Fishing

• An important way in which food and raw materials are produced

• The fishery alters the aquatic environment
  – It is environmentally disruptive

• Fishing generates place, landscape, ways of life
  – Vulnerable to economic, environmental change
Fishing

• We’ll focus on two regions of Canada:
  – Newfoundland & Labrador and elsewhere on the Atlantic coast
  – Pacific Coast
Atlantic Canada

- Extensive continental shelf with lots of shallow sunlit sea
- Where warm waters from the Gulf Stream meet the cold nutrient-filled Labrador current
  - Drives productive marine food chains
Atlantic Canada

- Rugged coastline with lots of small bays and islands
  - Harbour le Cou
  - settlements worked well in the days of the traditional fishery
Fishing pre 1950

• Traditionally fishing emphasised small boats (dories)
  – Operated direct from shore
  – Operated from a schooner

• European commercial fishing & whaling on the Atlantic coast from C15th
  – Red Bay in southern Labrador
Lunenburg NS

• **Classic port for fishing schooners**
  – Home of the Bluenose
• **Settled by Germans**
• **Now a UNESCO world heritage site**
• **Tourists are now catch of the day**
• A fishing dory
Preserving the Fish

• Before freezing & refrigeration
• Split and gut the fish
• Dry the fish on wooden racks or flakes
• Pack the fish in salt, brine
Fish & Brewis
Ackee & Saltfish
Industrial Fishing

• Fishing industrialised after 1950
  – Large ocean-going trawlers
  – Emergence of freezing, refrigeration
Industrial Fishing

• Fish processing has to industrialise
  – Expensive ocean-going factory trawlers which process on board
  – Cheaper to develop on-shore fish processing plants
Industrial Fishing

• Fate of small fishing communities becomes connected with the survival and management of the fish plant
  – Burnt Islands NL
Industrial Fishing

- Modern trawls damage sea-floor habitat
- Influx of foreign vessels fishing Canadian waters
- Catches of Atlantic cod collapse in the 1990s
Some kinds of fishing are more sustainable
- Lobsters, crabs, oysters

Inshore catches by local boats, in theory without ruining sea-floor habitat

But Atlantic continental shelf ecosystem is now badly disturbed
- Exploding populations of jellyfish, green crabs
Fishing

- An area where Aboriginal vs Non-Aboriginal faultline is evident
  - First Nations now asserting the fishing rights granted by treaty
  - At the expense of non-aboriginal fishing
  - Metis fishermen run risks if they exercise aboriginal rights. [link](#)
Newfoundland & Labrador

• Landscapes, places, ways of life shaped by the fishery
  – And badly disrupted by its changes

• A coastline accessible by sea
  – Open to ocean-going connections from early times
Newfoundland & Labrador

- 514,500 pop 2011
- Population peaked 1986-91 at 568,000
- Urban centres:
  - St Johns 106,000
Provincial Economy

- 2005 GDP approx. $14 billion
- $8 billion from service industries
- $2.5 billion from mining
- $0.44 billion from fishing
- $0.36 billion from tourism
Newfoundland & Labrador

- Settlement is coastal
- Interior is empty
Newfoundland & Labrador

• Makes it similar to Australia
  – but it doesn’t mythologise its “outback”
  – It mythologises its sea
  – Ode to Newfoundland
Grand Banks

- Extensive area of shallow sunlit seas
- Zone of mixing of the warm Gulf Stream and the cold Labrador current
  - Lots of nutrients and light to feed plankton, marine food chains
  - Abundant fishing grounds
- Offshore oil and gas deposits
Climate

• Labrador northern, cool.
  – Cold winters, cool summers (-20ºC W 10ºC S)
  – NW winds, NE storms

• Newfoundland
  – Cool winters, mild summers (-4ºC W 16ºC S)
  – Gets NW winds and SW Gulf Stream winds on south coast
  – Fog where warm & cold currents meet
Marine hazards

- tendency for fog
- icebergs (eastern coast)
Icebergs

- Icebergs calve off the Arctic glaciers
- Carried by cold Labrador current to Newfoundland
- Hazards to shipping
- Potential tourist draw
The humpback of Notre Dame.
July
The Cod

