

**Thoughts on the 10th Anniversary of the Cod Moratorium**  
**by Chris Brookes**

**Synopsis:**

This piece was created to mark the tenth anniversary of an environmental catastrophe in the North Atlantic. The gigantic Northern Cod Stock discovered by European fishermen five centuries ago prompted the settlement of Newfoundland and was known as the "Greatest Fishery in the World." In July 1992 the once-massive fish stocks were discovered to have collapsed and a two-year fishing ban was introduced. 30,000 fishery workers were thrown on the dole. A decade later fish stocks have not rebounded and the fishery remains closed. Many fishermen either have left the island or are destitute; many politicians and scientists who squandered the resource have retired on generous government pensions.

The feature was composed as part of a collaboration with a dancer. It was first "danced" in performance at the St. John's International Sound Symposium in July 2002. In January 2003 the audio work was released on the CD "Radiant Dissonance" by the Canadian Society of Independent Radio Producers and has since been broadcast as a radio feature by various community radio stations in Canada and the USA.

It is in three chapters:

(CD ID#1) **Silver Tongues** (length 5.02)

(CD ID#2) **How it Was** (length 3.41) (*technical assistance: Laurence Stevenson*)

(CD ID#3) **Gone** (length 5.15)

**Total length: 14 minutes**

**Thoughts On..** is drawn from conversations with two retired fishermen (Jack Wells and Bert Sparkes), from speeches by the 1992 federal government Minister of Fisheries (John Crosbie), and from some fishery sounds which no longer exist in reality but survive on audio tape. Part of the composition involved translating speech into MIDI notation and "playing" the melody of the voice as various instruments. (In the transcript I've written these musical lines as the speech phrases they derived from)

**Transcript of the full 14-minute program**

**Part One: Silver Tongues**

BERT SPARKES: Ah...

DRUM: (Ah)

BERT: I don't know which way I would begin to describe myself. Well, ah.

DRUM: (ah)

WHISTLE: (I like to think that I'm not the average run-of-the-mill)

BERT: You know. So, ah... Like, ah:

WHISTLE: (I must be on the other side of the spectrum, for that matter.)

BERT: Yup. I like to think that I'm not the average run-of-the-mill.

DRUM: (you know)

BERT: You know.

BERT and WHISTLE TOGETHER: I must be on the other side of the spectrum, for that

matter, you know.

BERT: Like, ah:

WHISTLE: (matter that for spectrum, the of side other the on be must I)

BERT: I guess I got two characteristics. I can speak serious on any serious thing, like global conflicts and happenings like that. But then, if I'm in casual talk, ah, you know, and ah:

WHISTLE: (Even if I'm in a funeral home)

BERT: Even if I'm in a funeral home, I can lighten it up by telling jokes.

WHISTLE: (Even if I'm in a funeral home)

BERT: Just talk along with the bereaved, and what have you. And just throw in a few jokes, you know.

WHISTLE: (Even if I'm in a funeral home)

BERT: You know. But, ah.

DRUM and WHISTLE: (but ah)

BERT: If you would allow me, I can ah, grasp what any given educated man be saying. I can get it and I can analyse it.

WHISTLE: (and I can analyse it)

BERT and WHISTLE: And its not very often I'm wrong, ah, in what he's saying.

BERT: It boils down to just a lot of rhetoric and rhetoric alone. You know. So, ah. Like, ah:

FORMER FISHERIES MINISTER and TRUMPET: Our scientists advise that with a moratorium on Northern cod for two years, the size of the stock should increase significantly, and the spawning stock should no longer be at dangerously low levels.

DRUM: (Ah)

BERT: I mean, the whole thing is just a stand-in, you know. They got to appear good for the media and what have you. Promotion, you know. Ah, but some of them are lacking in skills as to how to talk to people.

FORMER FISHERIES MINISTER and TRUMPET: In short, if there is a two-year moratorium we should be able to begin safely the fishery for Northern cod inshore in 1994, and have made a strong start in rebuilding that stock.

