

CHINCOTEAGUE, VA¹

Community Profile²

PEOPLE AND PLACES

Regional orientation

The town of Chincoteague (37.93°N, 75.38°W), is located in Accomack County in the state of Virginia on Assateague Island. The town has a total area of 37.1mi², of which 27.4 mi² is water (USGS 2008). It is located about 3.5 hours from Washington D.C., about 4 hours from Philadelphia and about 5.5 hours from New York (AssateagueIsland.com nd).



Map 1. Location of Chincoteague, VA (US Census Bureau 2000)

Historical/ Background

Chincoteague is named for the local Indian tribe that originally lived in the area called the Gingo-Teague Tribe. The first settlement came about in the mid- 17th Century when Colonel Daniel Jenifer applied for a grant to transport people to both Chincoteague and Assateague Islands. The first people to settle here were farmers who raised stock. The town grew slowly and lived mostly in isolation, with residents only traveling to the mainland for trading. This continued until the late 1800s. People would trade as much as possible, gathering numerous supplies so they could make as few trips as possible to the mainland.

¹ These community profiles have been created to serve as port descriptions in Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) for fisheries management actions. They also provide baseline information from which to begin research for Social Impact Assessments (SIAs). Further, they provide information relevant to general community impacts for National Standard 8 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) and information on minorities and low income populations for Executive Order (E.O.) 12898 on Environmental Justice.

² For purposes of citation please use the following template: “Community Profile of *Town, ST*. Prepared under the auspices of the National Marine Fisheries Service, Northeast Fisheries Science Center. For further information contact Lisa.L.Colburn@noaa.gov.”

One of Chincoteague’s main exports was oysters and due to the railroad in 1876, seafood trading expanded significantly. During the 1900s, large homes, shops and hotels sprung up and the people on the island no longer lived in such isolation. By the 1920s, Chincoteague suffered two devastating fires, one in 1920 and one in 1924. The fires burnt down many businesses and homes including an oyster house, factories and the railroad (Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce nd). In 1922 Chincoteague was connected to the mainland by a causeway, which increased tourism to the island especially sport fishing interests, which had been a popular activity here since the construction of the railroad (Oles 2005). Today, Chincoteague is still known for its oysters and is a resort island with tourism driving its economy (Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce nd).

Demographics³

According to Census 2000 data, Chincoteague had a total population of 4,317, up 20.9% from the reported population of 3,572 in 1990. Of this 2000 total, 48.6% were male and 51.4% were female. The median age was 56.1 years and 79.4% of the population was 21 years or older while 25.6% was 62 or older.

Chincoteague’s age structure (see Figure 1) shows a preponderance of residents in the 50 to 59 years age grouping. The age group of 20-29 is smaller compared to the other age groups showing that apparently young people are leaving the community after high school.

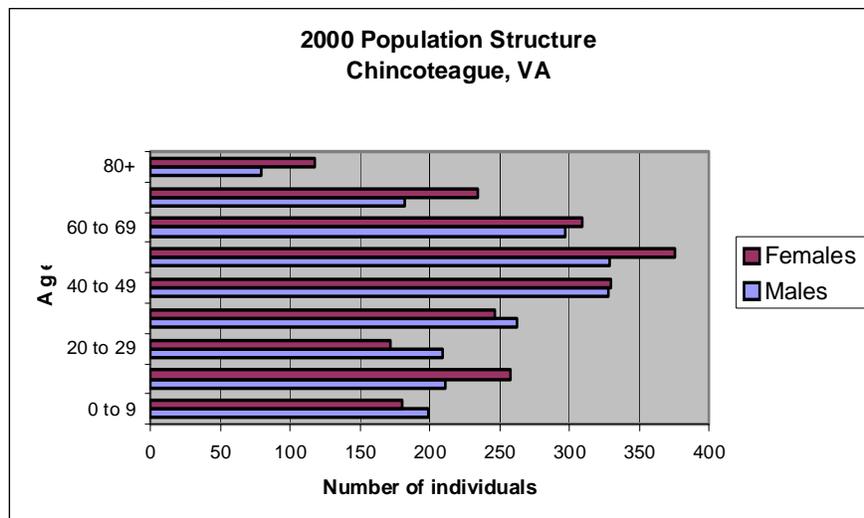


Figure 1. Chincoteague’s population structure by sex in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