- When Gulf Stream warms bottom waters warm above 5°C in summer
  - Cod move inshore to spawn (main fishing phase)
- In Fall, cod move offshore, onto Grand Banks
Fishery

- Newfoundlanders develop an inshore fishery
  - close-to-shore fishery for Cod (short summer season)
  - lobster, crab, capelin fisheries
  - sealing
  - some farming
  - highly seasonal
Sealers
Fishing

- Employs 26,000
- Contributes only $440 million to provincial GDP in 2006
- Only slightly more important than tourism
Ethnic Variety

• The Grand Banks attracted huge and varied fishing interests
  – French, Basques (to present)
  – Portuguese
  – Americans (to 1912)
  – English, Irish

• Complex dialect legacy in Newfoundland
Newfoundland

- France extinguished its claims on the western French Shore only in 1904
- St Pierre & Miquelon remains French.
  - wedding
Settlement

• Inshore cod fishery leads to
  – scattered coastal “outport” settlement
  – 3/4 had fewer than 200 people
  – but most people lived in the larger centres
Dependence on the Sea

• Fishing as a % of Production
  – 1884: 67% (Newfoundland) 13% (Maritimes)
Dependence on the Sea

• Fishing as % of exports
  – C19th: 90% of exports
  – 1901: 86% of exports
  – 1912: 77% of exports
Dependence on the Sea

- Has decreased since confederation, 1949
- but still greater than the Maritimes

It's for the birds.

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR
Confederation 1949

- Brought transfer payments, money for economic and social development to Newfoundland & Labrador
- Province lost control of import duties revenue, control over its continental shelf
- Vital fishing industries after 1949 regulated by Ottawa, not St Johns.
Confederation

• Closure and consolidation of the smaller outport settlements
Ireland’s Eye Nfd
Confederation

- Fishery in decline by 1970s, collapse in early 1990s
  - Salt & dried fish replaced by refrigerated/frozen fish in early 1950s
  - Confederation cost Newfoundland its control over the fishery
  - Offshore trawling by huge foreign fleets destroyed the inshore fishery
Ships that observe NAFO quotas

Composite of all foreign vessels
Their “trust in cod” sharply diminished, demonstrators (left) at St. John’s harbour cheer a convoy of Canadian trawlers bound for the Grand Banks last March. Their message to foreign vessels was peaceful but blunt: “Stop overfishing now.”
Collapse of Cod Fishery

• Transfer payments fund retraining schemes
  – mostly for other jobs in the fishery

• Changes in Employment Insurance Rules
  – threaten the seasonal fishing/fish plant economy
1992 Cod Moratorium

- An economic disaster for the coastal fishing communities of Newfoundland
  - Isle Aux Mortes
- Many fish plants closed
  - Isle Aux Mortes, Rose Blanche
- Population losses
Pacific Coast

• Continental shelf is much narrower than on the Atlantic coast
• Rich coastal fisheries connected to mighty rivers
  – Important for salmon
Fraser River

- Was probably the world’s best salmon river
- Rich salmon fisheries sustained several aboriginal civilizations
  - Enabled them to establish permanent villages
Commercial Exploitation

• Outsiders begin settling SW BC suddenly from the late 1850s
• Begin commercial exploitation of the rich salmon fishery
  – Created an industrial landscape of canneries and worker’s housing
Canneries

• Dangerous industrial work packing various fish species
• Racialised work environment
  – The most dangerous and difficult jobs went to Chinese, Japanese, Aboriginal workers
Commercial Exploitation

- Commercial overfishing, water pollution and the 1913 Hell’s Gate slide damaged the Fraser salmon fishery permanently
- Most canneries close
- Commercial fishery continues on what’s left of the wild fish stocks
Commercial Exploitation

- Major attempts to farm fish, especially salmon on the BC coast
- Concerns that this harms wild fish stocks
  - Claim that farmed fish are a source of disease
BC Salmon farm
BC Salmon farms
Fishing

• Ways of life tend to shape place, landscape
  – And shape culture

• Fishing in Canada, and globally not well managed
  – Industrial fishery has a poor track record of resource destruction
  – Devastates those dependent on it.