

Using Film Documentaries as Fisheries Teaching Tools

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I have taught a fisheries science and management class for many years at the University of Massachusetts and now at the University of Victoria. Because of my background and experience as a fisheries ecologist, the course focuses mainly on the fish and how to assess their populations in order to give managers useful information with which to manage different fisheries. I talk about fishing history (starting with the Greeks); fishing gear; status of local, regional, national, and global fisheries; population dynamics; and detailed coverage of various fisheries models. The one thing that is usually missing is the human component of fisheries, which is, arguably, equally as important as (or perhaps more than) science in managing fisheries. To fill this gap I have had guest speakers come to give talks to my students, but more recently I have turned to showing films. Students are generally receptive to good documentaries, and a good film can pack a ton of easily digestible information into one hour. Films, unlike most lectures, often provoke strong viewpoints and active discussions. Students also seem to identify with particular characters even if these characters are from very different cultures than their own.

In the last decade, fisheries science has grown in general interest and popularity, as indicated by (1) frequent papers in top journals like *Science* and *Nature*; (2) the increase in films about fish and fishing including feature films (*Gone Fishing*, *The Perfect Storm*, *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen*, etc.); (3) animated films (*Finding Nemo*, *A Shark's Tale*, etc.); (4) sport-fishing series (*Bass Tech*, *Fish Warrior*, and, more recently, an entire cable network, The World Fishing Network); and (5) perhaps most surprising, reality shows about fishers and the fishing industry (*Wicked Tuna*, *Lobstermen*, *Swords*, and, most famous, *Deadliest Catch*). There has also been a dramatic increase in documentaries about the fishing profession, the fishing industry, and local, national, and global fisheries conservation issues. It is these documentaries that I have found most valuable as teaching tools. The best ones focus on the fishing community—both fishers and their families and the industry they work for—but also include the important role of managers and politicians (and sometimes scientists). Here, I want to briefly highlight two such documentaries that I have used in the classroom. In future issues I will review newer films, focusing on their pedagogical potential.

Taking Stock is a film produced in 1994 by the National Film Board of Canada (director: Nigel Markham). Even though it is almost 20 years old, it still holds tremendous power and feeling. The film focuses on the personal, community, and industrial effects of the closure of a Canadian northern cod fishery in 1993, particularly focusing on Newfoundland, where about 80% of the population depended on the fishery. The film's power resides in taking us through the history of the fishery and the consequences of the closure through the eyes of the many players involved. The

film highlights where all of the errors were made but does not take sides; it even includes scientists from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans talking about mistakes in the stock assessments. The film begins with images of Pierce Burry, “son of a fisherman, grandson of a fisherman, and great-grandson of a fisherman” going out to check his nets for the last time as the fishery closure has just taken effect. In the course of the next 47 minutes, in addition to Mr. Burry and his family, we meet a variety of players all involved or affected by the moratorium: Winnifred Mackay, a fishplant worker who is suddenly out of work; Claude Bishop, a cod assessment scientist for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans; Vic Young, the CEO of Fisheries Products International, the company that owned most of the fishing industry and that had pushed for the development of the offshore fisheries; Bill Cox, a trawlerman who works for Fisheries Products International (“Give me saltwater and a boat and I will be OK”); various federal fisheries ministers; and Cabot Martin, a lawyer and spokesman for the Newfoundland Inshore Fisheries Association. Everyone blames everyone else for the tragedy, and in the end perhaps everyone is right.

Gutted: The Demise of Scotland's Fishing Industry was made 10 years later (directed by David Peat, produced by Thirteen/WNET New York for *Wide Angle* on PBS) and covers similar ground but from the eastern side of the Atlantic. Sandy West comes from a family with generations of cod fishermen in Fraserburg, Scotland. New European Union (EU) fleet reduction regulations have forced him to decommission his newly purchased fishing boat, the *Steadfast*. The film is focused around the West family's emotional final voyage toward demolition at a scrap yard in Denmark, where all salvageable parts are sold to pay for the trip home. It also describes the birth and activities of the “Cod Crusaders,” a group of spouses in the community who attend the EU Fisheries Commission meetings in an attempt to save a way of life in their town. In contrast, Will White and his family are successful herring and mackerel fishers as part of the pelagic fleet, a fishery that had collapsed in the 1970s but recovered after a 5-year EU ban. Curiously, the film also includes an interview with Leon Panetta (complete transcript is online, see web page below), former White House chief of staff and director of the CIA, present U.S. secretary of defense, and then-chair of the Pew Oceans Commission, about how to promote a sustainable future for the fishing industry and the worlds' oceans.

There are many similarities in both films but also important contrasts that can be fruitfully explored in discussions. These similarities and contrasts help students understand the complex nature of fisheries management by putting faces on all the different players.

For more information on these films see:

<http://www.onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=32271>

http://ffh.films.com/id/12787/Gutted_The_Demise_of_Scotlands_Fishing_Industry.htm

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/episodes/gutted/introduction/457>

If you know of any film with teaching potential that the readers of *Fisheries* or students in a class would be interested in having reviewed, please send ideas to juanes@uvic.ca. 