



## Economic Leadership

# Sea Grant outreach examines and advocates for fishing communities

**I**T ALL BEGAN WITH THE IDEA OF change—how change affects families who work in resource-dependent industries and how they and their communities adapt to the changes brought by nature, government, and the economy.

Where better to examine that idea than in Oregon's fishing industry, which in the mid-1990s was buffeted by unprecedented change resulting from dramatic harvest reductions and the efforts of federal and state regulators to protect the fisheries so important to the Northwest's economic health?

Now, half a decade later, Sea Grant research has brought new understanding of the mechanisms of change—and Sea Grant outreach has given those most affected by change new tools for taking control of their own destinies, from a library of self-help publications to the growth of organizations and structures that promise benefits for the entire fishing community.

And the effort is drawing attention—and praise—from other fishing-dependent regions.

“The bottom line is that fishermen in many fisheries will be in for some tough times in the next few years,” said James Kirkley, a marine scientist and specialist on changing fisheries at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science. “Right now I know of only one academic institution providing the type of help to industry that is necessary to deal



The Adapting to Change program addressed how fishing families cope with the daily stresses of rapidly changing resources and regulations.

with change: Oregon State and the Oregon Sea Grant Program.”

Kirkley was talking about Adapting to Change: Fishing Families, Businesses, Communities, and Regions, an unprecedented effort to combine research and outreach to examine fisheries change and to deliver the results of that research to the people who could put it to work. The effort attempted to address two key questions: How do fishing families, businesses, communities, and entire regions cope with change? What lessons might they cull for each other, for resource managers,

and for other resource-dependant industries and communities?

The ambitious project grew out of a 1994 Extension Sea Grant (ESG) effort, the Fishing Dependent Families Project, which was an attempt to better understand and serve Oregon's fishing communities. ESG's Flaxen Conway and Ginny Goblirsch, who led that project, quickly found that little was known about how change was actually affecting the fisheries and those who depend on them. Their questions led Sea Grant to solicit the competitive research proposals that would become known as ATC.

But outreach remained a key component of the new effort and eventually involved almost the entire Extension Sea Grant team. ESG agents stationed in coastal communities became the researchers' doorways into the communities; they helped organize meetings, interviews, and surveys and introduced researchers to people who might otherwise have been leery of talking to "academics" about the most intimate aspects of their family and business lives. And then the agents delivered the products of that research back into the hands of the community.

Early meetings and workshops made it clear that many fishing families shared common experiences and concerns—among them a lack of information about resources that might help them cope with family issues, business problems, and wider regulatory change. That knowledge led the outreach team to work with Sea Grant communicators to produce and distribute more than a dozen short, free publications, many of them drafted by ATC researchers, addressing practical aspects of fishing family life, from helping children cope with a parent's frequent, long absences to keeping business, tax, and emergency records. Together, these publications are among the most popular in the Sea Grant Communications

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— James Kirkley

catalog, with more than 1,200 copies in distribution.

ATC has also been instrumental in supporting the organization and growth of the Women's Coalition for Pacific Fisheries (WCPF), a group made up primarily of fishing wives which works to promote and support a strong local, regional, national, and global fishing industry and to connect fishing families and communities.

Among WCPF's most significant efforts to date has been a survey—designed and conducted in collaboration with Extension Sea Grant—which determined that many fishing families lacked even the most basic health insurance. The WCPF has been working with the insurance industry to fill that need and, as of mid-June, 2000, was negotiating with a major insurer to create an unprecedented "association group plan," which

would provide health coverage to fishing families across the region.

The Sea Grant-WCPF collaboration also led to the creation of Heads Up! <[www.heads-up.net](http://www.heads-up.net)>, an interactive Web site where agencies, educational institutions, and others can post news briefs of interest to the fishing industry and its people on issues ranging from regulatory change to seafood marketing and family concerns. The site is averaging about 400 visitor "hits" a week, with regular contributions from the Sea Grant and other OSU programs, the Pacific Fisheries Management Council, the International Pacific Halibut Commission, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the West Coast Seafood Processors Association, the U.S. Coast Guard, the Alaska Marine Safety Education Association, and other agencies and trade groups.