Women as agents of wellbeing in Northern Ireland's fishing households

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the gender dimensions of wellbeing in fishing households in Northern Ireland. The impact of change in the fishing industry on women's wellbeing is outlined and linkages are made between changing access to fish and changing roles of women in fishing households. The paper explores what this change means for how women perceive and pursue their wellbeing needs and aspirations and how they negotiate their needs with the needs of the household. In an occupation as gender biased as fishing it is argued that in order for fisheries management and policy to be successful, a profile of what really matters to people is important. In particular, the paper highlights how such priorities link to the complex and dynamic role of women in fishing households.

Introduction

Fishing society is a gendered one, where the burdens of coping with changing access to fish can fall disproportionately on women. In principle, much can therefore be learned from women's active responses to improve wellbeing for themselves, their families and their communities (Frangoudes 2011; Nadel-Klein 2003; Binkley 2002; Davis 2000; Gerrard 2000; Van Ginkel 2009). The recently established UN Women recognises the role of women as agents of change (de Londras 2010; UN Women 2011) and the Worldfish Centre's programme for gender and equity emphasises the role of women as agents of wellbeing (Worldfish 2012). However, public recognition of the role and rights of women in fisheries is lacking both globally and within the European Union (Symes and Frangoudes 2001; Pascual-Fernandez and De la Cruz Modino 2005; Salze et al. 2006; Frangoudes 2011). Contemporary policies fail to sufficiently acknowledge the non-economic as well as economic roles women play and the contribution they make to household livelihood and wellbeing (Okali and Holvoet 2005; SAIF 2011). This holds true too in the case of Northern Ireland (NI), where many of the fishers' wives are engaged in shore-based work for the family business [a], but often retain 'invisible' roles. Several authors have pronounced the lack of involvement of women in local fishing institutions and natural resource management (Ferguson 2005; Weeratunge and Snyder 2010), a fact that is also linked to the disproportionately low representation of women in government positions in Northern Ireland (DETINI 2011).

At a recent international women in fisheries workshop the International Collective in Support of Fisherworkers (ICSF) and the European women's network, AKTEA,

stressed the need to better recognise and support the contribution of women to fisheries activities, the wellbeing of the fishing household, and the maintenance of important community relationships (Kumar and Prakesh 2010). AKTEA, of which the Northern Ireland Women in Fisheries group (NIWIF) is a member, aims to strengthen the voice of women in fishing communities in Europe. Britton and Coulthard (2012) highlighted the European Commission's desire to create a European network of women in fisheries [b] and point to a new Directive [c] that recognises the contribution of spouses in self-employed enterprises. Although this Directive is not specifically aimed at the fishing sector and has yet to be fully implemented in all Member States, it nevertheless grants this category of women legal status and access to social benefits (Frangoudes 2011).

This paper employs a social wellbeing approach to explore the gender dimensions of wellbeing in fishing households. The social wellbeing approach, developed by the Wellbeing in Developing Countries Research Group (WeD) at the University of Bath (see Gough and McGregor 2007; McGregor 2007), sets out three comprehensive dimensions of wellbeing: i) material (what resources a person has); ii) relational (what a person is able to do or achieve through relationships with others); and iii) subjective (how a person feels about the quality of life they are able to achieve). It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore each of these in their entirety. This paper therefore focuses exclusively on the subjective dimension of wellbeing. That is, it hones in on *how women define wellbeing* and the ways in which this impacts the pursuit of wellbeing and wellbeing outcomes in the different dimensions. Additionally, this paper adheres to a definition of gender developed by Davis and (Nadel-Klein 1992: 165) and reads as follows, 'socially defined roles, resources and responsibilities of men and women as they relate to one another.' The emphasis here is on the *social*; how gender roles are 'socially constructed and vary across different times and places according to changing values, practices and technologies' (Frangoudes and Pascual 2005: 165).

The paper begins with a brief outline of the methodology and a presentation of some of the social and demographic characteristics of women in fishing families in NI. In order to gain an understanding of the current role of women in fishing households, their relationship with the fishing industry is considered in a historical context. An understanding of how and why this relationship has changed is achieved by exploring some of the drivers that have shaped, and continue to shape, the dynamic role of women in the fishing households of NI, as well as the ways in which these drivers can, in turn, influence the values of women and their relationship with their environment. This is followed by a detailed exploration of the findings of a quality of life survey, zeroing in on what women in NI's fishing households value as important for their wellbeing. The paper concludes by highlighting the importance of understanding and integrating gender dimensions into fisheries policy and management.

Methods

Research was carried out in Northern Ireland during the period from October 2010 to October 2011. Information for this paper comes from a mix of methods, including an initial phase of open-ended interviews with the wives of retired fishermen and focus group discussions with members from two women-in-fisheries support groups, the Northern Ireland Women in Fisheries Network (NIWIF) and the Fishermen's Wives Support Group (FWSG). The information gathered from these sources aided the

understanding of the contextual and enabling environment in which women in NI fishing households are situated (White and Elison 2006). The focus group interviews, in particular, explored the local meanings of decline in fisheries, the difficulties fishing families face as a result, and the changing role of women.

The initial phase helped inform the development of a semi-structured interview schedule and a questionnaire for women in fishing households. The questionnaire gathered data on basic household demographics and the more material aspects of wellbeing, focusing on the role of women at home, in the family fishing enterprise, employment, education, as well as the more social aspects, namely participation in social groups. A quality of life survey was also interview-administered. Known as the Global Person Generated Index (GPGI), it asks respondents to identify their most valued and important needs or aspirations for a good quality of life (see Figure 1). The GPGI provides a way of measuring 'subjective' wellbeing according to what matters most for the person, i.e. 'person generated' rather than a measure that uses a pre-determined set of indicators which may miss

Figure 1 Global Person Generated Index (GPGI) Survey.

situation-specific issues (Camfield and Ruta 2007; Smith and Clay 2010). It is based on the Patient Generated Index, widely used in Quality of life research (Ruta et al. 1994; Ruta 1998), and was adapted in the Wellbeing in Developing Countries (WeD) research as a measure of quality of life. The GPGI measures the extent to which people feel fulfilled in areas that they deem most important in their lives (see Figure 1) by asking them in step 1 of the survey to nominate five most significant aspects of life that contribute to their wellbeing. It prompts them to consider '*things that they need to have, need to able to do or able to be*'. Step 2 asks respondents to rate their level of satisfaction with each aspect of life using a scale from 1 – 5, where 1 is the worst you could imagine and 5 exactly how you would like it to be. Finally, in step 3, respondents are asked which of these areas they would most like to change. Respondents are asked to 'spend' 10 points to show which areas are most important to change in order to improve their quality of life, spending more on areas they consider to be most important to change and less on areas that they feel are not so important (i.e. you can choose to spend no points on one or more areas but the total must add up to 10. In doing so, the GPGI highlights the gap between people's perceived goals and reflection on their desire to fulfil these goals (McGregor et al. 2009; Woodcock et al. 2009)

