

THE NATION'S FISHERIES

IMPROVING COMMUNICATIONS WITH FISHING CONSTITUENCIES BY ENHANCING SEA GRANT'S FISHERIES EXTENSION PROGRAM

For the past 33 years the National Sea Grant College Program has operated a highly regarded extension system in each of the 30 university-based Sea Grant Programs located in each coastal and Great Lakes state. The Sea Grant Extension Program is a clientele-driven, educational program comprised of skilled specialists who disseminate research-based scientific information in an objective and non-advocative manner.

Budget restrictions over the last two decades have stressed the extension program, resulting in a reduction in staff of almost 30 percent over 1980 levels. At the same time, the issues and problems facing the nation in its coastal zones have grown in number and complexity, requiring Sea Grant extension to broaden its programmatic scope. The combination of reduced budgets and increased programmatic diversity has resulted in significant reductions in Sea Grant's fisheries extension program.

Similarly, federal, interstate, state and local fishery management agencies have received greatly expanded responsibilities in the last two decades. More than ever, these agencies need to foster understanding and partnerships between fishers and scientists by providing clear, understandable information in advance of actions and regulations. This is what Sea Grant does best.

For the first time, the FY02 budget for the National Sea Grant College Program included language requiring the enhancement of the fisheries portion of Sea Grant's extension program by \$3,000,000. However, no new funds were made available to fund the program. Congressional interest in an enhanced fisheries extension program was further underscored by the National Sea Grant College Program Act Amendments of 2002, which specified an annual authorization for each of the fiscal years 2003 through 2008 of "\$3,000,000 for competitive grants for fishery extension activities conducted by Sea Grant..." With additional funding, Sea Grant is ready to implement a sustained program that enhances fisheries extension services to constituents, promotes sustainable U.S. fisheries resources, and



fully engages appropriate local, state, regional and federal fisheries management agencies.

Why Sea Grant?

Sea Grant operates on a model of local, university-based programs. This paradigm has proven effective in engaging the academic enterprise in practical, critical research and outreach activities important to societal needs.

Local management enables Sea Grant to effectively and economically direct resources to priority local and regional problems through integrated long-term programs of research, outreach and local capacity building. By building long-term relationships with numerous stakeholders, Sea Grant's university network is able to transfer objective science-based information to fisheries constituencies at all levels quickly and effectively. Because Sea Grant is non regulatory, stakeholders can continue to expect research and outreach objectivity and credibility. Today, Sea Grant has more than 30 years of demonstrable accomplishments and represents a unique asset in the country's capability to address coastal fisheries and environmental issues.

Impacts of Recent Sea Grant Efforts

- Sea Grant delivered training courses enabling more than 15,000 individuals in industry to comply with the nation's first mandatory food safety regulations based on an innovative training program called Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP). Eighty-three percent of American seafood businesses reported that they could not have met federal regulations without these courses. The Department of Health and Human Services reported that food-borne illnesses in the U.S. have been reduced by 23 percent since 1996 through HACCP training courses, thereby saving as much as \$115 million annually in economic losses.
- Very little biological information has been collected on Atlantic halibut stocks (one of the region's most prized seafood items) in the Gulf of Maine. This information is needed for future fisheries management decisions. Sea Grant staff helped to develop data collection tools and methods, and trained 100 participating fishermen to participate in halibut studies. This effort has led to the formulation of state rules for the fishery.



- Sea Grant extension developed a method to count spawning horseshoe crabs along the shoreline in Delaware Bay. Since 1990, more than 150 people annually have volunteered their time to assist with this shoreline census, which has recorded a noticeable decline in the number of spawning crabs. The data have helped the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) to impose commercial harvest limits (commercial fishermen use the crabs as bait in the conch and eel fisheries) to conserve these ecologically important animals.
- Sea Grant conducted an economic analysis of proposed blue crab harvest regulations that were to go into effect in Maryland in 2002. The analysis found that the proposed increase in the size limit from 5 inches to 5-1/4 inches would cost the processing industry \$9.8 million annually in revenues, but that \$4.5 million of that could be saved if the regulations were changed to allow 5-inch crabs to be imported from states where they were caught legally. Because of the Sea Grant Extension study, the regulations were changed to allow the imports.
- Sea Grant facilitated stakeholder meetings in Minnesota, thus reducing conflict and ensuring the development of a



Future Plans for an Enhanced Fisheries Extension Program (2004-2008)

The organizing framework for future fisheries extension activities is provided by the Sea Grant plans for fisheries and seafood science and safety. Through participation by Sea Grant's many partners, two documents have been produced, *Our Nation's Fisheries: A Proud and Troubled Heritage* and *Ensuring Global Competitiveness of the U.S. Seafood Industry*, which provide guidance for developing future fisheries extension programs.

In general, an enhanced fisheries extension program will:

- Respond to the needs of fishery constituencies as identified by Congress and the Administration.
 - Provide enhanced extension programming over an extended period of time to fishery constituencies that makes a demonstrable difference in understanding and/or actions to promote sustainable U.S. fisheries resources.
 - Expand collaborations with Federal, state and tribal fisheries agencies, regional fishery management councils, interstate fisheries commissions, and local and community management organizations to improve overall fisheries outreach; in particular, enhance the information flow among fishery constituencies.
 - Enhance regional and national integration of Sea Grant fisheries extension programming by expanding the fisheries extension infrastructure and increasing information exchange at the national, regional and local levels.
- consensus-based 10-year Rainbow Trout Management Plan (2002-2012) in the Lake Superior basin.
 - Sea Grant conducted extensive tests using nets made of Spectra® superfiber, a net material as strong as conventional nets but much thinner, creating less drag in the water and improving fuel economy. More than 500 boats now use nets made of superfiber, saving considerable fuel costs.
 - Based on an applied research project by Sea Grant, the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council adopted regulations requiring larger longline vessels to deploy seabird bycatch mitigation measures, thus saving the lives of seabirds and preventing a potential closure of the valuable longline fishery.
 - Sea Grant was successful in working with the city of Cleveland, OH to construct artificial reefs from the rubble of the old Cleveland Municipal Stadium in the nearshore zone of Lake Erie. It is estimated that these reefs attract 12 to 66 times as many fish as the surrounding non-reef areas and produce approximately \$1 million of economic benefit annually.



For more information:

Ralph Rayburn, Co-chair
Fisheries Theme Team
Texas Sea Grant College Program
(979) 845-7526
ralph-rayburn@tamu.edu

Terry Smith
NOAA Sea Grant Office
(301) 713-2435 x144
terry.smith@noaa.gov

<http://www.SGA.seagrant.org/>
Theme Teams