

## Conference sets new course for fisheries' future

### Monitoring innovations can help sustain oceans

**Judith Lavoie**

Times Colonist

Thursday, May 17, 2007

Information is power. For some marine species, information can make the difference between survival and extinction, which is why fisheries experts from around the world are meeting in Victoria.

The International Fisheries Observer Conference, hosted by Archipelago Marine Research Ltd. of Victoria, has drawn delegates from more than 40 countries. It is jointly sponsored by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, provincial Environment Ministry and the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Against a backdrop of reports about the depletion of the oceans and the imminent extinction of many varieties of large fish, fisheries observers and equipment that will accurately record fishing data are taking on increasing importance, said Howard McElderry, Archipelago director and conference chairman.

"There's really a global trend in trying to improve information around fisheries and get a better understanding of what's going on," said McElderry, whose company has developed an electronic fishery monitoring system with digital cameras, sensors and a global positioning system that can ensure information given about catches and bycatches is accurate, even if a human monitor is not on board.

Monitoring catches is a complicated blend of science and art, and the resulting stock management often has socioeconomic aspects, McElderry said.

"There's a growing awareness that decision-making improves when people get better information."

Bud Graham, Environment Ministry assistant deputy minister for fisheries, said sustainability is becoming increasingly important and, consequently, there is a great need for accurate catch data.

"Addressing sustainability is critical in maintaining the social licence to continue to fish," he said.

Monitoring adds costs. That is a concern, because 80 per cent of fish caught in B.C. are exported, so the province must market the quality of its products, Graham said.

Third-party sustainability certification by groups such as the Marine Stewardship Council is



CREDIT: Darren Stone, Times Colonist  
Shawn Stebbins of Archipelago Marine Research Ltd. checks out state-of-the-art digital monitoring cameras aboard the 20-metre halibut longliner Dovre B.

gaining acceptance worldwide. Eight major B.C. fisheries are working to get MSC certification, Graham said.

For Martin Hall of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, the key to successful monitoring is a carrot, not a stick.

Hall, keynote speaker at the conference, has worked for 23 years on reducing dolphin bycatch in the tuna fishery and now works with Latin American countries to reduce the bycatch of sea turtles. He said he is optimistic about the future of ocean creatures.

"I accept that there are many problems, but I also believe that humans and scientists do evolve and we can do it pretty fast," Hall said.

A success story is reducing dolphin mortality, which dropped to 900 in 2006 from 130,000 in 1986, he said. During that time, the dolphin populations have increased by 20 per cent, which shows the impact the fishery was having.

"We are learning to fish better, based on observer data."

Instead of fighting, environmental groups, fishermen and governments are working hand in hand to try to save species such as the leatherback turtle, which is in dire straits, Hall said.

That means using methods such as offering fishermen alternative hooks that will not reduce fishing capacity but will not do so much harm to turtles, and teaching fishermen to remove hooks from turtles' mouths.

The efforts are based on two premises, Hall said. "Nobody wants to kill sea turtles or drive them to extinction and nobody wants to put fishers out of work."

The conference runs until tomorrow.

jlavoie@tc.canwest.com

© Times Colonist (Victoria) 2007

**CLOSE WINDOW**

---

Copyright © 2007 CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.. All rights reserved.