In total 20 interviews and 18 quality of life surveys (GPGI) were conducted face-to-face in families' homes. The interviews were administered at times that best suited the respondent and were arranged to ensure the respondent could be interviewed on her own (without the presence of her spouse). Once the aims of the study were explained, interviews were carried out and recorded with the participant's verbal permission and usually did not last more than one hour. The quality of life survey (GPGI) was administered after the semi-structured interview and demographic profiling. The number of GPGI surveys completed was slightly less than the total number of interviews as two respondents preferred not to answer the survey given their age (>80 years), feeling that at that stage in their lives it was too late to have needs and wants. Rather than live with regrets, it was more important to accept what could not be changed;

'*When you get to my age, there's not much left that you want to change.*'
[retired fisher wife, Kilkeel]

Demographic profile and characteristics of the study sample

Respondents were selected primarily through a process of snowballing (Bryman 2004), which afforded access to a wider network of women in fishing households. The majority of respondents lived in or near one of Northern Ireland's three main fishing ports on the east coast, Portavogie, Ardglass and Kilkeel. A small number were from the north coast, where there are far fewer active fishing boats. The sample is therefore not representative and generalisations from the information presented here can only be made to the study sample itself. Three different types of fishing household are identified in this study: i) active fishing households where one or more members of the family (e.g. father, spouse or son) are actively engaged in fishing; ii) fishing households who have diversified within the fishing industry e.g. processing; and iii) recently retired. The majority of households were still actively engaged in fishing (70%, n=14) - 16 women were married to a fisher, 3 widowed and 1 divorced. Reflecting the demographic of NI fisheries more generally (Ferguson 2005), the majority of households in the study identified themselves as

Protestant (75%, n=15) and a quarter as Catholic (25%, n=5). *Faith* was considered an important part of life for the majority of respondents. Most of the women interviewed were middle aged (average age of 55), while only a quarter (n=5) had young children (aged 16 or under) to look after. This was in part due to the difficulty of accessing younger mothers who had busy schedules and very little free time. The fact that the majority of Northern Ireland's fishermen are aged 40 years and over further contributed to this (Ferguson 2005). Women whose children were grown up often took over child-minding responsibilities of their grandchildren and nearly half (40%, n=8) of households had children involved in the catching sector. Responses about wanting their children to fish or not were, however, very mixed. The majority of respondents (60%, n=12) did not want their children to fish due to the uncertainty, 'the hard life' and high cost of entry associated with the industry.

It is interesting to note that only a quarter of women were from a fishing family. However, the majority (65%, n=13) lived locally, most coming from a farming background, and considered themselves to be a part of the community, if not directly linked with fishing. Almost a third (35%, n=7) married into the fishing community from 'outside', with some respondents adding that after living in the area for most of their adult life they would still be considered 'outsiders'. This outsider effect in 'tight-knit' fishing communities is discussed in greater detail in section 5. Respondents expressed a strong sense of place (Hay 1998) and place attachment (Altman and Low 1992), which have been shown to affect social wellbeing (Rollero and De Piccoli 2010). Women frequently referred to their satisfaction with their local area as a place to live. This seemed to be more related to a 'sense of community' and 'belonging' and the natural beauty of the coast and sea rather than access to services, shops and infrastructure, all of which were frequently criticised.

The majority of women in the study were well-educated. Over half of the respondents (65%, n=13) had completed secondary (A-levels) or third level education. This is in line with national statistics, where females leaving school in Northern Ireland tend to be better qualified than males and are more likely to progress to higher education (DETINI 2011). The majority of women were married just after their education was completed or they had entered the workforce, and left work after the birth of their first child. When it came to the working life and employment of women in fishing house-holds, lines could appear somewhat blurred as women often engaged in multiple roles at any one time. For example, a woman in a fishing household could be the 'housewife', look after the shore side of the fishing business and work outside the home simultan-eously, and for most these roles overlapped at various stages of their life cycle. Women in this study also provided a lot of support for the family fishing business with the majority (90%, n=18) working for the family fishing business in some way and 70% (n=14) working fulltime *within* the home. Of those who left work or education (n=9) to run the household (rear children, support the family fishing enterprise, etc.), 6 returned to the workforce for varying reasons such as the need to supplement household income from fishing. Interestingly, however, the need for 'me-time' and the need to fulfil aspira-tions they had put on hold when they married and had children were also cited by respondents as a reason for returning to work (see Zhao et al. 2012). This negotiation or adaptation of needs is explored further in the following section. Fishing was still the primary source of income for half of the households (n=10), with income from the
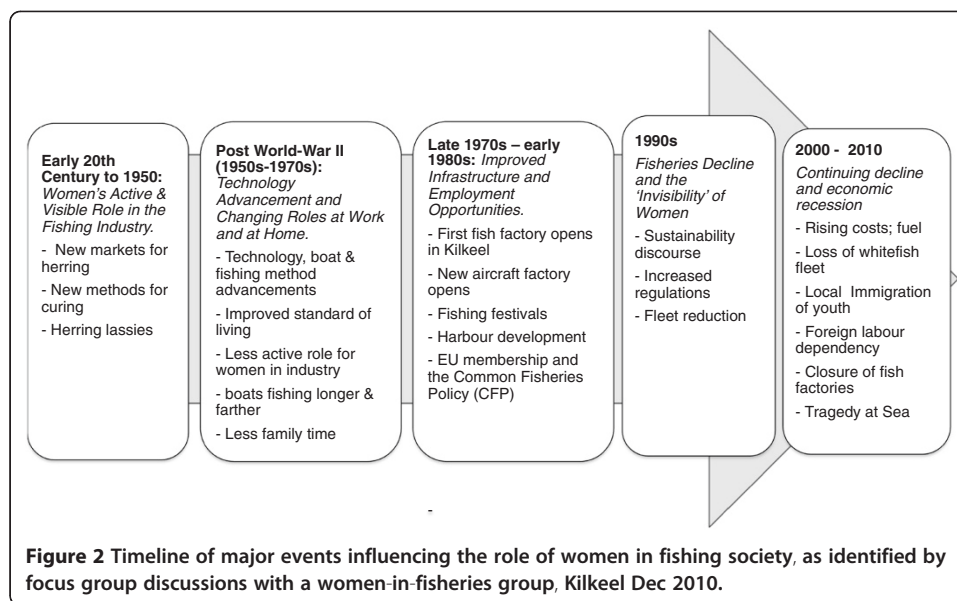
wife's work the second most important source of income, followed by a state pension, which was supplemented by other forms such as savings following the sale or decommissioning of the family fishing vessel or part-time work. Most respondents felt that at present they got along ok or comfortably with what they had, but worried about the lack of benefits and pension entitlements for retired fishermen, and felt anxious about money. Half of the respondents felt they would not be able to cope if fishing did not improve.