DRUM: (ah)

BERT: For instance, if they're talking to people and they want to get a next sentence, they'll say "ah"

TRUMPET: (Ah)

BERT: Er.

TRUMPET: (Er)

BERT: Uh.

TRUMPET (Uh)

BERT: Ah.

TRUMPET: (if there is a two-year moratorium)

DRUM: (Well ah)

TRUMPET: (if there is a two-year moratorium)

DRUM: (Ah well)

BERT: Even a learned lawyer will say that, while he's thinking. But if he repeat his former sentence...

TRUMPET: (if there is a two-year moratorium)

BERT: He knows what he's going to say, then he can formulate his next thought and come on with it, you know.

FORMER FISHERIES MINISTER and TRUMPET: We should be able to begin safely the fishery for Northern Cod, inshore in 1994.

DRUM: (Ah.)

TRUMPET: (inshore in 1994.)

DRUM: (Er)

BERT: So hence you got no, like, dead air like you had earlier on a radio station. Because...

TRUMPET ECHO: (inshore in 1994.)

BERT: He's not "ah"-ing and "ahm"-ing, waiting for the next words to say. So, ah...

FORMER FISHERIES MINISTER and TRUMPET: That rebuilding is critical for the future of the fishing industry that relies on northern Cod, especially the traditional inshore fixed-gear fishery.

TRUMPET: (For all of those reasons)

FORMER FISHERIES MINISTER: For all of those reasons...

TRUMPET: (For all of those reasons)

DRUM: (Ah)

TRUMPET: (and to safeguard the Northern Cod as a species)

FORMER FISHERIES MINISTER: And to safeguard the Northern Cod as a species...

DRUM: (Well.)

TRUMPET: (And to safeguard the Northern Cod as a species)

BERT: That is lacking in a lot of our speakers, you know? Like...

TRUMPET: (Inshore in 1994)

BERT: We got wonderful politicians, you know, if they're talking just on the street to an ordinary guy.

TRUMPET ECHO: (Inshore in 1994)

BERT: But if they get up before Rotary -- I been listening to them -- they don't come over

TRUMPET: (And to safeguard the Northern Cod as a species)

BERT: They haven't got no rightful presentation. And they just can't get across to the audience.

FORMER FISHERIES MINISTER and TRUMPET: I've decided that effective at midnight tonight...

TRUMPET: ( I've decided that effective at midnight tonight)

TRUMPET ECHO: ( I've decided that effective at midnight tonight)

BERT: They might be good businessmen in their field.

FORMER FISHERIES MINISTER and TRUMPET: There will be a moratorium on harvesting of Northern Cod.

BERT: Yeah, right!

FORMER FISHERIES MINISTER and TRUMPET: Especially the traditional inshore fixed-gear fishery.

BERT: But, ah...

TRUMPET ECHO: (Inshore in 1994)

BERT: See, there you go, ah...

TRUMPET ECHO: ( I've decided that effective at midnight tonight)  
( I've decided that effective at midnight tonight)

BERT: As for that part:

FORMER FISHERIES MINISTER and TRUMPET: Until the Spring of 1994.

BERT: For to listen to what's being said...

TRUMPET ECHO: (The Spring of 1994.)

FORMER FISHERIES MINISTER and TRUMPET ECHO: The Spring of 1994.

BERT: Ah, some of them are sadly lacking.

**Part 2: (How it Was)**

VOICES: Codfish. Cod, cod cod cod cod. Flounder. Capelin. Greyscale. Codfish. Fish.  
Fish, fish, fish, fish fish....

SOUND: Wave

VOICES: Capelin. Codfish. Flounder. Fish....

SOUND: Wave

VOICE WAVE: Caplin. Codfish. Flounder. Fish....

JACK WELLS: We were at the crab and scallop, and...

VOICE WAVE: Fish. Fish Fish. Fish Fish. fish, fish. fish...

