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**Community, Economy, And Environment:
An Anthropological Case Study of Fisheries Management in Northern Norway**

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Management of fisheries, like other natural resources used jointly, can have many different and sometimes conflicting environmental and social goals. Whether local, state or international, management regimes have their direct effects on the individual resource-users, whose experiences are invaluable for understanding resistance or compliance to rules. But in more fundamental terms, and ultimately for understanding success and failure, the study of common property is compelling because it captures the intersection of socially constructed notions of self and of community. In what follows, I will present a number of "voices from the commons" from recent fieldwork among fishers and whalers in a Northern Norwegian coastal village, paying particular attention to the boat-quota system, introduced in 1990 to regulate coastal cod-fishers north of the 62nd parallel. The interaction of political-economic forces, social structure, and a particular resource base has, on an individual level, affected different fishers differently and led to a variety of transformations in the way fishing is done. At the same time, most coastal fishers supported some form of regulation in ways that drew on what have been called key Norwegian values²—equality, fairness, independence, and responsibility. Though such values and concepts may not have meant the same to everyone, the fishers still shared a similar "community of discourse" (Scott 1985: 140) and a "discourse of the community" where the future of fishing was linked to the future of the village and other levels of community. And it is through these contextual identifications and understandings that resource management rules are evaluated.

Overview

The Lofoten Islands lie just off the coast of Northern Norway, above the arctic circle. The area has traditionally been a rich fishing ground; associated with the wealth of regional Viking kings and trade to the Mediterranean since the Middle Ages. *Lofotfisket*, the main cod season there, usually lasts from

January to March when Norwegian-Arctic cod migrates from the Barents Sea to spawn in the waters surrounding the islands. Although for most local fishers this winter cod season is the most important in terms of income, they also participate in a number of seasonally-dependent fisheries throughout the year, for example, many boats travel further north for the spring-cod season and others whale during the summer. Lofoten (and Northern Norway more generally) is marked by a large coastal fleet with relatively low capital, exporting low value-added products (Pettersen 1992: 3).³ In Moskenes municipality in the southern part of Lofoten, where I did fieldwork, most used hand-line, long-line, nets, and a few danish seine. Registered boats ranged in size from four to 23 meters, so all boats belong to the coastal fleet; fig. 1 shows a breakdown of boat-size structure in the village.

In Norway as a whole, there was a substantial decrease in the number of fishers between 1945 and 1975, especially among part-time fishers, and a more stable but still decreasing number after 1975 (Otterstad 1994: 30). In 1948 there totaled over 85,000 fishers, whereas in 1992 there were under 27,000, of which less than 20,000 were full-time.⁴ This decrease was echoed in Moskenes (fig. 2), one of the most fishery-dependent townships in Norway: over 30 percent of the labor-active population was directly involved in the fishing industry, and another ten percent in processing.⁵ The local population has also been decreasing (fig. 3), which many attribute to the stagnation in the fishing industry. Fig. 4 shows the number of fishers as a percentage of the population, one can clearly see the changes, especially since the crisis in the cod stocks during the late eighties.

Claiming the Waters

One important marker of difference among fishers is generational, which illuminates many of these broad changes in the national and regional political economy. Fishers in their sixties (those who began fishing by and large before large-scale reorganizations in the fishing industry) primarily regarded fishing

as inevitable, as their only means of making a living and surviving in the coastal arctic. None that I spoke with had ever had jobs outside the fishing industry. Younger fishers however, those in their twenties, thirties, and forties, tended to conceive of fishing as more of a choice, as an alternative among other possibilities. Many had held other jobs in other parts of Norway,⁶ growing up in the age of guaranteed education where many of their peers and classmates moved out of the village in search of "something better." Some also viewed fishing as an unstable and contracting industry: as one 25-year fisher said to me "I'm quitting, getting out to get an education for something else while I still can."