The majority of the population was white (96.9%) with 1.4% of residents black or African American, 0.4% Asian, 0.9% Native American, and 0.0% Pacific Islander or Hawaiian (see Figure 2). Also, 0.5% (23 people) of the total population is Hispanic/Latino. Residents link their heritage to a number of ancestries including the following: English (18.8%), American (15.1%), German (14.3%), and Irish (11.3%) (see Figure 3). With regard to region of birth, 44.2% were born in Virginia, 53.6% were born in a different state and 1.7% were born outside of the U.S. (including 0.7% who are not United States citizens).

³ While mid-term estimates are available for some larger communities, data from the 2000 Census are the only data universally available for the communities being profiled in the Northeast. Thus for cross-comparability we have used 2000 data even though these data may have changed significantly since 2000 for at least some communities.

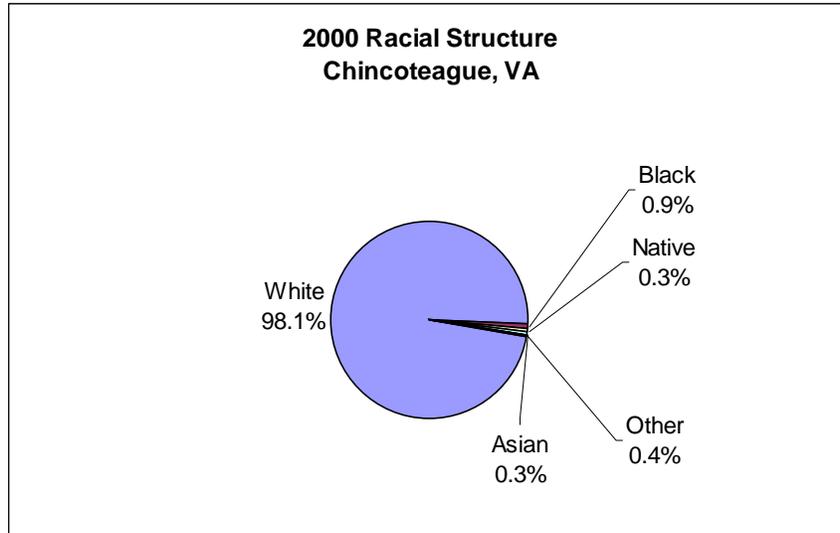


Figure 2. Racial Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

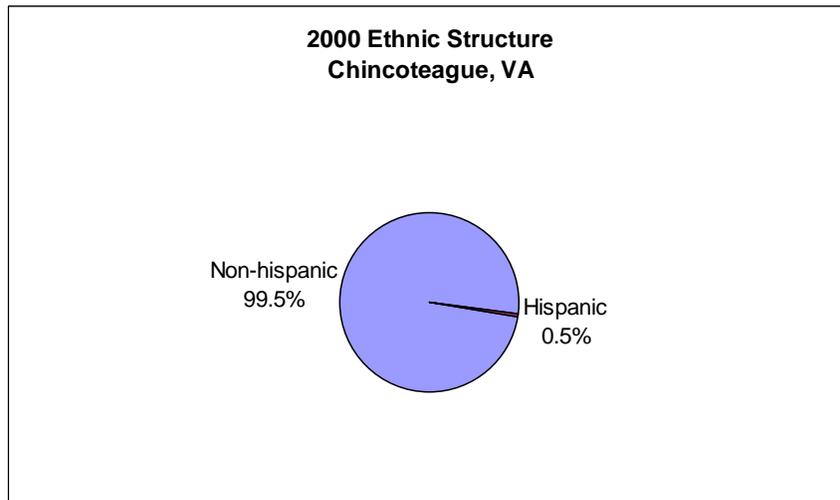


Figure 3. Ethnic Structure (US Census Bureau 2000)

For 96.0% of the population, only English was spoken in the home, leaving 4.0% in homes where a language other than English was spoken, including 1.2% of the population who spoke English less than “very well” according to the 2000 Census.

