

The Great Fishing “Debate”

Grades 5-12

Part One

The class will divide into six groups. You are either a recreational fin fisherman, commercial fin fisherman, shell fisherman, lobsterman, aquaculturist, or an environmentalist. Think about your particular concerns and interests. What do you need to be successful in your pursuits? You all want to fish in the same area of the Bay or conserve some of the Bay’s resources. Write two paragraphs about your concerns and issues. You will use these paragraphs as a starting point for homework. At home, you will do some research on your concerns and issues. You may use the Internet or your local library. With the information you gather you will prepare a one-page position statement. Bring your opinions to the “town meeting” that we will have in class. Be prepared to describe why you should have the right to fish or conserve resources.

Below are some position ideas for the various groups we have discussed:

Recreational fin fisherman

You want to be able to go out fishing whenever you want to, to catch fish that are fun to fish. You think that commercial fishermen have caused drastic reduction in the fish populations. You also feel that the commercial fishermen use more of the Bay than you do. After all they have rights to take much more fish than you do.

Commercial fin fisherman

You depend on the Bay for your livelihood, not just for fun. You need to have access to all parts of the Bay so you can vary your fishing depending upon the conditions of the Bay. You don’t want any restrictions on catch size – the more the better for you. You know that there is a problem with by-catch (fish that get caught in your nets by accident that you can’t sell) but you need to make your living.

Shell fisherman

You need to make your living by digging quahogs (hard shell clams), oysters, and mussels from the bottom of the bay. You need to catch as many as possible, as you are paid for each clam you catch. You go out each day into the Bay to find a place where there may be shellfish. However, where you can go is limited. You can't fish where the Bay is closed by pollution and sewage runoff. When it rains the closed areas get even bigger (see web link <http://www.state.ri.us/dem/topics/outdoor.htm#marine>). Also, you need to choose a place where the wind is right, the bottom is right- where you can catch! You want to be able to go anywhere in the Bay to fish so all your options are open.

Lobsterman

Your concerns are similar to the shell fishermen: you need to place your pots all over the Bay, depending on where the lobsters are. You would like to be able to fish as many traps as possible. You know that your gear can be a problem for recreational boater or other fisherman, but you have to earn a living.

Aquaculturist

You want to raise your own fish and shellfish. You need a piece of the Bay set aside for yourself to raise them in. You want the best areas for raising your product, and you want to make sure that no one else can come in and fish in the area. It takes time and money to set up your aquaculture business and takes a while before you get any product to sell.

Environmentalist

You have many concerns about fishing in the Bay. Fishing boats create noise pollution and release unburned gas and oil. Fishing harms many animals. Obviously, the fish that are caught are killed and eaten, but there are other casualties as well. "By catch" are fish that are caught and sometimes damaged or killed by accident while fishing for something else. Even catch and release fishermen damage their fish, and some of these die after being released. As a result of all of these things, you think, diversity and numbers of living things in the Bay are decreasing. Ecosystems can be destroyed by overfishing and polluting the resources.

Part Two

A huge amount of seafood is caught and sold in Rhode Island every year. Here are some of the numbers: The amount of shellfish (seafood creatures that don't have fins) caught in Rhode Island in 1999. Make a graph (bar graph or pie chart) comparing these numbers.

Type of Shellfish	Pounds Caught in 1999
Clams	2,690,000
Crabs	2,581,500
Lobster	6,400,000
Oysters	100,000
Periwinkles	4,000
Shrimp	11,000
Squid	20,234,000

Answer the following questions:

1. Does fishing hurt the ecosystem?
2. How many fish should people take from the Bay?
3. Are size limits a good idea?
4. Should we grow fish and shellfish for food?
5. How should we control the fish populations?
6. When a fish is caught and released, do they survive?
7. What is by-catch? How does it impact the ecosystem?