The older and more-established fishers often owned their own boats, and of course this is undoubtedly, if only partially, related to different positions in the life cycle. Yet changes in the regulatory system have also had a great impact on young fishers just starting out. For example, Svein⁷ was a 30-year-old crew member on a whaling and fishing boat. His skipper argued boat quotas were more just because they guaranteed everyone an income, but Svein responded "Fairness and equality may sound very social democratic, but since there isn't competition between boats any longer I get the same income whether I fish with a skillful fisher or not. That means it's more difficult to make enough to buy my own boat. The government bank for fishers⁸ isn't any help either, because they'll only give me a loan for a new boat, which are too expensive. I can only get a loan for a used boat at a private bank, but I don't have any collateral." In a sense then, the prevalent discourse on equality and fairness hides certain other inequities, as Svein argues they favor those with capital.

One of the more contentious debates concerning regulatory changes that arose while I conducted fieldwork was that of expanding the rights of recreational fishers. A state-appointed committee had recommended to increase their allowable equipment and permit them to sell excess catch. A spokesman for recreational fishers stated in a local paper "Recreational fishing is an ancient tradition and an

important part of the coastal milieu which presents no danger to occupational fishers”⁹ Most occupational fishers, however, argued vehemently against the recommendations. One responded to me “People certainly should be able to go out into nature and fish, because in a place like this there aren’t many free-time activities, but folk with a steady job and income shouldn’t earn money from it”¹⁰ Selling fish represented a form of economic competition which was feared would take away from occupational fishers their livelihood [*levebrød*] by flooding the market and reducing fish prices

You may recall here one of the predictions of classic Common Property Theory that open access to shared resources leads to an inefficient state of overcapitalization and the disappearance of the resource rent, the “natural profit” to be had from harvesting the growth of a renewable resource. The demands of occupational fishers apparently condone a system of state-sanctioned property rights, where only occupational fishers are allowed to profit from common property resources. Yet the debate over recreational fishing—more broadly, who has what kind of rights to common property resources—includes, but goes beyond, “inefficiency” and “purely economic” considerations where value is calculated in financial terms. Value has also to do with what kinds of ties are appropriate: the recreational fishers, for example, claim their part-time fishing and selling is an age-old coastal tradition. Others argued its value came from fulfilling a need to be out in nature, not the income to be received from it. Thus a seemingly straightforward occupational category—who is a fisher and what that entails—is contested, though this must also be seen against the backdrop of concerns about the sea-going fleet. While in discussions about trawlers, coastal fishermen expressed concern about the level of fish stocks, in this context they didn’t worry so much about recreational fishers catching fish but selling fish. And these broader concerns, about the maintenance of traditional livelihoods and coastal cultures, manifested themselves in a variety of material and symbolic reworkings of occupational coastal fishing.

Affecting Change—Transformations and Reforms Since the Boat Quota

The 80's fishing crisis and subsequent lowered quotas have created difficulties and worries for all fishers, regardless of their capital investments. They have also given rise to a number of transformations in how fishers go about their work. One dimension of change has been crew size, for that was one of the few things regarded as under direct control. Many argued that perceived low boat quotas forced bigger boats to reduce their crew numbers, and compelled many fishers in small boats to fish by themselves. This is not just a question of extra work for those continuing, added danger, or worries for their families. It also diminishes the local demand for labor. One sixty-year old fisher recalled that ten years ago he had eight crew members, now he employed only six. He also lamented that his son fished alone during the main cod season, unable to afford another crew member; for such reasons he argued for a more equitable distribution of quota amounts.