Of the population 25 years and over, 71.4% were high school graduates or higher and 15.1% had a bachelor’s degree or higher. Again of the population 25 years and over, 10.0% did not reach ninth grade, 18.6% attended some high school but did not graduate, 34.7% completed high school, 17.6% had some college with no degree, 3.9% received an associate’s degree, 9.8% earned a bachelor’s degree, and 5.4% received either their graduate or professional degree.

Although religion percentages are not available through the U.S. Census, according to the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) in 2000, the religion with the highest number of congregations and adherents in Accomack County was United Methodist with 47 congregations and 7,338 adherents. Other prominent congregations in the county were Southern Baptist Convention (17 and 3,868 adherents), and Catholic (2 and 952 adherents). The total number of adherents to any religion was down 6.1% from 1990 (ARDA 2000).

Issues/Processes

When the town of Chincoteague began to flourish, oysters became a very important commodity on the island. At one point there were eight oyster packing houses on the island, but due to an infection of the screw bore parasite, the number of consumable oysters seriously declined. There is only one packing house left at present. Also, packing houses for fish have also been reduced in number in recent years because of regulations regarding the fluke fishery. There have also been restrictions placed on the dogfish fishery, limiting the types of harvestable fish, increasing the competition between fishermen for a limited number of species. This competition also causes the market to become flooded which lowers the price per pound to going to fishermen (Oles 2005).

Another problem in Chincoteague is fishing gear storage. Fishermen operating out of the town harbor are not allowed to store their gear there, and must transport it to and from their own property, despite the fact that the harbor is intended for commercial use. There are also potential conflicts between commercial and recreational fishermen in the town. One recreational fishermen reported that, "commercial fishermen can do no wrong here [in Chincoteague]," because of the island's historical connection to the commercial fishing industry (Oles 2005).

Cultural attributes

Chincoteague has several fishing related attributes including the Maritime Museum, the Seafood Festival, and an Oyster Festival. In addition, there is also the tradition of 'pony penning' in the town dating back to the early settlers.

The Maritime and Oyster Museum was expanded in 1996 and tells the story of the town's seafood and oystering history. It was started by a group of women on the island in 1965 and today is houses many exhibits relating to the town's past. The Seafood Festival is an all you can eat event where the town's seafood is on display by local restaurants. In addition to food, there is entertainment such as music and an information tent. The Oyster festival was started by the Chamber of Commerce to promote the town's seafood. This is also an all you can eat event where oysters are prepared in a wide variety of ways. Proceeds from the event go to promoting the island (Chincoteague.com nd).

The town of Chincoteague is also known for their breed of horses known as the Chincoteague pony. Early settlers practiced penning as a way for livestock owners "to claim, brand, break and harness their loose herds." By the 1700s, it was a town event and today the event includes food and entertainment in addition to the traditional penning. The event is held in July during the Chincoteague Volunteer Firemen's Carnival to raise money for the fire company and to keep the wild population of horses at a certain level. The tradition involves "Salt Water Cowboys" which herd the horses across the Assateague Channel then through town to a corral at the Carnival Grounds where they are auctioned to interested buyers (Chincoteague.com nd).

There is also a Blessing of the Fleet on Memorial Day Weekend and many fishing tournaments held throughout the year.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Current Economy

While employer information for Chincoteague or Accomack County was not identified through secondary data collection, the top employers for the Eastern Shore of Virginia, including Accomack County may include jobs held by Chincoteague residents. The top employers for the Eastern Shore were: Perdue Farms (1,600 employees), Tyson Farms (950 employees), Accomack

County Public Schools (950 employees), NASA Wallops Flight Facility (750 employees), and Shore Health Services Inc. (750 employees) (ANPDC nd).

According to the U.S. Census 2000⁴, 62.0% (2,272 individuals) of the total population 16 years of age and over were in the labor force (see Figure 4), of which 6.6% were unemployed, 0.8% were in the Armed Forces, and 57.2% were employed.

