



World Wildlife Fund

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PRESS RELEASE
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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

WASHINGTON, November 15, 2007 – A team of Rhode Island inventors today will be 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 and its partners announced. The winners will be officially announced in Seattle today at the Pacific Marine Expo.

The Grand Prize winning team consists of University of Rhode Island 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 World Wildlife Fund. "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 today."

Two other inventors won runner up prizes of \$10,000 each for their inventions to help reduce bycatch. Argentinian Diego Gonzalez Zevallos, studied the accidental death of seabirds as they dive for food and are accidentally struck by trawling warp cables, dragged under the water and drown. His device, a simple plastic cone attached to the warp cable, has dramatically reduced seabird deaths, while not



affecting the profitability of fishermen. The other runner-up prize winner, Glen R. Parsons of the University of Mississippi, created a nested cylinder device, that greatly reduces bycatch of a number of species and was widely tested on red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico.

A special UK prize of \$5,000 was won by Andy Smerdon of Aquatec Group Ltd. of Hampshire, England, for a device called the Passive Porpoise Deterrent. The winning design, which draws on the mammal's echolocation system, combines passive acoustic reflectors that have several wavelengths, with a small number of active pingers, and alerts porpoises to the presence of fishing nets.

“WWF’s Smart Gear Competition inspires innovation and entrepreneurship, and fosters a marine stewardship ethic for protecting the oceans. NOAA awarded our 2007 Science, Research and Technology Sustainable Leadership Award to Smart Gear for its creative and dedicated effort to bycatch reduction. We also applaud its approach of transferring winning ideas into on-the-water conservation practices through collaboration with fishermen. We look forward to seeing the environmental benefits of the efforts from this year’s winners,” said retired Navy Vice Admiral Conrad Lautenbacher, Ph.D., undersecretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator.

The International Smart Gear Competition was created by World Wildlife Fund and a diverse range of partners in May 2004 to bring together fishermen, fisheries, policy and science to find solutions to reduce the unnecessary decline of vulnerable species due to bycatch. The first Smart Gear Competition drew more than 50 entries from 16 countries. This year the competition drew 70 entries from 22 countries, including Cameroon, Finland, Thailand, Ireland, New Zealand, Russia, Kenya, Malaysia and many others.

For more information on the International Smart Gear competition visit www.worldwildlife.org or www.smartgear.org. Images and video are available for media by request.

Other information regarding bycatch and the 2007 Smart Gear Competition:

- As many as 250,000 endangered loggerhead turtles and critically endangered leatherback turtles are caught annually on longlines set for tuna, swordfish, and other fish.
- There are 26 species of seabirds, including 17 albatross species, threatened with extinction because of longlining, which kills more than 300,000 seabirds each year.
- An estimated 89 percent of hammerhead sharks and 80 percent of thresher and white sharks have disappeared from the Northeast Atlantic Ocean in the last 18 years, largely due to bycatch.
- The 2007 International Smart Gear Competition partners and judging panel included representatives from: the American Fisheries Society, the Blue Water Fishermen’s Association, The Center for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, the Consortium for Wildlife Bycatch Reduction, Hubbs-Sea World Research Institute, the Inter-American Tropical Tuna



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Commission, Mustad, the National Fisheries Institute, the New England Aquarium, NOAA Fisheries, Ocean Watch Australia Ltd., the Sea change Investment Fund, Sealord Group Ltd., the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center, the WorldFish Center, NSW Department of Primary Industries, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the Northeast Consortium, the Sea Fish Industry Authority, and World Wildlife Fund.

For more than 45 years, WWF has been protecting the future of nature. The largest multinational conservation organization in the world, WWF works in 100 countries and is supported by 1.2 million members in the United States and close to 5 million globally. WWF's unique way of working combines global reach with a foundation in science, involves action at every level, from local to global, and ensures the delivery of innovative solutions that meet the needs of both people and nature. Go to worldwildlife.org to learn more.

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