopefully, within the next few years, we'll have most everybody converted to the cod pot fishery on Fogo Island," he said. "And then it can expand out to the rest of Newfoundland and Labrador. Then, maybe it can go across to foreign countries."

Andrew Safer

in September was pre-sold in May and that, currently, the limiting factor is the availability of cod pots. Additional pots are scheduled to be built this winter and will enable additional sales.

"Many suppliers, big and small, are asking for this product," he reported. "We have not come close to supplying those niche markets."

Asked if cod potting would work in New England, Walsh said it should, as long as there is sufficient biomass and the cod are hungry.

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