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Fishermen Teach The Public About Their Trade With Help From NH Sea Grant

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Dressed in orange rubber pants and a late-summer tan, Joe Jurek hauled up his net and dumped a pile of shimmering silver herring onto the deck of his boat, *Mystique Lady*. "Look, we got some dogs!" he said and grinned as he pulled one of the foot-long sharks from among the mass of herring.

Jurek was demonstrating his profession as part of a workshop organized by NH Sea Grant Extension specialists Pingguo He and Ken LaValley and Hampton fisherman David Goethel. He and LaValley work to generate cooperation among commercial fishermen, fisheries scientists and fisheries managers. They spend much of their time working with fishermen to improve gear and promote smart, safe fishing practices. On the flip side, they also aim to inform the public about commercial fisheries. To that end, they devised a fishing gear workshop that was held in late August. They plan to make it an annual event.

Fishing regulation is a complicated subject that today's commercial fishermen must understand inside and out. But regulators and conservationists don't always have an equivalent understanding of the challenges that fishermen face on the water. How does a gillnet differ from a trawl net? What effects do the different gear types have on the underwater environment? How do fishermen maintain their equipment to comply with regulations?

To help answer such questions, He and Goethel recruited three other local fishermen to explain the ins and outs of their profession. The workshop drew a wide audience that included congressional staffers, members of conservation organizations and volunteer groups, and employees of the Coast Guard, NH Fish and Game, and NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service.

The three-day event began on dry land, with a day-long introduction that touched on fish behavior, fishing gear and gear improvements that aid conservation efforts. "This gave me a better understanding of the New Hampshire fishery," Clare McBane, a marine biologist for NH Fish and Game, said after the first day. "Having actual fishermen as the instructors was a great idea."

During the next two days, the participants headed out to sea to witness the gear in action. Half of the students took off on gillnetters, while the other half boarded trawlers, including Jurek's *Mystique Lady*. He enthusiastically demonstrated his gear, showing how he calibrates his net to

sweep through the water at just the right depth to target herring. If he aimed too high he might miss valuable herring, he explained; if he hit too low, he could scoop up lots of accidental catch, known as by-catch. Jurek showed how a seemingly small adjustment to his gear dramatically reduced the dogfish, flounder and other by-catch in the net.

Workshop participants were excited to get a firsthand look at the often-complex fishing process. “The fishing industry plays a huge role in New Hampshire’s economic health and is also a key part of the heritage and culture of our state,” said Matt Leahy, a workshop participant and project director for U.S. Senator Judd Gregg. “In addition to learning about the technical aspects of the industry, such as fishing gear, Senator Gregg also wanted me to meet directly with members of the fishing community to better understand their concerns and issues. The workshop was a great way to accomplish these goals.”