

9/6/16

Herb Pollard  
Chair  
Pacific Fishery Management Council  
7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 101  
Portland, Oregon 97220-1384

Dear Chair Pollard,

On behalf of the Oregon Trawl Commission (OTC) and the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) we are writing to let the Council know about a trawl gear modification workshop that was held in Newport from July 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>. The workshop was sponsored by EDF and OTC with primary funding from the NOAA Saltonstall-Kennedy Program.

As you know, fishermen, researchers, and gear designers are continually improving the efficiency and selectivity of trawl gear as well as finding new ways to reduce bottom impacts. However, the results of that work aren't always shared widely enough. This workshop sought to bring together members of the fishing industry with gear mod experts and researchers to discuss modifications from the West Coast, Alaska and beyond. The hope was to provide a forum where fishermen could ask technical questions, share their experiences, and learn from each other about what's worked and what hasn't. The goal was to help fishermen learn about modification work and decide if modifications that reduce fuel costs, bycatch, and impacts might work for their businesses.

We were fortunate enough to have an exceptional steering committee made up of Sara Skamser from Foulweather Trawl, John Gauvin from the Alaska Seafood Cooperative, Dr. Craig Rose from Fishnext Research, Carwyn Hammond from the NOAA Northwest Science Center, Mark Lomeli from Pacific States, Huff McGonigal from Fathom Consulting, Council Member David Crabbe, as well as ourselves.

Over the two and a half days, approximately 80 participants shared their experiences and perspectives through 28 formal panel presentations as well as countless side conversations over meals and a gear viewing and reception at Foulweather Trawl. Attendees included fishermen from the West Coast and Alaska, researchers from around the country, Council staff and

members, GMT members, Northwest and Alaska regional and Science Center staff, state agency representatives, as well as NGOs.

As the attached program describes, panels and discussions were broken into the following topics:

- *Minimizing groundfish bycatch*

Panelists discussed the use of excluders, the tradeoffs of varying mesh sizes and escape panels, and considerations when using them.

- *Minimizing halibut and salmon bycatch*

Panelists discussed the efficacy of varying halibut excluder designs in Alaska and on the West Coast as well as design strategies for avoiding salmon bycatch in Alaska.

- *Understanding and minimizing habitat impacts*

The speakers on this two-part panel first presented an overview of the rationale for the current trawl gear regulations, the significance of those to the MSC certification, and the habitat impacts of trawl gear generally. The second half of the panel was focused on understanding the varying impacts across gear configurations such as elevated sweeps and lighter gear.

- *Innovative net and door designs*

Panelists discussed the evolution of efficient trawl door designs and future directions as well as new strategies for reducing net drag which is the biggest source of fuel consumption. There was also a presentation on the mechanics, gear, and markets associated with Scottish seining.

- *Cameras and electronics*

Discussion was framed around four levels of camera systems, ranging from homemade GoPro systems for \$1,000, to commercially available, real-time systems for over \$150,000. The discussion made it clear that at all levels, cameras have been invaluable in allowing fishermen to understand how their gear is operating and the adjustments that may be needed to save fuel, reduce bycatch, and increase quality.

- *Encouraging adoption*

Drawing on lessons from the West Coast and Alaska, this panel was focused on how to encourage the adoption of various gear modification strategies and how to overcome the financial and regulatory barriers.

The workshop was primarily intended to provide a forum where fishermen and researchers could ask technical questions and “get into the weeds” on various designs and strategies. However, there were a few specific policy considerations that were identified that we wanted to pass on to the Council. First, there was wide recognition that the Council’s decision to remove the selective flatfish trawl and small mesh requirements post-rationalization, given the incentives to avoid overfished species, will facilitate development and adoption of more efficient, effective excluders and nets, as well as foster greater catch of target species. It is critical that those regulations be implemented in a timely way so that fishermen can begin to experiment with improved gear. Second, there was a discussion of the two-sided nature of the incentives

created by restrictive quota levels. On the one hand they create the incentives that drive many of the innovations in terms of excluders and net design. On the other hand, when the quota limitations for some species (such as yelloweye) become extreme, they work to dissuade any experimentation with modifications to target co-existing species such as lingcod because the consequences are so severe. Finally, it was also voiced that while excluders and other gear modifications are the future, defining them and mandating their use can actually serve to stifle innovation.

We are generating a summary report from the workshop and will make that available when it's complete. In addition, the presentations as well as video of the complete proceedings can be found on the West Coast Trawlers Network website at [www.westcoasttrawlers.net](http://www.westcoasttrawlers.net).

There was significant interest in holding another gear modification workshop and we look forward to playing a role in that when the time comes. And it's possible that a workshop like this may also be beneficial for other fisheries under council management.

We would like to again thank the sponsors, the steering committee, the panelists, the state and federal staff, and mostly the fishermen who took time off the water to participate and lend their expertise.

Sincerely,

Shems Jud  
Pacific Regional Director, Oceans Program  
Environmental Defense Fund

Brad Pettinger  
Executive Director  
Oregon Trawl Commission