

Solutions to Bycatch Worldwide to be Shared at Symposium

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

Saying it's about time for fisheries experts and scientists to come together and discuss fisheries bycatch and advancements in reduction, the organizer of the Lowell Wakefield Fisheries Symposium will dedicate its next gathering to just that. Low returns of king and chum salmon, and revelations in recent years of exactly how big the bycatch is has increased awareness of the issue across Alaska.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, along with industry, have all been at work trying to reduce bycatch, and those efforts, along with bycatch reduction techniques from around the world will be shared by a field of experts at the state's largest gathering of fisheries scientists. Gordon Kruse, a UAF School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences professor based in Juneau, is the organizer.

"Obviously there are issues with bycatch in Alaska. And this is not unique to us, there's issues with bycatch around the world, and in many different areas folks have found different solutions to it, and so we'd like to learn from their experiences as well as share our experiences as well."

The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization estimates discarded bycatch worldwide averaged 7.3-million metric tons per year during the 1990s. Though it has declined in the past decade, Kruse says an international symposium on bycatch is long overdue, especially when so many positive solutions from around the world can now be shared.

"So some areas they have bycatch issues with porpoises and dolphins, for example. Also other areas, seabird bycatch is an issue, we've made great strides to address seabird bycatch in our longline fisheries. So that's an area probably where we can share some of our experiences with them. There's quite a few different examples from around the world on how different countries are dealing with bycatch. But I think we'll find that we in Alaska are really making particularly excellent progress."

There will be national and international speakers coming from Florida, the Netherlands, Korea and British Columbia, and one Alaskan who Kruse says will detail some of the work he's done here.

"John Gavin, who's with the Alaska Seafood Cooperative. He's been working really very well and very integrated way with various sectors of the commercial fishery in Alaska, finding creative solutions for bycatch of salmon in the pollock fishery, or reducing the impacts of flatfish trawls on the seafloor and other such approaches. We'll probably add to this a couple of other invited speakers as well to highlight some of our other sessions."

A call for submissions went out last week, seeking abstracts for oral or poster presentations.

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“Papers that are contributed to the symposium will be peer-reviewed and we’ll put out a nice peer-reviewed publication on bycatch, so the value of what we find can be distributed more broadly.”

The symposium will be in mid May at the Anchorage Hilton, but the schedule is already online at seagrant.uaf.edu.