The semi-structured questionnaire also considered how women accessed social resources such as involvement in different community and social groups or organisations, which was very high (65%, n=13) for women in the study. There is, however, some bias in the sample as seven (35%) respondents were members of NIWIF and all women involved in NIWIF were also actively involved in some other organisation or social group. Finally, personal health problems were reported by almost half (45%, n=9) of the respondents. The majority of those with health issues were aged over 60 years. Although younger women were also experiencing increasing levels of stress as they juggled the needs of those closest to them with their own and took on multiple roles within and outside the household. Over half of the respondents (55%, n=11) also experienced some kind of 'shock', including loss of life at sea or damage to the boat that impacted the wellbeing of the household.

Then and Now – the changing role of women in Northern Ireland fishing society

It is important to understand the changing historical context within which women in NI fishing households understand and pursue their wellbeing today. Fishing in Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland and the UK has traditionally been a gendered occupation. However, women have long played an important role in fisheries and at times a very active role in what appears to be an exclusively masculine domain of male of 'hunters of the sea' (Nadel-Klein 2003: 368).

In addition to key interviews with retired fishermen's wives, focus group discussions with a fishermen's wives support group helped identify key changes and particular events that affected the role of women in the fishing community (see Figure 2). Initially the group was asked to map any key changes or events on a timeline over the last 10 years that impacted their community, in particular the role of women. Members of the group began to tap into a wealth of 'social memory' (Coulthard 2005), what (Nadel-Klein 2003): 368) refers to as 'heritage-knowledge'. They were aided by images of women working in the fishing industry in the past; e.g. young women gutting herring in a local curing yard in Kilkeel in 1945, and a newspaper cutting of an old photo taken in 1937 of '*fishermen and fisherwomen coming ashore with longlines*' after a fishing trip in England (In: Fishing News, 2.7.2010: 18). Most of the group members were aged over 50 and had come from a long tradition of fishing - their fathers or husband's fathers were fishers and some of their sons fished the family boat now. Through their own personal experience and from this rich cultural and symbolic resource of how women were remembered in fishing society through stories, tradition and images, the group reconstructed past events, both positive and negative, that affected the role of women. The time-line, illustrated in Figure 2, highlights how changing access to resources (for example, technology, target species, labour) greatly influenced the role of women. It is evident that their relationship with the natural resource is a dynamic one that has shifted from a more visible, active role to a more 'invisible' supporting role (see Zhao et al. 2012). Although women were very involved in a lot of hard labour ashore, the group was very explicit in pointing out

Early 20th Century to 1950: *Women's Active & Visible Role in the Fishing Industry.*

- New markets for herring

- New methods for curing

- Herring lassies

Post World-War II (1950s-1970s): *Technology Advancement and Changing Roles at Work and at Home.*

- Technology, boat & fishing method advancements

- Improved standard of living

- Less active role for women in industry

- boats fishing longer & farther

- Less family time

Late 1970s – early 1980s: *Improved Infrastructure and Employment Opportunities.*

- First fish factory opens in Kilkeel

- New aircraft factory opens

- Fishing festivals

- Harbour development

- EU membership and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)

1990s *Fisheries Decline and the 'Invisibility' of Women*

- Sustainability discourse

- Increased regulations

- Fleet reduction

2000 - 2010 *Continuing decline and economic recession*

- Rising costs; fuel

- Loss of whitefish fleet

- Local Immigration of youth

- Foreign labour dependency

- Closure of fish factories

- Tragedy at Sea

Figure 2 Timeline of major events influencing the role of women in fishing society, as identified by focus group discussions with a women-in-fisheries group, Kilkeel Dec 2010.

that, despite the Fishing News cutting, women in Northern Ireland never really actively fished and if any did they were an unknown minority. One woman did however comment on how, in her mother's time, '*The wives went with their men to help pull the boats down the beach and carried the men on their backs out to the boats when they were afloat. This meant that they weren't sitting with wet feet all night.*' A similar remarkable feat was recorded by Nadel-Klein (2003) following her research with fishing families in Scotland.

Prior to 1950s, as fishing improved and new markets opened up, for herring in particular, there was a greater need to handle the increased volume of fish and to find better ways of perserving and transporting it. Women worked as 'herring lassies', gutting and packing the herring in barrels with salt. Women followed the fleet wherever they worked, earning a few pence a barrel and often working in kinship groups for protection and travelling from the west of Ireland to work in Ardglass or Scotland (Gallagher 1979; Nadel-Klein 2000). The type of fishery also determined the workload for women. For example, in the summer boats traditionally went long-lining for mackerel. This involved a lot more work for fishermen's wives, as mussels were used to bait the lines, which was woman's work. As one woman pointed out, '*Even now if you were to dig along the Annalong shoreline the mussel shells are still there.*'

After the Second World War, technology and boat developments led to lifestyle changes and changes in fishing behaviour with fishing trips lasting longer and covering greater distances. Advancements in boat building and fishing methods led to an improvement in the overall standard of living, but also meant boats worked out at sea for longer periods. The advent of technology resulted in a less active role for women in the industry; new machinery replaced the herring girls (Reid 2000) and women were no longer needed to bait the lines as men began to trawl instead. Technological advancements did, however, improve communication between fishers and their families. With the advent of radio most fishing households had a reciever so husband and wife could communicate on their own frequency, although no conversation was ever totally private.