JACK WELLS: We were at the turbot. We done it all.

VOICE WAVE: Fish. Fish Fish. Fish Fish. fish, fish. fish...

JACK WELLS: We were at the crab and scallop and...

VOICE WAVE: Fish. Fish Fish. Fish Fish. fish, fish. fish...

JACK WELLS: We were at the turbot. We done it all.

VOICE WAVE: Fish. Fish Fish. Fish Fish. fish, fish. fish...

JACK WELLS: We were at the crab and scallop.

VOICE WAVE: Fish. Fish Fish. Fish Fish. fish, fish. fish...

JACK WELLS: We were at the turbot. We done it all.

VOICE WAVE: Fish. Fish Fish. Fish Fish. fish, fish. fish...

JACK: The best of the fishing I used to like was the trawling.

JACK WELLS: We were at the crab and scallop, and...

VOICE WAVE: Fish. Fish Fish. Fish Fish. fish, fish. fish...

JACK WELLS: We done it all.

JACK: Coming up on the hooks, you know. One after the other and you'd look down  
and see it. Coming up white. Yeah, that was great! (chuckles)

JACK WELLS: We were at the crab and scallop.

VOICE WAVE: Fish. Fish Fish. Fish Fish. fish, fish. fish...

JACK WELLS: We done it all.

JACK: To me, there was nothing like it. There was no life like it for me. I don't care what anybody says. But you had to have a mind for it.

JACK WELLS: We were at the turbot.

VOICE WAVE: Fish. Fish Fish. Fish Fish. fish, fish. fish...

JACK WELLS: We done it all.

JACK: You know, it was no good you being out there and thinking you want to be somewhere else. Your mind had to be there.

JACK WELLS: We were at the crab and scallop.

VOICE WAVE: Fish. Fish Fish. Fish Fish. fish, fish. fish...

JACK WELLS: We done it all.

JACK: If you had twelve lines of gear, if you had a thousand hooks a night to bait...

JACK WELLS: We were at the turbot. We done it all.

VOICE WAVE: Fish. Fish Fish. Fish Fish. fish, fish. fish...

JACK: And you come in and you had two lines of that -- 100 fathom of that -- snarled up, you had to get the hooks off of that, put them back on, and bait that up and be ready for the morning.

JACK WELLS: We were at the crab and scallop and...We done it all.

JACK: We've often, we used to get up at three. And we often been there until one in the morning. Go home and gone again at three. It all depends on the hickles and snarls, and what time you gets in in the evening and everything, you know.

JACK WELLS: We were at the turbot. We done it all.

JACK: That didn't bother us. That was life.

JACK WELLS: We were at the crab and scallop. We done it all.

JACK: Couldn't be no better life. I don't care what anybody says.

JACK WELLS: We were at the turbot. We done it all.

JACK: To me, it was the only life I loved, anyway.

JACK WELLS: We were at the crab and scallop and turbot. We done it all.

*(Beat)*

JACK: I put me heart and soul into it, right?:

SOUND: *Waves.*

**Part Three: Gone.**

SOUND: *(Fisherman singing under his breath. Boat noises.)*

FISHERMAN 1: There seemed to be a lot of fish then. There was, I mean, compared to now.

SOUND: *(Old make-and-break boat engine starts up. Voices.)*

FISHERMAN 2: That wharf down there, and that building, that was the... the very small little community it is, but that was the centre of it, right?

FISHERMAN 1: There was, I mean, compared to now.

WIFE 1: Just the same as, you know, a painting or the night sky or something would be beautiful to a visual artist, these fish lying in the boat were beautiful to him.

SOUND: *(Boat engine distant, chord)*

FISHERMAN 1: There seemed to be a lot of fish then.

FISHERMAN 2: All that's just gone. I mean, its a big change. Big change.

WIFE 2: His father was a fisherman and his father before him.

FISHERMAN 1: You know, you'd get fish three or four feet long sometimes in your trap, right?