Bjørn-Thomas¹¹ was a young fisher in his early thirties, and had been fishing fulltime ever since he finished basic schooling [*grunnskole*] at age 15. He didn't own his own boat, but had been a member of a number of local crews.¹² "I've never made such good money as I am now, even with all the fuss about quotas and regulations. Of course there has to be some sort of regulation. And now there's a lot more daily grind since crews are smaller, but that just makes my income higher." Rules affect different fishers differently; unlike Svein mentioned earlier, who had worked for several years on the same boat whose crew number hadn't changed, Bjørn-Thomas didn't have problems switching between boats and had actually benefited from decreasing crew numbers.¹³ Viggo¹⁴ was also in his early thirties and, after years as a crew member, he now owned his own nine meter boat in which he had fished alone for the past five years. He bemoaned the still-competitive nature of regulations which created special binds for small fishers: "My boat has a quota of around fifteen tons. Once you take that, you can begin on a

competition-quota immediately afterwards. But if you aren't done when a new redistribution comes along, you might not get any more fish. And if you don't fish a certain percentage of your quota you might get cut from the registered list. I think my quota is enough for me, but I wish it were fixed so I knew I had enough time to finish. Now I start fishing real early in winter in all sorts of bad weather, when it's a matter of life and death, just to get some fish to finish my quota on time."¹⁵ When I asked him how he would devise a system, he responded immediately: "I would separate the quota, so that part was given to the boat, and part per fisher, whether or not they owned a boat. Then, for someone like me, it would pay to have another fisher onboard."

Another dimension of change involved the boat itself. Since the quota quantity awarded to a particular boat was determined by size, many boat-owners were sufficiently motivated to make physical changes to their boats, lengthening them in order to receive larger quotas. Brit had been married to a fisher who drowned in a lengthened boat, it capsized in a storm which she thought it would have weathered, unaltered. Whether or not this is "true" is not the whole point. The fact that people were willing to undertake such risks speaks to the pressures which they felt. These transformations in the ways fishing is done are both enabled and compelled by the interaction of political-economic forces, social structure, and an unpredictable and transitory resource base. For example, a quota system based on boat size, not crew size, the debts and liabilities one must meet to literally stay afloat, and fishing businesses which were often (gendered) household businesses, linking the continuation of property with the continuation of a family. Again, the boat accident in which Brit's husband, Raymond, drowned is sadly instructive. One day while chatting with a local fisher, the conversation drifted from the current bad weather to accidents at sea, and he began to talk about Raymond. "You know, all boats have their limits. With the smaller boats like the one Raymond had, it's more difficult to fish on the outer side of the

islands. He used to have a bigger boat, but he had to trade it for the smaller one. It just got too difficult to make ends meet without any sons or brothers.” He did however have female relatives. Although I don’t have time to discuss the issue of gender in fishing, there are starting to be female coastal fishers and they provide an exceptionally clear example of how differently positioned fishers, or members of a fishing community, are affected by rules and regulations in dramatically different ways ¹⁶

Keeping the family business together, and the family in the business, was for many an explicit goal. A few fishing-boats were “self-producers” with their own quay and workhouse where they could gut and clean the fish on land, and then hang the fish themselves (the most common way of processing) ¹⁷ With the liberalization of buying and exporting licenses, and the decreasing importance and power of the local fish-buyer, one of these family-run businesses was considering expanding to include buying and exporting. “It’s a little bit risky and time-consuming, but given what we know from last year, we could have doubled our income if we’d been buying and selling by then. We’re just a small family business, you understand, with a small quota, so we have to try to get the biggest possible value out of what we take.”

Conclusion: Evaluations of the Rules

The history which is recalled in these narratives is seen through the identification as a coastal fisher, as the “little guy” at odds with the local fish-buyer [*vareier*], the trawlers, the state, and so on. The values, traditions, and everyday ways of life which represent coastal fishing may themselves change or be contested, but it is through such an identification that a sense of community and group belonging is constructed and imagined, and through which resource management rules are evaluated. Aksel¹⁸ was in his middle sixties and had been fishing and whaling full-time since he was fourteen years old ¹⁹ He was now well-established and with a relative owned a 22-meter boat, one of the larger in the village. “It was first we whalers who got together and demanded that whaling be regulated. But the government and the

scientists both said that wasn't necessary. They said that about the cod and capelin too, even though we thought they were being overfished. Then there was the big crash." Aksel was not arguing against management or state involvement but rather for cooperation between researchers and fishers because, as he said, small-scale fishers are also researchers in that they're always out looking for fish.

