



Contact: Shelley Dawicki
shelley.dawicki@noaa.gov

508-495-2378

NR16.11

October 25, 2016

Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel Members Witness *Bigelow* Survey Operations

Three members of the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP), a new member of the New England Fishery Management Council and several of their colleagues made a day trip on the NOAA Ship *Henry B. Bigelow* October 11 to observe bottom trawl operations on the vessel, which is in the midst of the autumn bottom trawl survey.

“The idea was to allow NTAP members to see how we operate under real survey conditions” said Rob Johnston, chief of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center’s (NEFSC) Ecosystems Surveys Branch. The group boarded the *Bigelow* early Tuesday morning, the first day of Leg 3 of the fall survey, at the Newport Naval Station in Rhode Island and headed offshore just south of Rhode Island Sound.

“Three tows were made and NTAP members were able to observe the sampling process from start to finish, first by watching how NOAA Corps officers survey a potential site by using multibeam bathymetry, as well as scouting for fixed gear,” said Philip Politis, a fishery biologist in the Ecosystems Surveys Branch who was aboard the vessel.

The capabilities of the ship’s auto-trawl winch system and the use of the Scanmar net-mensuration package were demonstrated as the tow was underway. Once a tow was hauled aboard, NTAP members watched NOAA scientists process the catch in the ship’s wet lab and observe the marriage of the automated conveyor-belt system with the capabilities of the Fisheries Scientific Computer System (FSCS) and the Scientific Computer System (SCS) databases, which link environmental and shipboard operations data with the fisheries sampling data.

“The trip on the *Bigelow* was very informative and answered many of the questions I had about the trawl mensuration system,” said Chris Roebuck, a fisherman from Pt. Judith, RI and a NTAP member. “The trip confirmed my belief that the survey is not at fault for the mismatches between what we see on the water and what comes out as an end result in management. Rather the interpretation of what that survey information means and how it is incorporated into management is to blame. The trip also made me realize that there are many more obstacles to overcome in our transition to industry vessels supplementing the *Bigelow* survey.”

Two of the three tows were repeats of actual survey tows conducted during leg 2, which ended Oct. 7. The third tow was conducted outside Narragansett Bay. Panel members had opportunities to speak with the survey scientists, ship’s officers and crew members before returning to shore via small boat at the end of the day. The *Bigelow* then headed for its first station of leg 3 about 40 miles south of Nantucket Shoals. Nearly 400 randomly selected stations within different geographic strata, determined by depth and region, will be sampled between Cape Hatteras and the Scotian Shelf during the fall survey, which began September 6 and will end on November 13.

Others on board for the trip had particular interests. "The survey trawl carries several state-of-the-art sonar sensors, and the setting and hauling of the gear is nearly completely automated and requiring little human action (except on deck), including adjustments to the trawl warps as the net is being towed," said Mike Pol, a senior fisheries biologist and program leader in conservation engineering for the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MADMF) and a NTAP member.

Terry Alexander, a long-time fisherman from Harpswell, Maine and a member of NTAP and the New England Fishery Management Council, said the *Bigelow* crew knew how important it was to the industry "to follow the protocols to the letter and insure the net was fishing at its peak at all times to get the best information the gear was capable of."

"The deck crew was very professional and followed the protocols to the letter. We had full access to all areas of the boat," Alexander said. "I was impressed with all the different systems aboard the *Bigelow*, from the deck gear for doing the fishing to lab equipment to the wheelhouse with all its electronics. The crew that I interacted with had a passion for the job, from the people sorting the fish all the way to the Captain. They all had the same mission in mind: Do the best job we can because people's livelihoods and the stocks depend on it."

Jon Hare, NEFSC Science and Research Director, said the opportunity to get the group aboard the *Bigelow* at sea to observe and discuss survey operations was a positive step. "The interaction between those working aboard the vessel and the NTAP members will improve understanding and help move us in the right direction."

The Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP) is composed of members of the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils, the fishing industry, academic and government and non-government fisheries experts who will provide advice and direction on the conduct of trawl research. The NTAP was established to bring commercial fishing, fisheries science, and fishery management professionals in the northeastern US together to identify concerns about regional research survey performance and data, to identify methods to address or mitigate these concerns, and to promote mutual understanding and acceptance of the results of this work among their peers and in the broader community.

###

Related Links:

[NEFSC Ecosystems Surveys Branch](#)

[NOAA Ship *Henry Bigelow*](#)

[New England Fishery Management Council](#)

[Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council](#)