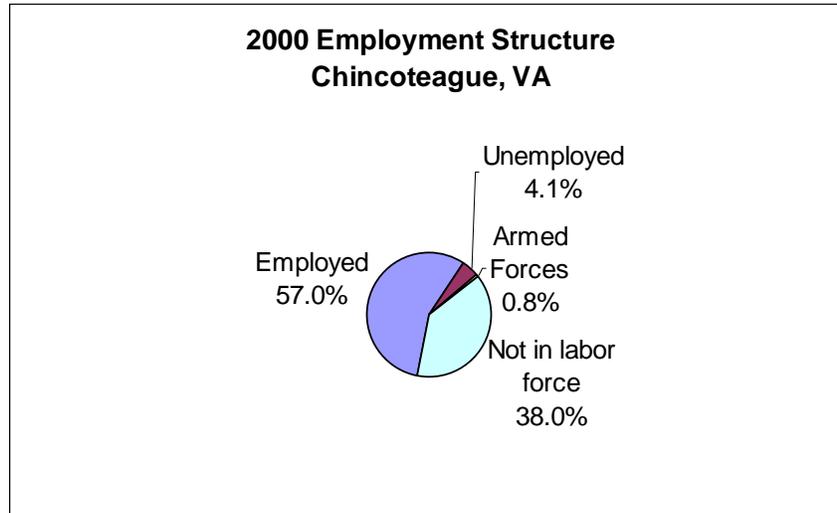


Figure 4. Employment Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

According to Census 2000 data, jobs in the census grouping which includes agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining accounted for 122 positions or 5.8% of all jobs. Self-employed workers, a category where fishermen might be found, accounted for 302 positions or 14.4% of all jobs. Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services (20.6%), retail trade (15.9%) construction (13.6%) and educational health/ social services (10.0%) were the primary industries.

Median household income in Chincoteague was \$28,514 (up 29.6% from \$21,996 in 1990 [US Census Bureau 1990]) and median per capita income was \$20,367. For full-time year-round workers, males made approximately 29.8% more per year than females.

The average family in Chincoteague consisted of 2.63 persons. With respect to poverty, 9.7% of families (down from 10.0% from 1990 [US Census Bureau 1990]) and 12.7% of individuals earned below the official U.S. Census poverty threshold. This threshold is \$8,794 for individuals and ranges from \$11,239 through \$35,060 for families, depending on number of persons (2-9) [US Census Bureau 2000b]. In 2000, 53.8% of all families (of any size) earned less than \$35,000 per year.

In 2000, Chincoteague had a total of 3,970 housing units of which 52.1% were occupied and 62.6% were detached one unit homes. Less than twenty percent (13.6%) of these homes were built before 1940. Mobile homes, vans, and boats accounted for 23.5% of the total housing units; 97.4% of detached units had between 2 and 9 rooms. In 2000, the median cost for a home in this area was \$105,600. Of vacant housing units, 43.2% were used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. Of occupied units, 20.7% were renter occupied.

⁴ Again, Census data from 2000 are used because they are universally available and offer cross-comparability among communities. Some statistics, particularly median home price, are likely to have changed significantly since 2000.

Government

The town of Chincoteague is governed by a mayor and town council. The town council is made up of six councilmen. They are all elected to four-year terms with three councilmen being elected every two years so that the elections are staggered. The Town Manager is appointed and also acts as the Clerk to the Council (Town of Chincoteague nd).

Fishery involvement in government

The Virginia Shellfish Growers' Association has clout with the government and often have their concerns addressed when otherwise commercial fishermen are not included in the process. Additionally, the Town of Chincoteague has sent its own representatives to meetings of the VMRC to support the local sport fishing industry in the town. Both the town and Accomack County have declared their commitment to protecting both commercial and recreational fishing interests here (Oles 2005). Chincoteague also has a harbormaster.

The Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) is a state agency established in 1875 to preserve Virginia's marine and aquatic resources, including all tidal waters. The VMRC's Fisheries Management Division aids in the planning of state, interstate, and federal management organizations. Its Fisheries Advisory Council helps agencies create and implement management plans for both commercial and recreational fishery species. The Commission's headquarters are located in Newport News (VMRC nd).

Institutional

Fishing associations

The Virginia Shellfish Growers' Association works on behalf of shellfish growers in the state. The Eastern Shore Working Waterman's Association is also located in Chincoteague. Members meet for monthly meetings and to express concerns regarding management of packing houses and docks (Oles 2005).

Chincoteague also has the Chincoteague Island Charterboat Association, which represents the interests of sportfishermen and is engaged in the fisheries management process (Oles 2005).

Fishing assistance centers

Information on fishing assistance centers in Chincoteague is unavailable through secondary data collection.

