



Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation, Inc.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 14, 1992
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**AFDF TO TEST NEW TRAWL DESIGN
THAT MAY DECREASE HALIBUT BYCATCH**

The Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation (AFDF) today launched an experiment to test a new trawl designed to increase cod catches but let incidentally caught halibut escape the net. AFDF awarded a contract to Gourock Trawls of Seattle, Wash. to modify a standard, commercially used cod trawl to give halibut the opportunity to escape before they are hauled on board and then discarded over the side.

Gourock will test the modified trawl this fall, and AFDF will deploy it in the 1993 commercial Pacific cod fishery. It will be the first commercial application of a modified trawl to be tested through a whole season.

"Bycatch rates vary considerably according to bottom geography, time of year, time of day and trawling methods," said Paula Cullenberg, AFDF project manager. "Lots of companies have looked to trawl modifications to decrease bycatch, but no one has committed the resources to test one through the whole season. This way we'll gather enough information to judge just how big a difference gear modifications can make."

AFDF will charter a trawler during next year's cod season to test the new net and compare any differences in halibut bycatch.

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The vessel, which will be chosen through a proposal process, will be subsidized for lost time spent in switching cod ends, but can otherwise catch and deliver product as it normally would. Requests for bids from vessel owners interested in participating in this study will go out in late August.

Bycatch of halibut, crab, salmon and other valuable species by fishermen targeting on cod and pollock has stymied the commercial trawl fisheries in the past few years. Since 1989, thousands of available cod and pollock in the North Pacific have gone unharvested because fishermen exceeded the halibut bycatch limit.

"The entire fishing community recognizes unnecessary bycatch as wasteful," Cullenberg said. "Reducing bycatch has the potential for tremendous payoffs - by keeping the targeted fisheries open longer, and conserving the prohibited species like halibut for their directed harvests."

AFDF executive director Mel Monsen said that bycatch reduction is a top priority to the Foundation's board of directors and members.

"We spearheaded a project looking at crab pot modifications to increase cod catches while decreasing halibut bycatch, and are currently funded by the Alaska Science and Technology Foundation to examine alternative crab pot escape panels. We also recently submitted a proposal to the Saltonstall-Kennedy Program to test mesh size and shape in pollock trawls to reduce the catch of undersized fish."

Impetus for the projects definitely comes from the industry,

he said.

"No one in the fishing industry wants to continue the economic and conservation losses that result from catching non-targeted or undersized fish," he said. "While some bycatch will always be inevitable in an ocean full of different species of fish, minimizing it is a national priority."

AFDF will also tap the University of Alaska's Fishery Industry Technology Center for technical support during the project, which was funded by a grant from the National Marine Fisheries Service.

The Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation, based in Anchorage, is a non-profit corporation guided by fishermen, processors and seafood users to develop new fisheries opportunities.