The particular conjunction of power and knowledge marked by scientific proposals is thus reinterpreted in an idiom of personal responsibility and partially rejected for a more accessible relationship to knowledge production. The social democratic ideology of equality-as-sameness (Gullestad 1992) finds expression in what terms of knowledge production and resource management are considered acceptable and fair. In Aksel's words "We fishers got 'The Raw Fish Law' in 1939 which finally gave us the right to set a minimum price for the fish we catch. That was supposed to insure equality for coastal fishermen. Now what's going to happen? Without a fair distribution and rational management, people on the coast won't be able to make their living from the sea."

Knut²⁰ was in his mid-sixties, and owned a 22-meter boat jointly with his son. "It's been absolutely better with permanent quotas because there aren't big variations in catch or income from year to year. And since the sale of fish goes through the fishermen's cooperative (*Råfisklaget*),²¹ there's a more even distribution. But there would be big problems for coastal communities if Norway went into the European Union²². Those foreigners have big-capital trawlers and shipping companies. They just fish and fish, only thinking about money, not about the stock or the future." Going out to the open seas and just "taking" fish without deserving it or working for it violated his norms of equity: equal work was what deserved equal compensation. And his conception of equity was one which demanded clear national boundaries, and premised regional differences. "Here in Northern Norway, we can't live without fishing. We don't have sheep, cows, potatoes. Just like our forefathers, we have small boats, so

we fish when the fish come to us at the coast, not like the trawlers who go out deep into the ocean to find fish first” Later, Knut explained how *Lofotfisket* first begins in the early part of January on the outside of the Islands, where it is often more dangerous for the very small coastal boats to venture. With his 22 meter boat, he could handle the weather and waves easier, and acknowledged he had much better opportunities for fishing.

Nonetheless, he identified himself as a coastal fisher. Differences between his boat and smaller ones were seen as a matter of degree and not the same as the qualitative difference which separated coastal fishers from the trawlers. Difference and identity is then produced and reproduced by political-economic linkages while at the same time in fundamentally cultural terms²³. Despite technological changes which have made his fishing very different from the generations before him, his historical understanding provides the circumstances for his particular identity as a coastal fisher, which is continuous with the past. These fishers, as do all cultural beings, operate from a configuration of different identities they are Norwegian, Northern, small-scale fishers, who may be young or old, male or female, part or full-time. Such differently positioned fishers experience rules and regulations in often very different ways. Yet the debates over the future operate through a discourse of the community and a community of discourse; and it is through these that we can glimpse the challenges which they face and the motivations with which they act.

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¹ Fieldwork was conducted during the spring of 1994, and from September 1994 to July 1995. It was generously supported by the Fulbright Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the Morrison Institute for Population and Resource Studies at Stanford University, and the Department of Anthropology at Stanford University. This paper draws from my dissertation-in-progress. In order to insure confidentiality, all the names used herein are pseudonyms.

² By Norwegian values I mean that many of these ideas are "explicit facets of popular ideas in Norway. This means that many Norwegians in many contexts would argue that [they] are 'typically Norwegian'. It does not necessarily mean that they are aware of all the implicit meanings of these categories." (Gullestad 1992: 14)

³ Lofoten is dominated by coastal fishing, which accounted for 90 percent of catch-value in the 80's, and 70 percent of catch-value is in home waters (Pettersen 1992: 8). Boats under 21 meters account for 80 percent of catch-value, although they have been hurt worst by the fishing crises (ibid p 10)

⁴ In 1948 there were 85,518 fishers, of which 68,442 were full-time. In 1992 there were 26,752 registered fishers in total, of which 19,779 were full-time (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, Fiskeristatistikk 1991-1992, 1971)

⁵ In 1980 Moskenes municipality was determined to be the most fishery-dependent township in Norway, because 53.4 percent of the population was involved in the fishing industry (reported in the 1984 Moskenes Årsmelding). In 1990 the population in Moskenes was 1450, the cited employment figures come from *Folke- og Boligtelling 1990*, Statistikk Sentralbyrå, Oslo

⁶ One 30-year old fisher had been trained as an engineer, another a mechanic. Even those who hadn't been out of the fishing industry had worked on land in loading plants, and most had gone through compulsory military service.