WIFE: Beautiful to him.

FISHERMAN 1: Compared to now.

FISHERMAN 2: Big change.

SOUND: *(old boat engine fades)*

WIFE 2: Fishing's not... a job -- I know lots of people have said that but -- it's not a job. It's a style of life.

SOUND: *Waves.*

FISHERMAN 1: But for me to go anywhere else and get a job? No. Oh god, soon as the sun's shining you'd want to be out and you'd be, your mind would be on the water, and you know, on what you would be doing. Not what you're doing, but what you would be doing. Right?

SOUND: *Chords*

FISHERMAN 1: CHORUS: But for me to go anywhere else...  
But for me to go anywhere else...  
But for me to go anywhere else...

FISHERMAN 1: Your mind would be on the water.

WIFE 1: Just the same as, you know, a painting.

FISHERMAN 1: Soon as the sun'd be shining, you'd want to be out.

WIFE 1: He loved catching the fish. They were beautiful to him.

FISHERMAN 1: All you wants is a couple of hours for that fog to life, right? And you're gone.

FISHERMAN 1 CHORUS: You're gone.

FISHERMAN 1: Everything is blowing in your face and, you know, the sprays are coming back at you.

WIFE 1: Just the same as, you know, a painting.

FISHERMAN 1: But for me to go anywhere else and get a job?

FISHERMAN 2: I mean its a big change.

FISHERMAN 1: No. Oh god.

FISHERMAN 2: Big change.

SOUND: *(old make-and-break engine slows into percussive beats)*

DRUM: (Ah well) (Ah well)

TRUMPET ECHO: ( I've decided that effective at midnight tonight)

DRUM: (Ah well)

TRUMPET ECHO: (Inshore in 1994)

DRUM: (Ah well)

TRUMPET ECHO: ( I've decided that effective at midnight tonight)

DRUM: (Ah well)

TRUMPET ECHO: (Inshore in 1994)

FORMER FISHERIES MINISTER and TRUMPET: Inshore in 1994.

DRUM: (Ah well)

TRUMPET ECHO: (Inshore in 1994)

FORMER FISHERIES MINISTER and TRUMPET: Especially the traditional inshore fishery.

DRUM: Ah!  
Ah!  
Ah!  
Ah!

FORMER FISHERIES MINISTER and TRUMPET: That rebuilding is critical for the future of the fishing industry that relies on Northern Cod.

DRUM: Ah!



Ah!  
Ah!  
Ah!

BERT and WHISTLE: Even if I'm in a funeral home. TRUMPET: (For all of those reasons)

FORMER FISHERIES MINISTER: For all of those reasons

WHISTLE: (Even if I'm in a funeral home)

TRUMPET: (For all of those reasons)

TRUMPET: (And to safeguard the Northern Cod as a species)

DRUM: Ah!  
Ah!  
Ah!  
Ah!

BERT: Just talk around with the bereaved, and what have you.

FORMER FISHERIES MINISTER and TRUMPET: And to safeguard the Northern Cod as a species.

DRUM: Ah!  
Ah!  
Ah!  
Ah!

FORMER FISHERIES MINISTER and TRUMPET: I've decided that effective at midnight tonight.

TRUMPET ECHO: Inshore in 1994.

FORMER FISHERIES MINISTER and TRUMPET: There will be a moratorium on harvesting of Northern Cod.

BERT: Just throw in a few jokes, you know, there.

SOUND: *(Old boat engine stops, fisherman mutters "she's in a mess... that's the mud off of the bottom...")*

FORMER FISHERIES MINISTER: Until the Spring of 1994.

TRUMPET ECHO: (the Spring of 1994.)

BERT: Jokes. You know.

WHISTLE: (Even if I'm in a funeral home, I can lighten it up by telling jokes. Just talk along with the bereaved, and what have you...)

SOUND: *(Fisherman singing softly, sounds of closing up boat)*