

Introduction

In 2008, the Fisheries Technology and New Opportunities Program (FTNOP) provided assistance to the Fur Institute of Canada (FIC) to develop and deliver sealing information workshops.

Background

The FIC, a non-profit organization, was established in 1983. In 2005, the FIC, along with representatives from provincial and territorial governments as well as Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec sealers, formed a multi-stakeholder, Government of Canada Seals Committee, chaired by the federal Fisheries Conservation Ambassador. Seals Committee meetings held in St. John's in December 2007 and January 2008 resulted in four key outcomes:



- 1) Processors agreed to purchase seal pelts based on a grading system, with enforcement provided by independent inspectors.
- 2) Committee agreed to endorse a three-step killing process derived from 2005 recommendations by the International Veterinarian Working Group.
- 3) Committee agreed to develop and promote sealing Codes of Practice.
- 4) Committee expressed an interest in developing sealing information workshops.

The need for sealing information workshops became apparent in light of communications and consultation challenges facing the sealing industry. Public criticism deterred discussions regarding issues relating to improved process, regulation and safety. It was determined that sealing information workshops would be an effective means to improve communications between government and sealing stakeholders.

Methodology

In a joint effort, the FIC and the Fisheries and Marine Institute (MI) organized and facilitated sealing workshops across Newfoundland. The purpose of these workshops was to provide sealers the opportunity to consult with government authorities (regulators, the Canadian Coast Guard), and industry experts (veterinarians and training developers) on specific aspects of professional practice and conduct. The workshops were also intended to generate discussion among sealers on current practices and how they may be improved or reinforced, including the three-step killing process recently written in license conditions.

During February and March 2009, the FIC and the Sealing Network hosted sealing information workshops in St. Anthony, Plum Point, Port au Choix, Baie Verte, Virgin Arm, Fogo, and New Harbour. These sealing information workshops took an independent, professional approach to discussing some of the major challenges facing sealers and other industry personnel. Issues identified included: a) the political, anti-sealing lobbies in the European Union and elsewhere; b) improving animal-welfare practices during the hunt; and c) the adoption of consistent incentive-based, seal-handling methods in order to provide the best possible quality material to the market.

The workshops were intended to be informative, but also consultative with respect to gathering sealer feedback on matters of practice and the possible development of a new professional sealer training program.

Results

The sealing information workshops were considered to be a successful communications and consultative initiative. Of the 318 active sealers who attended the workshops, 186 were vessel captains. Since the captains have authority over approximately five crew members per vessel, it was estimated up to 930 active sealers in NL sealers benefited from these sessions.

Workshop participants completed approximately 200 Needs Assessment surveys in five of the seven workshops. Seventeen sealers participated in the three focus groups to assist in identifying issues of importance to sealers.



Sealing workshop display.

Conclusion

The feedback from presenters and attendees following the sealing information sessions was positive. After completing the workshop, the majority of attendees became highly receptive to the work needed to carry the industry forward with a strong and proactive, scientifically-supported position.

The information gathered from the Needs Assessment survey and focus groups suggests future training programs should be practical in nature and consider the experience of the sealers while addressing skills, regulations, quality, and safety.

The Fisheries Technology and New Opportunities Program (created under the Fishing Industry Renewal Strategy) provides support for innovative and competitive harvesting, processing, and marketing initiatives to increase the overall viability of the Newfoundland and Labrador seafood industry to be a major economic contributor to the provincial economy. For more information please contact us.

Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador

P.O. Box 8700, St. John's, NL, A1B 4J6

Call: 709 729-0118 / Fax: 709 729-1884

Web: <http://www.gov.nl.ca/>

(Or a DFA Regional Office near you)