

# Connecting the Dots

The largest conference on occupational safety and health in the fishing industry returns after a gap of nine years

In June this year, the city of St. John's in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, played host to the largest gathering of fishing, aquaculture and seafood-processing safety and health professionals: the Fifth International Fishing Industry Safety and Health Conference (IFISH 5), the only conference dedicated to improving safety and health in the fishing industry.

Health (NIOSH), the SafetyNet Centre for Occupational Health and Safety Research, Memorial University, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Other donors included Fishing Partnership Support Services, Ocean Frontier Institute and Workplace NL.

A three-member conference planning committee, consisting of Jennifer Lincoln of NIOSH, Barbara Neis of SafetyNet, Julie Sorensen of the Northeast Center for Occupational Health and Safety, was in charge of planning and curating the conference. The three members were also part of a larger expert scientific committee, which included leading figures in the fields of occupational health and safety, representing a wide range of stakeholder interests, including research, academics, fishers and community organizations, who were responsible, among other things, for approving abstracts from the hundreds of submissions received.

Proceedings began with a pre-conference workshop on Sunday, 10 June, a day before the official start of the conference, which explored recent global initiatives related to fishing vessel design, fishing safety, sustainable fishing practices and fisheries management, and their relationship to safety and working conditions in fisheries from different regions of the world.

## Presentations

Brief presentations were made by Brandt Wagner of the International Labour Organization (ILO), Sandra Allnutt of the International Maritime

**...the Fifth International Fishing Industry Safety and Health Conference (IFISH 5), the only conference dedicated to improving safety and health in the fishing industry.**

Held from 10 to 13 June 2018 in the picturesque campus of St. John's Memorial University, and blessed – contrary to gloomy weather forecasts – by a few days of unexpected sunshine between rainy ones, IFISH 5 explored the latest research on occupational safety and health; discussed current fisheries policy and regulations; and showcased best practices for keeping workers safe and healthy.

Earlier editions of the conference were held in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, United States (US) in 2000; Sitka, Alaska, in 2003; Mahabalipuram, India, in 2006; and Reykjavik, Iceland, in 2009. The present conference was taking place after a long gap of nine years.

The conference was sponsored by the Center for Maritime Safety and Health Studies at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and

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Organization (IMO) and Raymon VanAnrooy and Ari Gudmundsson of FAO. Their presentations covered a wide range of instruments, tools, agreements and guidelines which mark milestones in safety and health in the fisheries sector, such as the ILO Work in Fishing Convention, 2007; the completion of the FAO/ILO/IMO Safety Recommendations for Decked Fishing Vessels of Less than 12 metres in Length and Undecked Fishing Vessels in 2010 and the FAO/ILO/IMO Implementation Guidelines in 2011; and the Cape Town Agreement on the safety of fishing vessels in 2012, amongst others. These were followed by presentations based on field experiences with these instruments and agreements, which highlighted the wide divergence of issues and challenges in their implementation between developed and developing countries.

The afternoon session of the pre-conference workshop began with a presentation by Jennifer Lincoln of NIOSH on the results of an FAO initiative she had worked on. Several interesting points of critique were raised in the sub-group discussions that followed this presentation, highlighting the adverse effects of quota-based management systems on fishers' livelihoods and ecosystems; issues related to vessel stability; the need to include fishers at the very start of fisheries decision-making processes; the need to collect occupational safety and health data in industrial seafood processing where women are widely employed, and so on. This was followed by panel presentations covering various aspects of recent research on fisheries management and fishing safety.

The formal conference was held over the next three days with presentations organized around four themes – developments in fishing, occupational health and safety concerns, seafood processing and aquaculture, and worker safety interventions and training – running concurrently in parallel sessions. The parallel sessions covered 60 hours of presentations and discussions in a packed schedule, which often spilt out

onto lunch and tea breaks. Keynote addresses by distinguished speakers marked the start of all three days and also the closure of the first day of the conference.

These keynote addresses were organized in ways that suggested careful planning, and allowed participants to connect the dots, for example, between the local and the global or an individual story and a universal one. They receive special emphasis in this article because they appeared to lay the tone for the rest of the conference, where presentations ranged from local case studies to global research and policy around occupational safety and health in fisheries.

Day Two started with two keynote addresses that, between them, raised a comprehensive spectrum of issues. Jennifer Lincoln's talk on "What I've learnt about safety from listening to fishermen" focused on trauma and

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injury among US seamen, and Sandra Allnutt's addressed global fisheries regulation, in the light of the Cape Town Agreement of 2012 and its role in improving fishing vessels' safety. That afternoon, the address by the internationally acclaimed occupational medicine specialist, Mohamed Jeebhay, offered a developing-country perspective on occupational health and safety based on South Africa's seafood industry. The next speaker, Ingunn Marie Holmen of SINTEF, a technology and applied research organization, offered a contrasting view from the developed world in her talk on health and safety measures in the Norwegian fishing fleet.