The late 1970s and early 1980s marked a change in employment opportunities. The growing importance of ancillary businesses and investment in shoreside infrastructure such as the opening of the first fish factory in Kilkeel provided an important source of employment for women after the collapse of the herring fishery. The opening of an aircraft factory in Kilkeel also provided new and alternative employment opportunities for the first time since the shift from farming and granite export to commercial fishing. Local community festivals were identified as key events in the annual fishing calendar (e.g. Kilkeel's Prawn Festival and Portavogie's trawler race). These ended, however, due to insurance issues with public liability and health and safety regulations in the 1980s.

Another key turning point was EU membership, and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) in 1983. Throughout the 1990s, 'sustainablility' became the new buzz word and efforts shifted from capital maximisation to conservation with increased regulations aimed at effort reduction (Symes and Phillipson 2001). At the turn of the millenium, the fleet, in particular the whitefish fleet, declined dramatically as costs rose, restrictions continued and the dependency on foreign labour grew while local youths, disincentivised to fish, emigrated elsewhere. Participants commented how the last decade has seen cut-backs and closures of fish factories resulting in less work for women locally and increasing pressure on women to work outside, as well as within the home to supplement income;

> 'That's the other difference. Before women didn't have to work the money was so good they could stay at home. But now they nearly all work, a lot of them professionally as nurses, etc. bringing in the steady income so payments can be made on time. They all bought houses and that when times were good but now it's so uncertain, but they still have mortgages...'[retired fisher wife, Kilkeel]

The role of women in fisheries is in a dynamic flux, having shifted from one of active involvement in fishing labour to industrial labour in fish factories, and finally to more 'invisible' labour at home, running the shore side of the business. More recently, there is a growing trend of women working outside the home as primary breadwinner (Quast 2011, Zhao et al. 2012). The changing roles and patterns of work that women engage in are complex, flexible and dependent on changing social structures, natural resources and local circumstances, as well as individual goals, values and aspirations (Pascual-Fernandez and De la Cruz Modino 2005).

What matters for a good life: How women in NI fishing households put it

With the exception of a few feminist authors who focus on gender aspects of fisheries (Davis 1988; Nadel-Klein 2000, 2003; Binkley 2000, 2002; Bennett 2005), the literature has tended to focus on the fisheries sector as a male occupation, providing a sense of freedom, adventure, self-worth and pride for men. Studies of job satisfaction by Richard Pollnac and others (Pollnac and Poggie 1988, 2006, 2008; Pollnac et al. 2001, 2012) have focused on the domain of the resource operator, excluding any gender dimension. How women value their roles and identities is all too frequently overlooked (Weeratunge and Snyder 2010). The wellbeing image for women (Figure 3) illustrates aspects of life that women in this study valued most across all three dimensions of wellbeing (see McGregor 2007; McGregor and Sumner 2009; Britton and Coulthard 2012). These include *security*, for

Figure 3 Three-dimensional image of social wellbeing for women in NI fishing households (N=20).
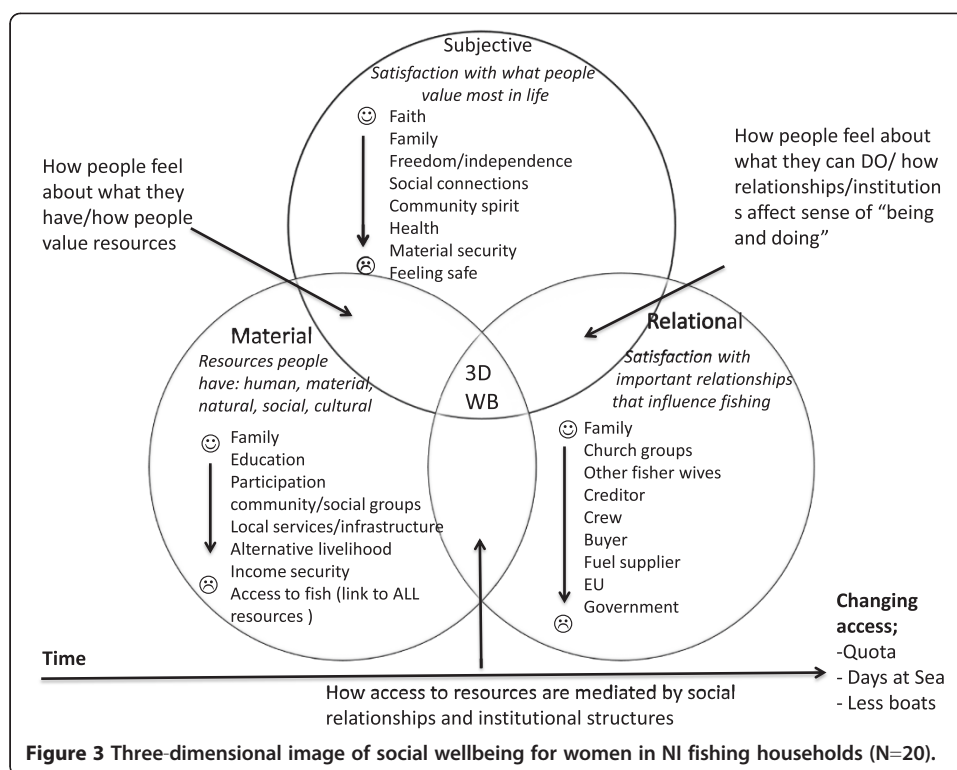
example, alternative livelihoods and income security, which are also frequently identified in the literature as a key objectives for women in fisheries across nations and cultures (Pascual-Fernandez and De la Cruz Modino 2005); *community*, for example, social networks and 'shore' relationships; and *freedom and independence*, which is often only thought of in a male context of job satisfaction and self-actualisation (see Pollnac and Poggie 2006). It is also evident that importance and value are placed on family and relational aspects of wellbeing, such as community spirit, participation, social connections, across all three dimensions. Figure 3 further highlights how pursuing wellbeing in one area of life may require a trade-off with another area of life. This is exemplified by the negotiation of a woman's own needs to ensure the household stays afloat, placing the wellbeing of others (family) above her own personal wellbeing (e.g. loneliness, giving support, etc.), an aspect that is well-represented in the literature (Pascual-Fernandez and De la Cruz Modino 2005; Binkley 2002; Nadel-Klein and Davis 1988). These were the main aspects of life that arose from SSIs and surveys with women. They are also evident in the self-reported GPGI survey assessing quality of life (Table 1). This section focuses on women's responses to the GPGI survey and what this means for how wellbeing needs and aspirations are negotiated within the household.