Other fishing related organizations

The [Assateague Mobile Sportfishermen Association](#) has a number of recreational fishermen from Chincoteague as members (Oles 2005). This group sponsors fishing tournaments, beach clean-ups, a scholarship program, and other events, and is involved in activism to preserve public access to beaches for sportfishermen.

Physical

Chincoteague is accessible from the mainland via Rt. 175, which extends over a bridge and is the only road to the mainland. Buses travel through the town and the nearest airport is the Salisbury Airport in Maryland. US Air serves this small airport and offers travel to Washington D.C., Baltimore and Philadelphia (Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce nd). Chincoteague is

about 40 miles from Wachapreague, 50 miles from Ocean City, MD, and 168 miles from Washington, DC (MapQuest 2005).

There are currently six marinas in Chincoteague. Some of these marinas, like Capt. Bob's Marina, seem to focus on charter tours and dockage is available at Curtis Merritt Harbor. Curtis Merritt Harbor is the primary dockage area for Chincoteague and is owned by the town. There are 70 slips here, and commercial fishermen are given priority in the assignment of slips, as are charter and party boats. Commercial fishing vessels generally unload their own catch into coolers and transport it to fish packers themselves. Chincoteague has a substantial infrastructure devoted to sport fishing. In addition to the marinas there are also many tackle and bait shops and a number of public boat launches (Oles 2005).

INVOLVEMENT IN NORTHEAST FISHERIES⁵

Commercial

Commercial fishing in Chincoteague is in decline in recent years. There are only two fish packing houses in the town, one of which is doing well and brings an average of 80,000 lbs. per day and has increased the types of fish it packs. The other packing house is having trouble staying in business, while a third recently closed, due in part to a lower number of fish being landed because of government restrictions on catch. In addition, there used to be many oyster houses on the island, with estimates ranging from eight to twelve. Today there are only two left. There is also a shellfish aquaculture facility on the island that raises clams and oysters that has been in business for 30 years (Oles 2005). Gary Howard Seafood is a business which sells locally caught seafood and has a small oyster packing operation (Chincoteague.com nd). Seaside Lobsters in Chincoteague sells lobsters fresh off the boat (Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce nd). [Tom's Cove Aqua Farms](#) raises hard clams and oysters for wholesale, and Chincoteague Shellfish Farms is another aquaculture business located here (Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce nd).

The most valuable species in Chincoteague is scallops, followed by summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass, both with 2006 values significantly higher than the ten year averages. The 2006 values of "Other", monkfish, and lobster were also greater than the ten year averages (see Table 1). Dogfish saw a sizeable decrease, likely due to restrictions placed on the dogfish fishery.

The number of vessels home ported in Chincoteague generally increased over the years until 2003 when the numbers declined yearly through 2006. The number of vessels whose owners live in Chincoteague also followed a similar trend as the number of home port vessels. While the value for home ported vessels in Chincoteague increased until 2003, the level of fishing landed port continued to increase significantly throughout the ten year time period, with the exception of a decline in 2006 (see Table 2).

⁵ In reviewing the commercial landings data several factors need to be kept in mind. 1) While both federal and state landings are included, some states provide more detailed data to NMFS than others. For example, shellfish may not be included or data may be reported only by county and not by port. 2) Some communities did not have individual port codes until more recently. Before individual port codes were assigned, landings from those ports were coded at the county level or as an aggregate of two geographically close small ports. Where landings were coded at the county level they cannot be sorted to individual ports for those earlier years, e.g., prior to 2000. 3) Where aggregated codes were used, those aggregate codes may still exist and be in use alongside the new individual codes. Here the landings which are still assigned to the aggregate port code cannot be sorted into the individual ports, so port level data are only those which used the individual port code. 4) Even when individual port codes exist, especially for small ports, landings may be coded at the county level. Here again it is impossible to disaggregate these to a port level, making the port level landings incomplete. 5) In all these cases, the per port data in this profile may under report the total level of landings to the port, though all landings are accounted for in the overall NMFS database.

