

Should the University of Alaska Offer a Formal Training Program in Commercial Fisheries?

Survey Highlights

The University of Alaska Sea Grant Marine Advisory Program collected input in an online survey for 10 weeks in early 2011 of commercial fishing captains and crew, retired fishermen, people interested in becoming a fisherman, and those supporting the commercial fishing industry with their goods and services, including scientists and educators. The purpose of this survey was to understand if a formal University-sponsored training program in commercial fisheries would be of value and, if so, what subjects would be most important to offer. MAP reached survey respondents through various media outlets and direct email lists. The following are highlighted results based on the 185 people who participated in the survey.

Survey Respondents

Sixty-three percent of the respondents are active fishermen (Figure 1).

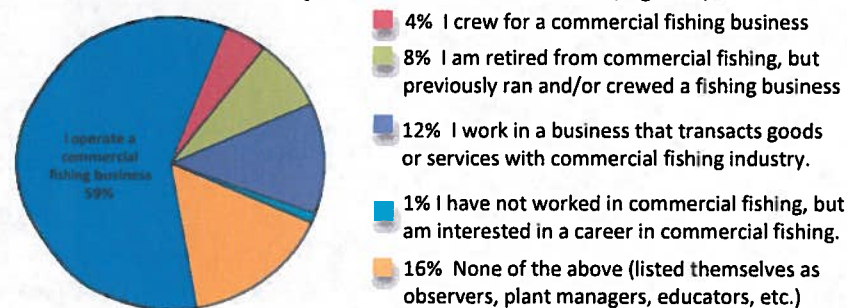


Figure 2. How respondents are involved in the fishing industry

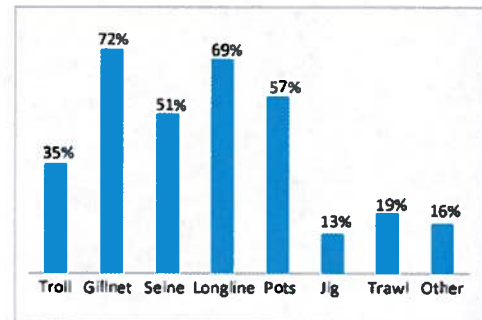


Figure 2. Fishing gear groups

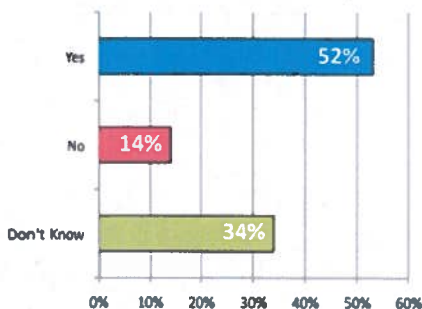


Figure 3. Fishing location

Respondents represent coastal areas throughout Alaska and a variety of gear groups. The greatest number (72%) had used gillnets, followed closely by longline gear at 69% (Figure 2). Fishing locations for these respondents were distributed statewide (Figure 3).

Training and Education for Fishermen

Is it a good idea? Seventy-nine percent of respondents had attended workshops and/or training related to fishing and 88% responded that this had helped their fishing careers. Fifty-two percent believe the University of Alaska **should** offer a formal training program in commercial fisheries; 34% said "don't know" and 14% said "no."



Eighty people offered specific concerns and recommendations about establishing a program.

- Cost of the program for students
- Need for hands-on training
- Timing and location of classes be compatible with fishing season

Additionally, concerns were expressed that by establishing a certificate program, it would become an industry mandate, which would discourage participants, increase barriers to entry and encourage other mandates upon the industry.

Figure 4. Should a formal commercial fisheries training program be offered by the University of Alaska?

What would need to be included to make a formal training program most effective and useful?

What? Important core (or required) classes would include: *Marine safety, Marine navigation and seamanship, and Seafood handling and quality*. Next in line of importance is: *Vessel maintenance and repair, Understanding regulatory processes & fisheries management and Maritime law*.

Classes that might be optional additions to the program included: *Welding, Direct Marketing, Dive Instruction, Refrigeration*.

How Long? The typical duration of time each class should be offered varies between a *week or less, to several weeks*.

Preferred core classes listed above include the following preferred durations: *Marine safety, "one week or less," Marine navigation and seamanship for "several weeks," and Seafood handling and quality, "one week or less"*

When? The best months to incorporate in-class learning are (in priority order) *January, February, December, and November*.

How? The most consistent comment throughout the survey was the *importance of hands-on learning and experience*.

Would it help you and how?

- Seventy-seven percent of total respondents "strongly or somewhat agree" that a *formal training program would make an inexperienced individual a better fisherman*. Thirty-nine percent of respondents elaborated on this point and emphasized that all training is helpful, not necessarily a formal training program, and specified the need for hands-on learning and fishing experience. (Figure 5)
- Seventy-two percent "strongly or somewhat agree" that they *would be interested in hiring someone with a certificate*. (Figure 6)
- Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with nine listed ways in which a training program in commercial fisheries could be useful. The strongest sentiment was that the program would *improve the financial management* of their fishing operation. (Figure 7)

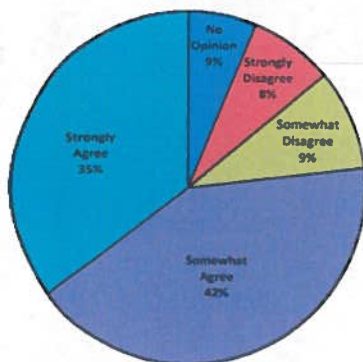


Figure 5. Would training help an inexperienced fisherman?

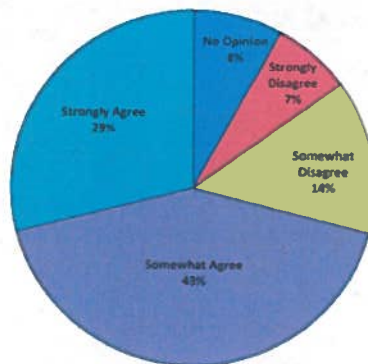


Figure 6. More likely to hire someone with a commercial fisheries certificate?

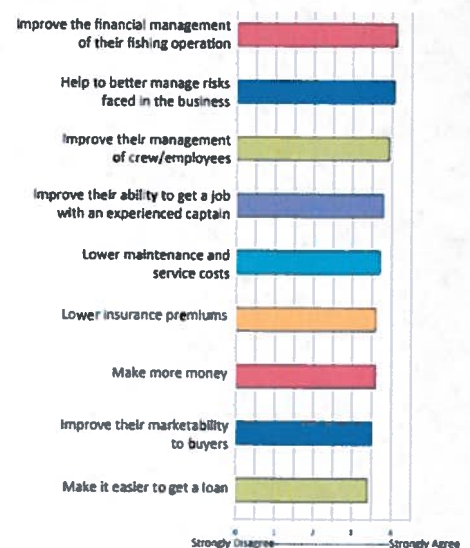


Figure 7. How training would be useful?

Summary

Results of this survey and list of comments can be found at seagrant.uaf.edu/map/fishbiz/trainingsurvey/index.php. The Marine Advisory Program appreciates the responses and will use the results of the survey in their design of classes and in the analysis of formal training for commercial fishermen. Please contact us with questions at map@sfos.uaf.edu.