Table 1 presents 16 self-generated [d] domains of wellbeing most frequently cited by women and the average satisfaction with those domains. Also presented are areas of life women wished to change in order to improve their overall quality of life. In doing so it showcases the way respondents prioritise areas of life they would most like to improve. The nominated areas were a mix of resource-based, e.g. financial security; relational, e.g. community relations; and psychological, e.g. self-worth. Respondents stressed the need for regular or alternative income and often discussed innovative ways to live with

Table 1 Self-generated subjective wellbeing of women in NI fishing households (GPGI survey responses) N=18

Domains of wellbeing; "What I need to have for a good life" (ranked in order of frequency)	Women who cite this domain	Satisfaction with domain scale 1 ☺ to 5 ☺		Mean no. of points allocated to change domain* (total points = 10)		
	No.	Mean	Rank 2	Mean	Rank 3	RD**
Family, close relationships	18	4.3	3	2.0	6	**3**
Health	13	3.2	8	4.7	2	−6
Material security	13	3.2	8	6.8	1	−7
Community spirit	9	3.8	6	4.3	3	−3
Social connections	8	4.0	5	0.0	0	0
Faith	6	5.0	1	0.0	0	0
Freedom/independence	6	4.0	5	0.0	0	0
Job satisfaction	5	4.2	4	3.0	5	1
Self-worth	4	4.5	2	2.0	6	4
Leisure and quality time	4	4.0	5	0.0	0	0
Feeling safe	4	3.0	9	3.8	4	−5
Basic needs	3	5.0	1	0.0	0	0
Safeguarding the future	2	3.0	10	3.0	5	−5
Marine environment	2	3.5	7	3.0	5	−2
Place attachment	2	4.5	2	0	0	0
Fisheries management	1	2.5	11	0	0	0

*Note: Domain change was rated by respondents using a 10 point scoring system, 'spending' a total of 10 points on areas of life they would most like to change in order to improve their QoL.
**RD refers to the satisfaction ranking (R2) less the change ranking (R3), i.e. a negative RD score relates to an area of low satisfaction and high desire to change, and vice-versa.

less or save more (see Conway et al. 2005: 25). Individually (and in groups) fishermen's wives in this study focused on promoting and protecting the wellbeing of their families and communities, rather than fishing and the domain of the sea. Devine et al. 2006 also emphasise the way in which the gendered division of labour influences the domains of life on which men and women rely most. The following section first pinpoints the nature of the relationships and how needs are negotiated within the household with resulting trade-offs (e.g. the loneliness associated with being a 'grass widow' with a husband absent at sea for long periods of time). This is followed by a discussion of the importance of material security as an enabling resource, community and other social networks women draw upon in their pursuit of wellbeing, and the value placed on sense of freedom and independence.

The duality of family relations and negotiation of needs

As the survey was interview-administered it enabled the researcher to explore the meanings and values attached to each domain of wellbeing in greater depth, as well as the often dual-nature of each domain (White and Elison 2006). For example, 'family' was an area of life that all women in the study identified as important and a domain that women said they were very satisfied with (a score of 4.3 out of 5). Women also identified home-comings as very important in the life of a fishing family, especially for the children, and the relief of having a partner safe home;

> 'The kids seeing Joe [e] come up the lane shouting 'Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!' was one of the happiest moments for me.'

Family life was perceived as highly important for individual wellbeing. Respondents frequently commented that their wellbeing revolved entirely around their family's wellbeing. However, some women (n=3) still wished to change this aspect of their life in some way, ranking 'family' in the top six domains to change in order to improve their quality of life (Table 1). This seemingly contradictory response highlights the duality of relationships (White and Elison 2006; Bebbington 2007). (Agarwal 1997) criticises the 'unitary' conception of the household, stating that relationships between members of the household are complex and dynamic. She argues for the need to recognise household gender relations as socially constructed and resulting from the constant negotiation and re-negotiation or 'bargaining' of roles and resources. As illustrated in Figure 3, family relations are also influenced by external structures, such as the social networks that exist in the wider community (Agarwal 1997). In addition to being a source of great joy, there were also challenges connected to the fishing way of life that had to be overcome. These included women having to adjust or change carefully developed family routines when their partners came ashore or left the industry. For some women it was the fact that their husband fished longer and farther away and therefore missed time at home with the children. These women had to try to cope with a single-parent family. The following quote indicates how the needs and priorities of one family member, in this case the husband and skipper, can fail to match the needs and values of their wife and that in order to meet needs in one area of life (provide income security for his family and employees) another area may be impacted (family time);

> 'Harry missed the birth of our second son because he had to go out to sea – the crew and the boat were his first priority.' [wife of fisher, Kilkeel]

This duality of close relationships (and indeed all social relations, see Agarwal 1997) challenges the dominant discourse on social capital and its over-simplistic view of social relations and positive framing of social capital as the solution to social problems (Serra 2011). (Serra 2011) emphasises the need to consider the context within which these social relations operate and the role of status and power when it comes to negotiating needs. Generally, discussions with respondents pointed to the need to maintain family ties and improve quality time as a family to protect the perceived quality of life (Martin et al. 2010). Another aspect to consider is that family and close relationships are areas of life that people often do not feel comfortable openly complaining about. The same holds true for the discussion of problems, especially with a 'stranger'. This may have affected some of the responses.

Adaptation of expectations

As (Coulthard 2012) recently outlined, the literature is particularly rich in its accounts of adaptation of women in fisheries and how their contributions to the wellbeing of the household can result in costs to individual wellbeing (Coulthard 2012; Binkley 1995, 2000). (Binkley 1995: 87) also highlights this trade-off between adaptation and wellbeing where the economic wellbeing of fishing households are dependent on the husband's job and 'the wife's primary responsibility lies in supporting him. Her needs become secondary' (cited in Coulthard 2012: 7). (Coulthard 2012) argues that the social implications of adaptation are poorly understood, with varying gains and losses associated with adaptation. For

example, in the demographic profile we saw that the majority of women in this study married into the fishing way of life. Women often married very young or left work and were cut off from former social networks, having to cope with loneliness. This is illustrated in the following quotes:

'When birthday parties came, weddings came you were always the "grass widow" as they called you, you were always there on your own because they were at sea.'

