



## Cleaner Catch, Less Fuel

Partnership Between Scientists and Midcoast Fishermen's Association to Refine Trawl Nets



**Gulf of Maine  
Research Institute**

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Fishermen in Maine face a number of challenges—declines in fish stocks, new regulations, lower market prices, and ever-increasing fuel costs. To survive during this difficult time, they must make changes to their fishing gear and methods. Steve Eayrs, a scientist with the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, has partnered with the Midcoast Fishermen's Association (MFA) in Port Clyde, Maine, to develop solutions that will help fishermen survive and thrive in this new environment.



The Nature Conservancy and the Island Institute also provided vital support by supplying the fishing permit, as well as financial assistance and data collection.

Steve and the MFA worked together on an Environmental Management

System (EMS) that helps fishermen minimize risk and maximize benefits throughout their operations. The EMS is a systematic process by which an industry can identify areas needing improvement and then take action. New fishing regulations have made it all the more important that fishermen catch only their targeted species and do so efficiently. The EMS provides a framework under which Port Clyde fishermen can use fishing gear to improve catch selectivity, improve the quality of their catch, and use less fuel while doing it. Steve then worked with the fishermen to design new nets and created a plan for testing them.

The fishermen and Steve have discovered that changing the size and shape of the mesh opening in trawl nets allows small fish and non-targeted species to escape. Catching only larger, higher quality fish has resulted in extra



earnings for the fishermen. They also used nets made with stronger, thinner twine throughout the net to decrease fuel consumption. Fishermen using the new nets have been using around 25% less fuel and early reports indicate that catch levels are equivalent to the older nets. The fishermen may continue to benefit in the future by using the EMS to help market their products as more environmentally responsible and demonstrate the validity of this claim.

This project received funding from The Nature Conservancy, the Island Institute, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the Alex C. Walker Foundation.

*Written by Kelly Towle*