

IN BRIEF

URI fish-saving device pulls in \$30,000 prize for American winner of International Smart Gear Competition

New invention—“The Eliminator”—exploits fish behavior to haul in haddock, while keeping other fish out of trawls

A team of Rhode Island inventors were awarded the grand prize in the International Smart Gear Competition for a fishing gear innovation that could save thousands of fish and other sea creatures from dying accidentally in fishing nets each year. World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and its partners announced.

The grand prize-winning team consists of URI Fisheries Center researchers and Rhode Island Sea Grant Sustainable Fisheries Extension staff Laura Skrobe and David Beutel and fishermen Jon Knight, Phil Ruhle Sr., Phil Ruhle Jr., and Jim O’Grady. Their invention—aptly named “The Eliminator”—captures haddock while reducing the accidental netting of other marine species. The device works by taking advantage of the haddock’s tendency to swim upward but not over the headrope when encountering the large mesh net invention, instead of swimming downward where they can escape the net, which is the tendency of other fish. The Grand Prize winners beat out more than 70 other contenders from 22 countries.

“The collaborative design and development of the Eliminator trawl is a great example of industry and scientists working together with managers to develop innovative solutions to reduce or eliminate bycatch,” said Beutel. “We’re excited to be receiving this award and look forward to continuing to research effective ways of reducing bycatch in fishing.”

Every year millions of tons of fish die and are discarded as unwanted catch, called bycatch. Hundreds of thousands of marine animals are also killed through destructive fishing practices.

“WWF created the International Smart Gear Competition to reward and inspire innovative ideas to reduce fisheries bycatch,” said Ginette Hemley, senior vice president of WWF. “Bycatch is a critical environmental and economic problem. These inventions have shown to be effective solutions in our efforts to make fishing ‘smarter’ and we’re pleased to honor their creators.”

For more information, visit www.smartgear.org/.

—Todd McLeish, URI News Bureau



From left: Ginette Hemley, WWF-US vice president, with “Eliminator” team members David Beutel, Sea Grant fisheries extension specialist, and fishermen Phil Ruhle Sr., Jon Knight, and Phil Ruhle Jr., and runner-up winner, Glenn Parsons. Photo © WWF/Smart Gear.

Members of the winning team use a scale model of “The Eliminator” to demonstrate the way it works. Photo © WWF/Smart Gear.



Editor’s Note: With great sadness we report that on July 23, 2008, Phil Ruhle Sr. was lost at sea when the *F/V Sea Breeze* capsized.

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