'It was easier to socialise with other women before you had kids but once you had kids that was it, you were pretty much on your own. I missed out on a lot of social events, like weddings and that because my husband was at sea. It can be isolated and lonely at times.' [fisher wife, east coast]

This increased reliance on family support:

'Sometimes I have to rely on my Mum and Dad with the wee ones when I'm out with the older ones. My Mum and Dad just live around the corner to me which is very handy.' [fisher wife, Kilkeel]

However, it also encouraged the creation of new social networks, like developing relationships with other fisher wives. (Nadel-Klein 2003: 66) points out the importance of core groups of kin and strong bonds between women when she says that 'a fisher lassie needs a fisher lassie'. This may be especially true for women adapting to the fishing way of life, as the following quote illustrates:

'I was from a farming family but Vinnie had 5 brothers and they all fished so the sisters (in-law) were support for each other. Three of us lived next door to each other and they were back-up for when things went wrong, as they often did, with children getting ill and all that. There was always some challenge[...]. It's much harder for those who don't have that close (family) support to rely on, it causes a whole other set of problems.' [widowed fisher wife, east coast]

(Nadel-Klein 2003: 65) also notes that 'a fisher laddie needs a fisher lassie', referring to the shared cultural norms and values of tight-knit fishing communities in early 20th century Scotland and the importance of a partner 'who knew the work'. However, in contemporary fishing families in NI this is less common. Seven respondents married into the fishing way of life with no connection to fishing. Despite having lived, worked and reared their children in the community (some for over 40 years), they may still find themselves considered 'outsiders' (Nadel-Klein 2000: 367). Trying to adapt to a fishing way life, especially in a tight-knit community with its own norms and customs, knowing little about the fishing society and the hierarchical status of crew, with no social connections of her own and a husband at sea for weeks, can be very lonely and cause of great distress for a new wife:

'I cried for fifteen years. My husband was at sea from a sunday night to friday. It was awful being the first married to a big fishing family in a small village and not from here and having nobody else. I had absolutely nobody [...] I knew nothing about the

way they settled money on the boats and people were stopping me on the streets and saying, "how much had your ones got last night?" And when I didn't know what to say, my husband never ever came in and discussed money, then the people thought I was stuck-up because I didn't tell them my business.' [*fisher wife, east coast*]

This was a common experience amongst women from outside the fishing community. With fishing communities frequently characterised as 'tight-knit', they could also be very isolated and exclusive places to live:

'I came over on a fishing boat and when I got off the boat I was approached by three girls in the village and asked to get back on the boat and never come back. So that was my first 'welcome.' And here I am, forty years on (laughs). I need my head looked at don't I?!' [*wife of deckhand, east coast*]

'Often John would be away at sea from 3 to 6 weeks so it was like being a part-time single Mum raising four young children in a strange place far from home. When we first married and moved here I didn't know anyone and being left alone ashore for so long without any connections was very hard. [. . .]Even after 50 years I'm still an outsider.' [*wife of retired skipper, east coast*]

Despite improved communication technology easing some of the stress of separation from a partner, younger women, especially those with no fishing background, still face a whole new set of challenges and may rely on the support of their mother-in-laws:

'It's a bit of a problem for some of the young wives at the minute now, and like that is including my own daughter-in-laws, (especially) the one that doesn't belong to kilkeel, hasn't an idea. She's coming out of a different environment altogether, not a fishing environment. She can't adapt to it, I try to say to her, "really you've got to try and do this" and it's a bit of a struggle for her at the minute to try and see that.' [*fisher wife and mother, Kilkeel*]

When asked if they would rather their husbands do something else, most replied that they knew what they were marrying into and that you just had to get on with it until it becomes a way of life:

When I met Paul he was doing it, so I evolved along with him. You knew that it wasn't going to be easy but it was nearly like a challenge, y'know?
[*wife of a skipper, North Coast*]

The quote above suggests the importance of agency in determining the level of adaptation women are to negotiate. (Coulthard 2012) explains, 'In accepting a proposal of marriage from a fisherman, knowing the life this will entail, they expand the breadth of what they are willing and able to compromise.' However, (Coulthard 2012) also highlights the influence of cultural norms relationships within fishing society, and questions the degree of agency a woman may have in making her decision as a result.

Health, wealth and the importance of security

A number of health-related issues were identified by women in the demographic profile and Table 1 also highlights the mixed satisfaction (3.2 out of 5) with this aspect of life. Respondents emphasised that if you did not 'have health then wealth didn't matter.' It is evident from the data that 'material' security was still, however, an important aspect of life for women - thirteen women cited it as important for their wellbeing. Mixed levels of satisfaction (3.2 out of 5) and a high desire to change this aspect of life were also expressed. These seemed to be influenced by household characteristics such as success and satisfaction with fishing (in terms of income levels), life cycle stage (active or retired), the type of fishery targeted (offshore or inshore) and levels of uncertainty or mortgage to pay. Families had to cope with the unpredictable nature of fishing and women had to plan and prepare for the 'lean' months with frequent comments about the need to become 'good managers.' A lack of social benefits or pension entitlements caused added strain, especially for smaller scale fishing households operating small in-shore vessels in more isolated areas. A lack of adequate infrastructure and safe landing sites in these areas meant families were unable to fish during periods of bad weather, impacting household income security as the following quote demonstrates:

> 'We couldn't get social security other than the four 4 months between 1st November and end of following February. That was 'official' non fishing season in NI (...). There was no proper harbour [where we lived] and the exposed coast meant we couldn't fish in the shoulder season. I spent two years living on £4 child allowance for those months. We were also trying to pay off a bank loan for the boat.'
> [ex-wife of fisher, north coast]

Material resources are also related to services that can impact social aspects of well-being such as the lack meeting places for younger women. This was indicated by a respondent from Portavogie when she remarked, 'we don't even have anywhere to go for a cup of coffee.' It was also captured by the lack of social support for widowed fisher wives, contributing to isolation and loneliness for women left behind by the fishing industry:

> 'Fishermen worked till they were 60 and a lot died in their 60s and 70s...A lot of women live on their own and are frightened, their families had moved on (as a result of the decline in the local fishing industry). If we had sheltered dwellings, where they had a communal area and their own wee flat...'

The importance of community, social and faith-based networks

Community and feeling safe, along with health and wealth, were in the top four domains that women wished to change. The two domains are closely linked, with a threatened sense of safety and security identified as a knock-on effect of fisheries decline in the community that results in the closure of local business and the general decline in the economic wellbeing of the fishing community (e.g. closure of fishing factory in Portavogie, Northern Ireland's second largest fishing port and an aircraft factory now the primary employer in Kilkeel, Northern Ireland's largest fishing port). With a lack of incentives for young people to enter the fishing industry, and detached

from their fishing heritage in communities with little alternative employment or activities available, respondents said they noticed an increase in anti-social behaviour amongst youths in particular. Fishing-dependent families felt marginalised in communities no longer fully dependent on fishing, with comments about 'newcomers' settling in the community who were not connected to fishing having an effect on social networks and tight-knit community ties (Nadel-Klein 2003; Conway et al. 2005; Davis 2000; Binkley 1995). 'Feeling safe' was a domain expressed primarily by women whose husbands were away at sea on longer fishing trips.

