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# STUFF

MAGAZINE

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# DINING

**LEADING LADIES OF THE KITCHEN | RESORT READY | THE MEALS THAT MADE THEM**

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## CONSUMED

### FISH IN A BARREL

Funny how things turn out. January's infamous "blacklist dinner," hosted by Legal Sea Foods' Roger Berkowitz, may turn out to be a wake-up call for a focus on the sustainability of the fishermen as well as the fish. The dinner was co-sponsored by the Culinary Guild of New England, which stages monthly events — a cooking class with Gordon Hamersley, a tour of the test kitchens at *Cook's Illustrated*. Berkowitz cheekily suggested the menu concept: blacklisted fish. Atlantic Cod cheeks, Vietnamese black tiger shrimp, prosciutto-wrapped hake — these "blacklisted" species are not illegal fish, or even illegally caught fish. They are simply on "watch lists" like the one published by the Monterey Bay Aquarium. Berkowitz has long taken issue with the lists, arguing they inaccurately represent the true sustainability of some species.

Controversy ensued, with blogospheric name calling spilling over into print, TV, and radio. But the evening turned out not as a fiery dialogue, but as a smart, respectful teach-in on the fate of fish and fishermen in New England. Instead of stomping up to the podium, bloggers texted away at the tables as Berkowitz, New Bedford scallop fishermen, marine biologists, and the state representative from Gloucester, Ann-Margaret Ferrante, explained the nuances of assessing fish stock and habitat damage, legal hurdles for fishermen, and the ongoing political battle between state legislators, conservationist NGOs, and the Fed. Here's what I now know: we've got to make it simpler for the fishermen — or we won't have any independent fishermen left. We will still have the fish. Just not to eat.

Green-minded friends, we may have been "smugged." We've been smugly listening to only half of the sustainable seafood equation, conscientiously worrying about dwindling stock of fish species. But we haven't been paying sufficient attention to the sustainability of the fishermen who catch them. The central argument is that the fishermen are small businessmen, many of them legal immigrants or first-generation, who are not well funded like the well-intentioned NGOs to which we proudly send checks. According to fishermen like Richie Canastra of New Bedford, "It's off balance. The environmental groups have lots of money. The fishermen get huge fines for catching totally legal fish."

The heated controversy has the New England Fishery Management Council, U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Administrator Jane Lubchenco, and environmental NGOs pitted against Governor Deval Patrick, members of the Massachusetts congressional delegation, and New England fishermen. At issue is who accurately measures the supply of fish. Is the NOAA more accurate with its decades-old techniques, or are the fishermen and scientists who use four-dimensional sonar more accurate? And is the government setting catch limits that appropriately account for differences in catch method, habitat, and net size? There was even a "Trawlgate" scandal: uneven trawl lines led to almost three years of faulty NOAA assessments, which were used to create catch allocations.

Mostly, the argument comes down to whether stocks have rebounded remarkably since catch controls were established in the 1980s. Local fishermen think the government vastly under-reports the supply. Recently, the Commerce Department denied Northeastern lawmakers' request to freeze sanctions and allow local fishermen accused of breaking the law additional time to have their cases reviewed. This denial came even as the inspector general appointed by Secretary Locke to review fishermen's claims against the NOAA found financial mismanagement, abusive treatment of fishermen, and the use of high-pressure tactics to force fishermen to settle their claims. Maybe we need to stop treating fishermen as if they were fish in a barrel. Maybe we need a "Fish Aid" concert, just like Farm Aid. Sea shanties, anyone?

— Louisa Kasdon

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