⁷ Interview, May 3, 1995. Svein had been fishing for the past fourteen years on this boat, he had a common-law wife and two children, but they lived outside of Lofoten.

⁸ *Fiskarbank* is a state-owned bank, intended to help fishers make investments at reasonable lending rates.

⁹ The committee, *Fritidsfiskeutvalget*, was appointed to draft recommendations about recreational fishing. The newspaper article came from *Lofotposten*, February 20, 1995 "Vil gi fritidsfiskerne lov til å selge fisk"

¹⁰ Interview, May 7, 1995.

¹¹ Interview, May 9, 1995. Bjørn-Thomas lived in the municipality with his common-law wife (who worked a variety of part-time jobs) and two children.

¹² After a portion (for input costs such as fuel and food as well as for capital maintenance) is subtracted from the total revenue, the rest is split evenly between all crew members. This share is known as a *lott*, which is what

Bjørn-Thomas received, and is a common way of dividing income. He told me that his *lott* from the 1995 *Lofotfisket* was 100,000 kroner (approximately 15,000 american dollars).

¹³ A boat that was better, according to Bjørn-Thomas, was one that made money, and that depended on the skipper. "Some skippers won't get anything in their nets one day, and they'll just wait until the next day to try again. A good skipper will go out to another place and keep looking for fish that day. It's more work, and long hours sometimes, but it's a lot better income." In his explanation, losers and winners thus become reinscribed in a discourse of merit and worthiness. "If someone really wants to be a fisher, they can always get a place on a less-successful boat. Then if they're good enough, they can shift up to a better one."

¹⁴ Interview, May 7, 1995. Viggo lived in the municipality with his common-law wife (who was unemployed at the time) and three children.

¹⁵ Equality and fairness was also central for him. "My brother has a boat which is one meter longer than mine, so he has a bigger quota. His boat was expensive, but he had another boat which he sold and he doesn't have a family to support. There are a lot of fishers with expensive boats and big debts, but you can't distribute the quota after that either. If someone fished his whole life and paid down his boat and then the quota were made according to debt, he'd get a lot less which is hardly fair."

¹⁶ Out of 669 people officially with employment during 1990 in Moskenes, 41.6% were women (compared to 34.4% in 1980; 23.5% in 1970, and 12.3% in 1960). Much of this (1990) employment was found in the public sector, such as teaching and nursing care (57 percent) or service-industries like tourism and clerking (18 percent). At the same time, unemployment figures for women are relatively higher. In Moskenes, 58.3 percent of the population (sixteen and over) was labor-active in 1990, while the figure for women only was 49.3 percent compared with 67.1 percent for men. (In Nordland province, the comparative figures are 61.1, 54.4, 67.8, for Norway as a whole, 62.2, 55.5, 69.9). Traditionally, the fishing industry was an important source of employment for women, in sectors such as on-land processing as well as "unofficially" in household-based economies. But very few women are listed as officially participating in fishing, and their specific roles are not provided in the general statistical reports. Seven and a half percent are listed in the category "Agriculture, Forestry- and Fisheries-work," and a further nine percent in the category "Food Processing." Furthermore, only six women in the fishing category and four in the processing category were employed full-time during the whole year (all figures from *Folke- og Boligtelling*, 1960, 1970, 1980, and 1990, Oslo, *Statistisk Sentralbyrå*).