It is evident from the findings (both demographic and the GPGI survey) that faith can have an important role to play in the lives of fishing families, especially, it seems, for women. For the six women who cited it as an important aspect of life for their wellbeing, faith also gave them the highest level of satisfaction (5 out of 5). The literature on voluntary groups and associations in NI also highlights that participation in church groups is significantly higher in NI (49%) than in Britain (28%) (Daly 2004: 61). Respondents identified faith as an important factor in fishing, offering a valuable coping mechanism (for example, through prayer) and a social network of support:

> 'In smaller areas you get that. The church plays a big role. It plays an important role. Especially too when so many things have gone wrong, they're always there. They would provide support. That's well up our list actually. It supports everything else. Your faith, and everyone has their own personal faith.' [*fisher wife, Kilkeel*]

The fishing identity and way of life are strongly attached to religious beliefs in Northern Ireland in particular (Van Ginkel 2001: 188). In each of the main fishing communities in Northern Ireland different religious events and occasions are celebrated. In the predominantly Protestant communities, the importance of fishing is recognised in traditional fishermen's services in local churches. In the predominantly Catholic communities (for example, Ardglass, Lough Foyle), the annual blessing of the fleet, where wives and children traditionally could go out on the boats, offers a rare opportunity to experience the working environment of their husbands and fathers. This practice has since stopped due to health and safety regulations and the fleet is tied up alongside and blessed in the harbour rather than out at sea. Many of these religious events and occasions are important family days out during which women playing an important role, volunteering in different church-related groups and organisations. Women act as the household heads in the absence of their husbands, representing the family at church and other social functions. Membership with a particular church can also be an important form of social identity (Kumari 2012). In addition to these more festive occasions, religion also plays an immensely important role in communities that experience high levels of loss (MAIB 2010). Annual memorial services and permanent memorials feature at every major harbour and are an important part of the grieving process:

> 'It's especially important in fishing. There's a lot of prayer that goes into it, when they go to sea, when they're at sea. Prayer is a very important part of your life.'
> [*fisher wife and mother, Kilkeel*]

However, there can also be a 'dark side' to social capital or social resources (Serra 2011; Bebbington 2007). The same can be true for religion, with its exclusive as well as inclusive aspects. This is especially the case in a Northern Irish context, where the boundaries between religion and politics are frequently blurred. Religion and politics further define each of the main fishing ports in Northern Ireland, with Portavogie recognised as predominantly Protestant and Unionist, while Ardglass as Catholic and Nationalist and Kilkeel are relatively mixed Protestant and Catholic.

Freedom and independence

Fishermen's wives frequently cited independence as an important quality (Bennett 2005; Davis 2000; Binkley 2000; Nadel-Klein 2000). However, unlike men, whose job satisfaction is often discussed in the literature, the women in this study cited job satisfaction less frequently (n=5). For those whose job was important, it gave them relatively high levels of satisfaction (4.2 out of 5). However, despite job satisfaction being linked with self-actualisation and independent income, it is an area of life that can also cause increased pressure for women who feel they have no choice but to work due to a lack of income from fishing. The low RD score in Table 1 reflects this. There was a strong sense of fulfilment and satisfaction with the 'freedom/independence' domain for women, an area that reflects the independence and autonomy of women who run fishing households (Coulthard 2012; Binkley 1995). Most respondents adopted a 'taking each day as it comes' philosophy (although still finding innovative ways to save money) and developed a self-reliant attitude that enabled them to embrace these perceived challenges. The following quotes from fishermen's wives illustrate this:

> 'It's unpredictable. You just have to be on-call, adaptable. You had to change, be easy-going. Although not everyone could do it.'

> 'If you weren't strong enough, though I'm not a strong person by no means, in a real crisis I'd wilt now, but then I got strong, I live day to day and just cope.'

A strength of character or sense of agency that is still tempered by her needs playing second fiddle to the fishing way of life, adapting to her husband's absence and home-coming:

> 'Honestly I think it takes you to be a special person to be a fisherman's wife. It doesn't take you to be a wimp. If something happens here I wouldn't even have thought to call him because I feel he is out there and it isn't fair to him'

> 'It can be isolated and lonely at times (but) you learn to be independent and prepare for homecomings.'

Women developed long-term strategies to cope with the fishing behaviour of their partners, such as their husbands long periods of absence from home. These coping strategies led to independence, taking emergencies in their stride and a sense of self-worth, which could create difficulties when husbands returned. How this aspect of change (leaving fishing) is negotiated is beyond the scope of this paper. It will, however, be explored in a forthcoming paper (Britton et al. in progress). The ability to participate

socially also helped improve women's sense of independence and self-worth by creating a life for themselves outside the home. It is worth noting that this was generally easier for women who had the greater flexibility of being a housewife or more time in retirement age:

> I work 12 hours a day more or less (*as a child-minder*). But I'm also involved with the lifeboat. I have to have outside activities. (...) I'm secretary for the local history group which takes up a lot of time. And I work with adults with mental disability. I do a lot of charity, too much at times but you have to create a life for yourself outside the home otherwise you go stale and when Ben's at home if he's not golfing or not at the harbour there's nothing he likes better than to be in front of the TV.
> [*wife of semi-retired fisher, Kilkeel*]

