

Bycatch Workshops – General Summary

While acknowledging that progress has been made to reduce bycatch through the implementation of gear technology and management measures, participants in the bycatch workshop discussions generally concluded that significant work remains to be done to address the problem. Fishermen expressed concerns about the waste associated with throwing fish back overboard, gear technologists pointed to the promise of innovative fishing techniques but voiced frustration at the disconnect between research results and the implementation of management measures, managers pointed to the need to more accurately quantify discards to improve stock assessments, and environmentalists called for a more extensive observer program to monitor the situation.

In addressing the question of how to continue to make progress in reducing bycatch or discards, participants' suggestions fell into one of the following major categories: data collection, research needs, management practices, educational needs, and the communication process.

Data Collection:

Throughout the discussions, there was a general recognition that more accurate and detailed information on discards is needed. Some suggested that the most efficient way to accomplish this would be through the development of a Study Fleet [a subset of the entire fishing fleet] that would be compensated for taking the time to collect detailed information on discards using state of the art recording and communication technology. Proponents of this approach stated that this would be more efficient and provide more accurate information than logbook reporting by all fishermen.

Increased observer coverage would also ensure more accurate reporting of discards, and all interested parties [fishermen, environmental groups, managers, and scientists] need timely access to the data.

More accurate reporting of discard information was part of a need to develop a more extensive database capable of supporting an ecosystem approach to management. This would include developing a more detailed understanding of the life history of various species and interactions among species, as well as continued monitoring of environmental parameters. This type of information appears to be crucial to making the best decisions possible about where and when fishermen should be fishing in order to minimize discarding. A collaborative research approach that ties standard scientific methods with field observations from fishermen is needed.

Research Needs:

Collaborative research aimed at identifying effective gear modifications to reduce bycatch needs to be continued and expanded. Participants pointed to the need to take these research results to the next level where more extensive fleet trials can be conducted.

Without this step, it is difficult to generate the type of data needed to make gear modifications a viable management option.

Work needs to be done to determine the survival rates of discards in order to more accurately assess which species are most impacted. Coupled with this is the need to study fish behavior patterns to more accurately determine the best means of avoiding capture of or impact to untargeted species or undersized fish.

Input is needed from all stakeholders groups to prioritize research needs and identify critical research questions, and this would best be accomplished through the development of a collaborative research planning process.

Management Practices:

In all of the workshop discussions participants pointed to the need to streamline the permitting process for collaborative, experimental fishing research. Fishermen and scientists called attention to the long delays in trying to obtain a permit to simply begin this type of work. Coupled with this is the need to develop a more effective means of integrating research results on gear technology into the management system.

Fishermen called for management measures that provide incentives to fish efficiently such as more days at sea for those demonstrating bycatch reductions. In turn, managers called for more guidance in determining how much bycatch is acceptable and more clearly defining what is “practicable” under the law.

Underlying the discussions on management measures and bycatch was the general desire to move towards a more adaptive management approach that is responsive to changing stock conditions. All agreed that this will depend on the development of a timely, extensive, and accurate fisheries database that all stakeholders have access to and trust in.

Educational Needs:

Commercial and recreational fishermen need to be made more aware of the need for accurate discard and landings data, and the role this data plays in stock assessments and subsequent quota determinations. A continued educational outreach program is needed to dispel the fears associated with reporting too much information to the managers and environmentalists, and for fishermen to recognize that accurate reporting is in their best interests.

Observers need to be well trained and this will ease their acceptance by fishermen. Enforcement officers also need to be made aware of the importance of enforcing observer regulations to prevent bias in the data collection process.

All research results need to be disseminated.

Communication Process:

A common theme echoed throughout the workshops was that there needs to be continued communication among stakeholders groups, managers, and scientists to address the problem of bycatch. Continued communication will go a long way towards moving past a contentious situation, and developing a sense of trust that will enable interested parties to work together in achieving common goals.