Landings by Species

Table 1. Dollar value of Federally Managed Groups of landing in Chincoteague

	Average from 1997-2006	2006 only
Scallop	2,730,647	7,752,896
Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass	1,126,760	2,159,348
Other ⁶	506,696	921,375
Monkfish	401,496	540,864
Lobster	61,952	143,776
Dogfish	51,843	38,035
Squid, Mackerel, Butterfish	38,565	12,133
Bluefish	12,833	54,857
Skate	6,221	1,710
Tilefish	1,522	14
Smallmesh Groundfish ⁷	379	0
Largemesh Groundfish ⁸	293	0

Vessels by Year⁹

Table 2. All columns represent vessel permits or landings value combined between 1997-2006

Year	# Vessels (home ported)	# Vessels (owner's city)	Level of fishing home port (\$)	Level of fishing landed port (\$)
1997	13	10	6,601	906,166
1998	15	15	24,382	763,754
1999	17	15	48,132	2,138,891
2000	21	16	362,409	2,431,371
2001	24	17	354,429	2,569,596
2002	28	18	321,982	2,877,693
2003	26	18	503,801	4,078,803
2004	22	17	299,244	7,248,586
2005	25	17	311,281	14,752,188
2006	22	16	333,110	11,625,008

Vessels home ported = No. of permitted vessels with location as homeport

Vessels (owner's city) = No. of permitted vessels with location as owner residence¹⁰

Level of fishing home port (\$) = Landed value of fisheries associated with home ported vessels

Level of fishing landed port (\$) = Landed value of fisheries landed in location

⁶ "Other" species includes any species not accounted for in a federally managed group

⁷ Smallmesh multi-species: red hake, ocean pout, mixed hake, black whiting, silver hake (whiting)

⁸ Largemesh groundfish: cod, winter flounder, yellowtail flounder, American plaice, sand-dab flounder, haddock, white hake, redfish, and pollock

⁹ Numbers of vessels by owner's city and homeport are as reported by the permit holder on permit application forms. These may not correspond to the port where a vessel lands or even spends the majority of its time when docked.

¹⁰ The Owner-City from the permit files is technically the address at which the owner receives mail concerning their permitted vessels, which could reflect the actual location of residence, the mailing address as distinct from residence, owner business location, or the address at which a subsidiary receives mail about the permits.

Recreational

Recreational fishing is a popular activity in Chincoteague. There are many hotels catering to tourists who rent charter boats and there are approximately 24 charter fishing vessels; however, party boats businesses have never been successful here. Many of the charter boat captains make their living full time from charter fishing; others do it part-time and work another job during the fall and winter.

Fishing also occurs at the Town Dock bulkhead and the pier at Memorial Park (Oles 2005). There are also several public boat launches in the town. The most popular types of species targeted inshore include: flounder, sea trout, bluefish, rockfish, spot, croaker, sheepshead, triggerfish, red drum, black drum, sea bass, small sharks and tautog. Offshore fishing targets bluefish, mako and other sharks, bluefin, yellowfin and albacore tuna, king mackerel, dolphinfish, wahoo and billfish (Daybreak Services 2007).

There are also many fishing tournaments hosted by the various marinas. Capt. Bob's hosts a tuna tournament every July; Barnacle Bill's has a shark tournament and tuna tournament yearly; East Side Marina hosts a tuna tournament; and Capt. Steve's bait and Tackle hosts a surf fishing tournament yearly (Oles 2005).

Subsistence

Information on subsistence fishing in Chincoteague is either unavailable through secondary data collection or the practice does not exist.

FUTURE

A new park is being built in the downtown area of Chincoteague. This will make another site in town where events and festivals can be hosted. The town hopes that families will use the park regularly for recreational activities and the area is cited to be built to provide a beautiful view of the sunset. The park will also have slip space for both recreational and commercial vessels. Also, the town is building a new visitors' center for the wildlife refuge. It will house many exhibits as well as an auditorium and classroom and wet lab (Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce nd).

Many commercial fishermen see the future of fishing in Chincoteague as bleak. There has been a sharp decline in fishermen in recent years and it is hard to recruit new fishermen into the profession. Many of the older fishermen's children do not want to continue the tradition of following in their fathers' footsteps and most fishermen would not want their children getting into the business anyway. One local gillnetter in his mid-thirties noted that he is the youngest fisherman he knows. However, the town government is said to be supportive of commercial fishing and they foresee resurgence in the importance of seafood to their town (Oles 2005).

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