Lessons and conclusion

This paper argues for a more gendered approach to fisheries management by emphasising the impact of changing access to fish on the role of women, as well as the way in which women define wellbeing. Gender alone does not create inequity. It must instead be understood in the context of enabling and constraining structures and external factors (Westerman et al. 2005; Deneulin 2008), as well as individual goals, values and aspirations (Pascual-Fernandez and De la Cruz Modino 2005). The ability to pursue wellbeing is greatly mediated through resources (social and cultural as well as material, natural or human), relationships (within the family and the community as well as wider socio-economic and political spheres) and cultural values, all of which are socially embedded (White and Elison 2006). (Camfield and McGregor 2005: 19) draw from (Giddens 1984) to describe how structures can both enable and constrain behaviors in a range of different ways. In this study of women in NI's fishing households, this includes the physical restriction of opportunity, namely a lack of services or infrastructure supporting opportunities for social cohesion. This, in turn, impacts women socially. It results in a sense of isolation and loneliness in part due to a lack of 'meeting places' for women in fishing communities. Moreover, women are forced to adapt their own needs (e.g. for a 'social life') to meet the needs of the household (for example, pressure to provide extra household income or support as a result of declining returns from fishing). This financial burden was also a worry, with half of the respondents feeling unable to cope if fishing does not improve perhaps reflected in the rise in the number of fishing households receiving welfare support (Fishermen's Mission, pers comm, 31.7.12), and half of the study sample still dependent on fishing as a primary source of income. Cultural norms can also limit the range of what can be imagined in the pursuit of wellbeing. For example, cultural limitations restrict the prospects of women challenging the decisions of men, while other norms ensure that women's needs come second to the needs of the fishing business (Coulthard 2012). Conversely, the paper also highlighted shifting cultural identity with women's increasing role as breadwinner. Gender roles within the household are in transition as a result of increasing male unemployment and increasing number of women entering the workforce (DETINI 2011; Quast 2011). This can create greater responsibility for women and the erosion of self-worth for men (Narayan et al. 2000), leading to tensions within the home where these roles are negotiated (Agarwal 1997; Harper and Leicht 2007).

With this in mind, how can fisheries policy take better account of women's wellbeing? What women value may not match up with the way policies envision what they should value (Gerrard 1995). In this study, women's needs and wants were considered in relation to those of others in the household, and how different aspects of life are valued and interlinked. As illustrated in Figure 3, women's priorities are integrated across different domains and not sectorised like much of fisheries policy. White and Elison (2006: 5) argue that, in a policy context, a social wellbeing approach provides a 'more holistic, accurate profile of what is really important to people.' Women in this study emphasised the importance of a good life for themselves and their families, the need for greater livelihood security, income support, community wellbeing, participation in decision-making and the importance of maintaining their sense of freedom and self-worth.

In Table 1, *fisheries management* was only cited once, and despite scoring the lowest level of satisfaction there were no points allocated to change by the respondent. This may reflect women's 'shore' role, prioritising the needs of family and community rather than the needs of the catching sector. It may, however, also be related to the lack of voice in decision-making at various levels in the fishing industry (Zhao et al. 2012). In addition to contributing to the family fishing business (mostly unpaid and unrecognised support), the majority of women in this study were actively involved in promoting their fishing heritage and way of life. For example, they searched for new ways to promote the sustainability of their industry through NIWIF's 'fish presentations' [f], which further suggests that women understand how changes in the fishing industry are intimately linked to the wellbeing of their families and communities.

This has implications for fisheries funding, especially Axis 4 of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) and the creation of fisheries local area groups (FLAGs) [g], which are in the process of being finalised for Northern Ireland (MMO 2012). During focus group discussions, the major challenges identified by members of NIWIF were issues with bureaucracy and exclusion when trying to access resources, in particular information about fisheries funding, as well as a lack of voice or recognition in policy-making. For example, one respondent in the study contacted the government to enquire about Axis 4 funding for her fisheries area: '*I said to him how much is the community getting? "Oh its for the community not the fishermen." Well look at Portavogie. There's nothing left. There's one shop left in it. That's what we've got*'. Failure to include women in FLAGs, which are aimed at promoting a sustainable economy for fisheries areas, and a lack of consideration of the gender dimension in fisheries could potentially result in the inequitable distribution of benefits and impacts. Given the dynamic role of women in managing and supporting household finances, as well as the EU's policy support for continuing effort reduction within the EU the fleet (Pita et al. 2010), the need to identify equitable access to financial support and appropriate training on income-generating and management activities for women will need to be addressed as key areas for fisheries governance (Pascual-Fernandez and De la Cruz Modino 2005: 172).

A recent Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) report of the fishing industry in Northern Ireland (Ferguson 2005: 13) stated the need to 'ensure that we take account of the needs of the few women working in the sector.' However, this fails to consider the wider role of women in fishing society and their contribution to the objective and subjective wellbeing of the household. The EQIA report also falls short of outlining any framework or process

for how these needs might be taken into account. Given that family responsibilities, especially for women with young children, may impact women's ability participate in traditional decision-making processes (Okali and Holvoet 2005) more innovative ways of communicating information about changes in the fishing industry and support for quality childcare services are advocated. It is therefore important to recognise that 'women in fishing households' are a diverse group of people (Westerman et al. 2005: 1758). Women in this study expressed varying individual values, differences in their capacity to cope with change and their 'decision-making power within and between households', as well as being influenced by a host of factors including individual characteristics (age and education), local context (services and infrastructure) and external drivers (increasing economic costs as a result of a fuel crisis). (Weeratunge and Snyder 2010) advocate the use of multi-dimensional frameworks and processes to capture and support the multi-dimensional roles of women in fisheries, which an approach like social wellbeing has the potential fulfil.

In their study of women in a Lake Victoria fishing community in Tanzania, (Onyango and Jentoft 2011) also stress the need to understand how women perceive their own world and their ability to meet their needs and fulfil their aspirations. The implications for policy include the need to improve mechanisms for an integrated policy framework. For example, seeing fisheries policy in relation to other policy arenas such as social and welfare policy. Additionally, it is imperative that we move away from a gender-biased perspective in fisheries management and beyond a focus on the domain of the sea (that is, the boat, the fish, the fisher) to consider the wider societal context. In particular, the current situation warrants careful consideration of the relational dimensions of wellbeing to better connect women's views on wellbeing with policy interests.

Endnotes

[a]The majority of boats in Northern Ireland are still owned and operated by fishing families.

[b]For the network establishment see the EU strategy for equality, COM(2010)491 final of 21/09/2010

[c]Directive 2010/41/EU

[d]Note: self-reported statements or conceptually similar items were condensed into single wellbeing domains to aid frequency analysis and interpretation. e.g. *family* includes; close relationships, with spouse/partner, children, good home/family life (See also Camfield and Ruta 2007)

[e]All names have been changed to protect respondents' anonymity

[g]Regular 'fish presentations' by NIWIF for community groups around the country which includes showcasing local fish, cookery demonstrations and talks about NIWIF and what it means to be a fisher's wife.

[h]Axis 4 of the European Fisheries Fund supports sustainable development of fisheries areas, in particular smaller communities experiencing decline. The scheme is delivered through fisheries local action groups (FLAGs) who represent the area.

Competing interests
I, the author, declare that there are no competing interests.

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