



Avoiding fishing in problem zones – lessons from the University of Aberdeen

The rollout of geospatial position reporting (GPR) and real time electronic reporting (ER) in the New Zealand's commercial fishing industry had tumultuous beginnings but is starting to prove its worth.

Even those who were initially reluctant to abandon paper reporting would now argue that ER/GPR has made their lives simpler.

At present, all that data goes only to the regulator, Fisheries New Zealand (FNZ) and while some is available to fishers themselves through Fishserve, there is a strong argument that industry should be looking to make more uses of the data it supplies.

An initiative out of Scotland, run by the University of Aberdeen, is using positioning data and data gathered from reporting of catch to help others to avoid unwanted bycatch.

By using catch observations and position data as it is recorded, this data is then processed to produce maps showing hotspots where catch rates of unwanted species were high.

The method was first used in the Alaskan pollack fishery in the 1990s, to enable fishers of pollack to reduce the bycatch of salmon during their annual migrations.

The phone app was developed by the University of Aberdeen after the West of Scotland fishery was awarded a 'bycatch only' quota for cod in 2019 and the commercial fishers were looking at any way they could avoid a species they had no wish to catch.

There was initial reluctance to share catch data and positions with other fishers for financial and other reasons, so the University collaborated with the industry to address those concerns.

The software that came out of this collaborative process is called Bycatch Avoidance Tool Using Mapping, or BATmap and was launched mid last year.

It is a voluntary system and only fishers who agree to share data are involved. Vessels submit their catch data within two hours of the haul coming onboard, while position data is automatically submitted by monitoring units specially installed on each vessel.

When a vessel reports that it has caught a lot of cod, an alert is automatically sent to all participating fishers detailing the volume and location of the catch.

Fishers can then consider this information, along with other factors, when deciding when and where to fish.

The University reports that the reluctance to share data is now generally thought to be worth the value they receive from the app.

Apart from increasing the efficacy of catch, other uses have been suggested.

The skippers participating in the development of the application asked that a protected species also trigger warnings, and spurdog fish, which has high conservation value and present in large numbers seasonally, now also triggers warnings.

Details of the BATmap are [here](#)

A significant amount of information is now gathered electronically by vessels at sea and sharing that data to avoid bycatch and protected species is something that should be considered.

If New Zealand is to realise the true value of its recent catch and position reporting systems, we need to invest in using these data more creatively.

Potential not realised is wasted.



Leighton Kirk of Port Chalmers with kingfish bycatch - image ODT

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