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Tundi's Take: Can anything as narrow as catch shares propel us toward EBM?

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I find myself hopelessly adrift in appraising whether catch shares and ITQs work or not. As in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, the last person to speak is the one I find most convincing. In theory the idea of catch shares is the kind of paradigm-shifting management measure that we need. But in practice we have seen how transferable rights have led to market consolidation, empowering the already powerful, and sometimes pushing small-scale fishers into oblivion.

Admittedly there are success stories, all of which rest on the premise that any users will protect what they own (or have limited access to). Instead of the amorphous free-for-all that exists in most fisheries - which not only puts pressure on the fish stocks but also tests the mettle of the management authorities that are charged with ensuring that use is sustainable - tradable rights lay the groundwork for rational control. There are at least three features of catch share fisheries that seem to predispose them to be inherently better forms of fisheries management than other effort controls:

1. They require a solid understanding of stocks and population dynamics, without which the limited entry scheme cannot be designed;
2. They are based on a widely recognized value of the fisheries - made even more valuable by perception that is enhanced by the limited entry; and
3. The fishing pressure is inherently bounded by the limited entry scheme, instead of spiraling out of control in a race to catch the last fish.

Maybe where ITQs run amok is in their methods of allocation. But the real question for MEAM is, even when catch shares succeed in making fisheries sustainable - do they help us achieve EBM? Here again, I'm of two minds.

On the one hand, fisheries management remains one of the highest priorities for marine EBM, and getting it right can only contribute to a more effective management regime. In our UNEP EBM Manual (www.unep.org/pdf/EBM_Manual_r15_Final.pdf), we point to fisheries management as one of five approaches that EBM must embrace (the other four being watershed management, integrated coastal management, marine protected area designation, and marine spatial planning). But that's the crux of the matter: fisheries is but one use of marine resources and space. Tackling fisheries extraction does not help us with controlling pollution, stemming habitat loss, limiting the impact of invasive species, maintaining system resilience in the face of climate change, and other equally pressing management issues.

And - importantly - designing and implementing catch shares rarely if ever involves the kind of broad stakeholder engagement that true EBM requires. Instead, catch share methods focus the discussion and negotiation to the narrowest group of special interests. So perhaps there is no yes or no answer. Let's accept that catch shares can improve some situations, when appropriate to a particular fishery and society. But let's also remember that EBM will almost inevitably require much more.

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