¹⁷ For lack of space plus the start-up costs involved, this wasn't an option for many in the village; there were only a few such "self-producers" there. For the establishment discussed, it cost them approximately a quarter of a million American dollars for the land and building materials in 1992/1993.

¹⁸ Interview, April 30, 1995.

¹⁹ This was after his confirmation, an important ritual in the Lutheran church, the state church of Norway (and the other Scandinavian countries). For this time period, when the church was more important, confirmation could be said to mark the transition between "childhood" into "adulthood," at least for some purposes.

²⁰ Interview, November 13, 1994 and December 11, 1994.

²¹ The fishermen's cooperative sales group, which negotiates a minimum price with fish-buyers.

²² The bid to apply for membership was rejected by a narrow margin. In the north of Norway, and especially along the coast, the vote was overwhelmingly against membership, for reasons that, most likely, were intimately related to such concerns as fishing.

²³ See also Pred and Watts 1992.

Figure One

Breakdown by Boat-Size, Moskenes 1982-1994

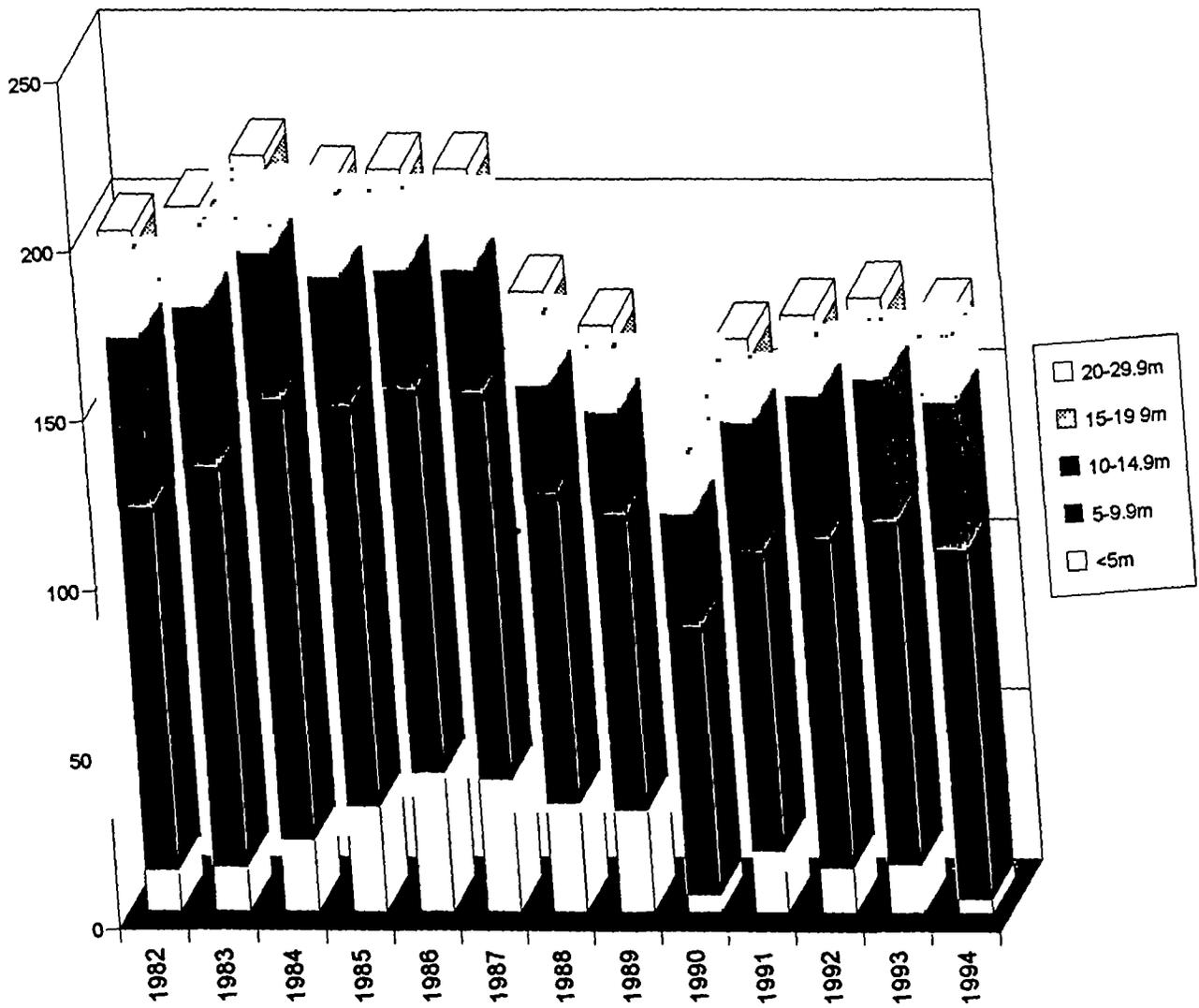
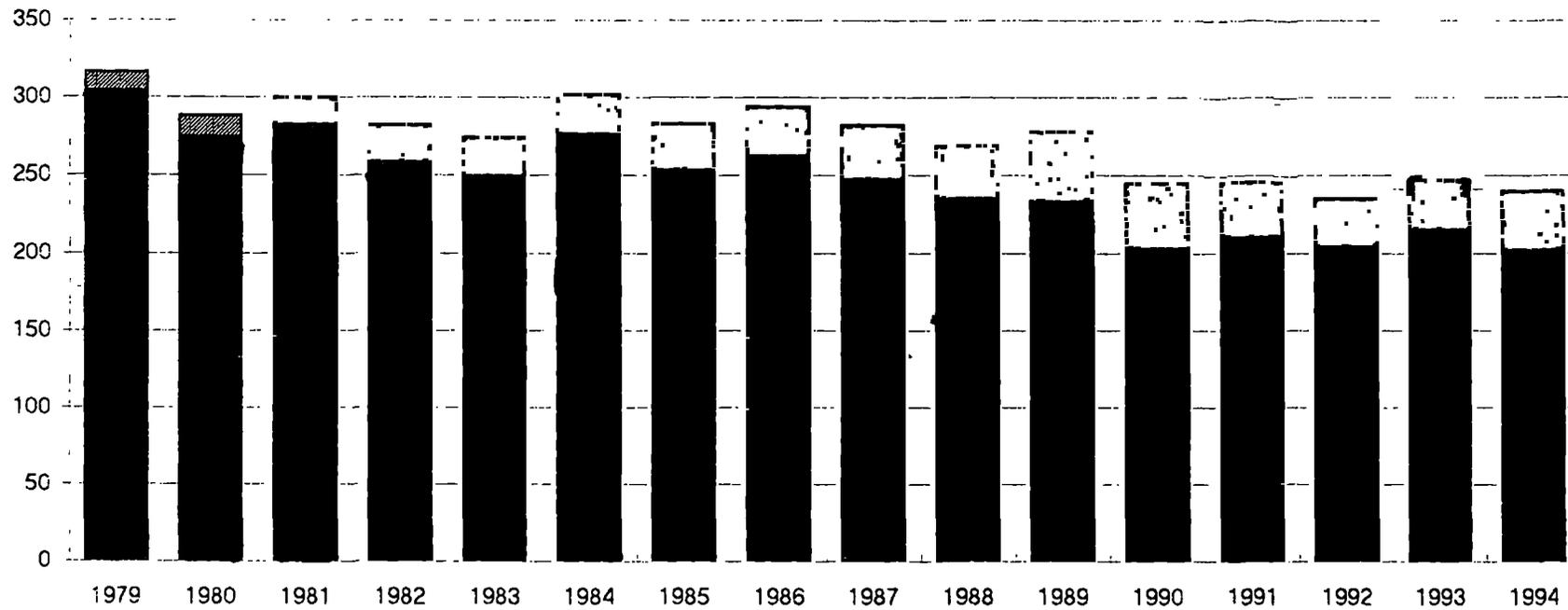