#### **Contrast, continuity**

The keynote addresses on Day Three offered similar pictures of contrast as well as continuity. Regional issues in occupational health in aquaculture were explored by Robert Durborow

of Kentucky State University, who, presenting on behalf of keynote speaker Melvin Myers, a leading public health specialist, covered research on safety and health among seafood harvesters in the Gulf of Mexico. Next, global issues in aquaculture occupational health and safety were addressed by Andrew Watterson of the University of Stirling, who presented key findings from an FAO-funded scoping study on global aquaculture.

The keynote addresses on Day Four, the last day of the conference, were a journey from the personal to the political. Writer Jim Wellman, known for his popular column *Final Voyages*, talked about the devastation that follows when “people go to sea and don’t come home”. Next, Christina Stringer of the University of Auckland, gave a searing report on slavery in New Zealand’s offshore fisheries, which was also an account, albeit under very different circumstances, of people who go to sea and often do not return.

**...participants were taken on a field trip to the Offshore Safety and Survival Centre, Foxtrap, at the Marine Institute, where they were treated to exciting demonstrations of noise and vibration simulation techniques and fire extinguishment drills.**

Presentations under the first of the four overarching themes, “New Horizons in Fishing”, were organized under the following sub-themes: weather and fishing safety; effects of fisheries management measures on risk-taking and safety in commercial fishing; policy and regulation; obstacles to performing occupational safety and health research in commercial fishing; the need for a public-health programme in commercial fishing; latent and active causes of vessel losses; and a session on health and safety, education, and social contract with collective financing in the Danish fishery.

Under the second theme, “Health and Safety – A Changing Landscape”, presentations explored topics such as understanding and tracking injuries in the fishing sector; regional approaches to commercial fishing safety; commercial fishing and processing

health and safety surveillance; risk analysis and tested prevention solutions for crews and their boats; and changing commercial fishing personal flotation use behaviour.

The third sub-theme was “Aquaculture/Seafood processing/Quick Takes”. The presentations under this theme covered the following topics: regional approaches to aquaculture and seafood processing; seafood processing, hazards and interventions; safety and health in aquaculture; exposure assessment and health effects of seafood bioaerosols in the fishing and seafood-processing industries; and safer, healthier work places in aquaculture. The ‘Quick Takes’ under this theme consisted of short talks on a variety of topics.

Presentations under the fourth theme, “Worker safety interventions and training,” covered medicine at sea; fishing safety; utilizing an industry-led integrated approach to advancing safety and reducing injuries, illness and fatalities in commercial fishing; prevention of chronic injury and illness; health and safety interventions; evaluation of fishing-safety interventions; and workplace injuries. There was also a session on safety and survival training in New England.

The conference presentations were complemented with a poster exhibition, imaginatively showcasing research and technology innovations in occupational health and safety in fishing and aquaculture. On Day Three, participants were taken on a field trip to the Offshore Safety and Survival Centre, Foxtrap, at the Marine Institute, where they were treated to exciting demonstrations of noise and vibration simulation techniques and fire extinguishment drills. In addition, a social event was organized that evening, which provided a welcome break from conference proceedings for networking and informal exchange.

### Perspectives

A post-conference workshop on national and international perspectives in global aquaculture occupational health and safety marked the end of the proceedings. The workshop opened with a series of short presentations of



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findings from an FAO-funded scan of the global, regional and national terrain of aquaculture/fish farming occupational health and safety and related social and welfare impacts, and ended with small group discussions on future priorities for research and action in the field of aquaculture occupational health and safety.

The conference was superbly organized. No aspect – whether pre-conference communication and outreach or accommodation for the many participants or attention to administrative detail – was in any way lacking. The scope of the conference was ambitious and extensive, both geographically and in covering various aspects of work in the supply chain. This was made possible by having a large number of sessions running concurrently each day. Perhaps, the long gap of nine years between the last IFISH conference and this one meant that a large number of developments in research, regulation and policy that had accumulated in the interim, needed to be accommodated. However, as a result, one sometimes had the feeling that simply too much was going on and there was not enough time for meaningful discussion.

The large majority of the sessions represented experiences of industrial fishing from developed countries, in particular the US, Canada, Norway and a few other European countries. Further, the role of women in fisheries, and particular issues related to their occupational health, remained, as is often the case, relatively eclipsed. It is hoped that future editions of IFISH will

offer greater space to the small-scale fisheries of the developing world, with necessary attention to gender issues in occupational health and safety. ❦

#### For more



<https://ifishconference.ca/>  
**The Fifth International Fishing Industry Safety & Health Conference (IFISH 5)**

<https://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc96/pdf/rep-iv-2a.pdf>  
**Report IV 2(A) Work in the fishing sector**

<https://www.icsf.net/en/proceedings/article/EN/103-icsf-seminar-workshop-on-the-conditions-of-work-on-distant-water-fishing-vessels>  
**The condition of fishworkers on distant-water fishing vessels: ICSF seminar-workshop on the conditions of work on distant-water fishing vessels**

<https://www.icsf.net/en/proceedings/article/EN/11-848-Preface.html>  
**Proceedings of the Indian Ocean Conference: Forging Unity: Coastal Communities and the Indian Ocean's Future, India, 9 to 13 October 2001**