Figure Two

Fishers (Full and Part-Time) in Moskenes, 1979-1994



Source Aarsmeldinger 1980-1994, Moskenes Fiskerirettleder

Figure Three

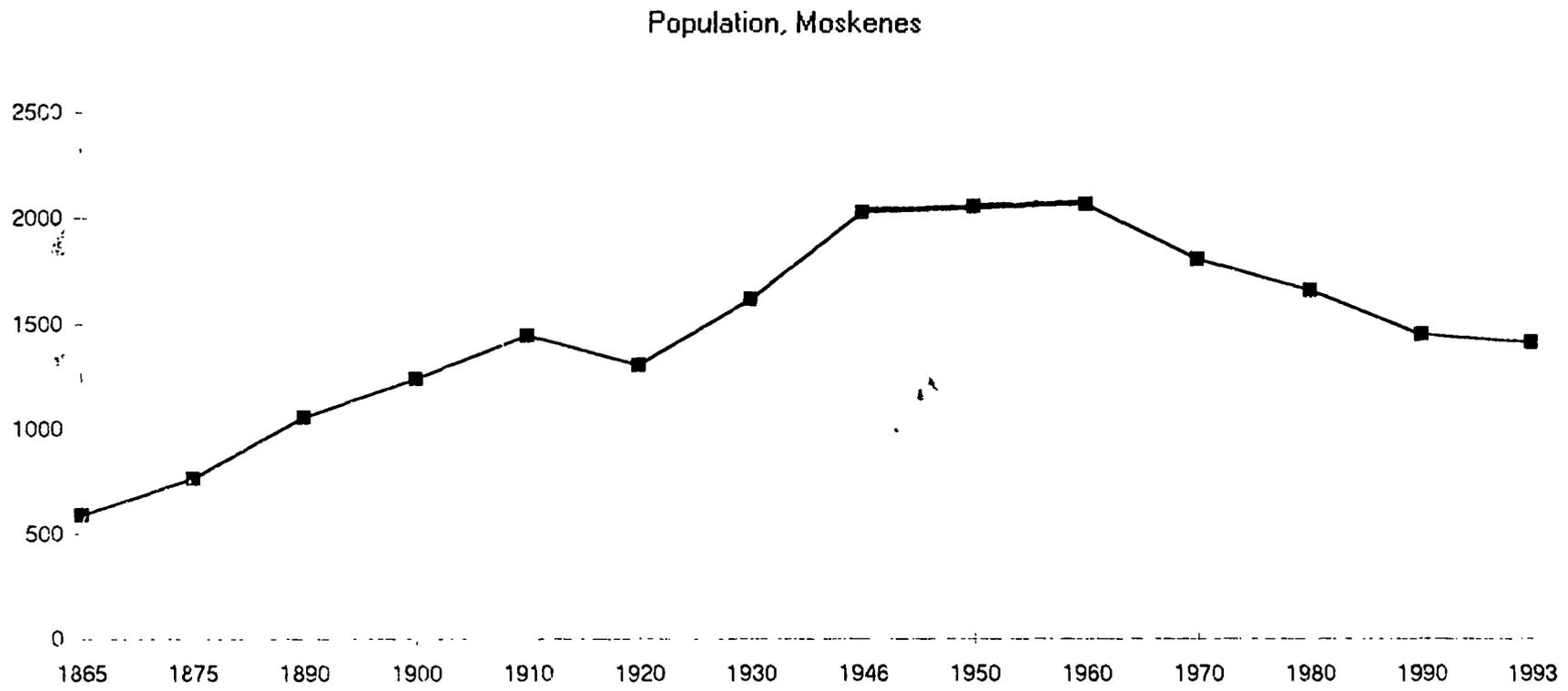


Figure Four

Percentage of Full-Time Fishers in Population

