

Small boat fishermen are wired and ready

By Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries
St. Francis Xavier University
Antigonish, Nova Scotia

Recent research carried out by the Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries Project (SRSF) at St. Francis Xavier University reveals that many small boat fishermen are now using personal computers.

Research results also indicate that most fishermen are ready and willing to learn new, fisheries-relevant, computer applications. These findings come from research conducted with 289 small-boat lobster-license holders in two adjacent regions of Northeastern Nova Scotia: one centred on the St. Georges Bay region in the Southern Gulf of St. Lawrence (LFAs 26a and 26b), and the other on the Atlantic Coast, centred on the Chedabucto Bay region (LFAs 29, 31a and 31b).

Computer Use – Current Trends

Research results show that personal computer (PC) use with fishermen increases in relation to the number of years of formal education they have. About 70 per cent of those who have completed 12 years or more of formal education report that they used a personal computer.

In addition, substantial minorities of those having completed 11 years of education or less also report using PCs. The pattern of high use associated with higher levels of education is expected, but a surprising number

of persons, who do not report having completed high school are using PCs. This underscores the extent to which PC use has become widespread among small boat fish harvesters.

As would be anticipated, younger fishermen are also more likely than older fishermen to use PCs. Almost 60 per cent of those who have fished for 30 years or less report using a personal computer, whereas only 20 per cent of those who have fished for more than 30 years report using a computer.

Possible Benefits of Increased PC Use

Personal computers provide an opportunity for improved communication among fishermen and the many associations to which

they belong. This is especially the case given the dispersed residence pattern of small-boat harvesters in rural Nova Scotian settings. Fishermen could discuss important issues among themselves online and could also use Internet sites to communicate more effectively with government agencies.

Computer use also offers opportunities for fish harvesters and their associations to minimize some of the costs associated with fishing. By

using e-mail and Internet sites, associations could reduce the costs of frequent information mail-outs and meetings.

Harvesters could use computers to search for and buy various kinds of supplies and equipment. Internet auctions where both fish and equipment are sold could result in savings through increased price competition.

It is also inevitable that on-board as well as in-home computer applications will

proliferate in the future and that fishermen will need to integrate the two systems.

While using computerized navigational gear to locate fish, harvesters could be using other PC applications to communicate with government agencies, monitoring companies, or other fishermen.

Training in Personal

Computers

SRSF research reveals that there is considerable interest among small-boat fish harvesters in accessing and participating in fisheries-related computer training courses.

Eighty-five per cent of those with 20 years or less experience, 75 per cent of those with 21 to 30 years' experience, and 60 per cent of those with 31 years or more fishing experience expressed an interest in taking such courses.

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Categories	Southern Gulf, N.S.	Atlantic Shore
Median age of fishermen	51	49
Median formal education	11	9
Median years fished	25	25
Median weeks fished (previous year)	18	16
% that use a PC	43.3	44.7
% that would attend a training course	80.3	68.6

Table 1: General Response Patterns Concerning Personal Computer Use and Training

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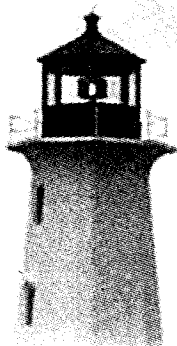
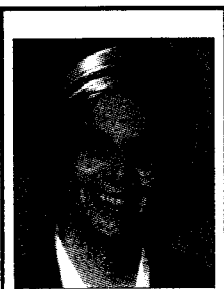
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Fishermen are wired and ready

It is also worth noting that those who spend the most weeks fishing (22 weeks or more per year), report a slightly higher level of interest in PC training courses than do those who spend less time fishing (77 per cent as compared to 70 per cent over-

all). Associations that have not already done so would be well advised to survey their membership on this issue and begin to develop training programs to meet their members' needs.

For both fishermen and their associations, the ad-

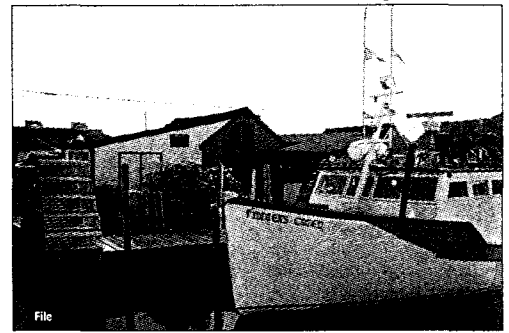
vantages of plugging in and turning on to the potential of the information highway and the new economy are becoming irresistible, as well as critical, to the future.

Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries is an alliance of several fisheries organizations (the

Gulf Nova Scotia Bonafide Fishermen's Association, the Guysborough County Inshore Fishermen's Association and the Paqtnkek Fish and Wildlife Society) and university researchers.

For more information, visit SRSF's Web site at www.stfx.ca/research/srsf.

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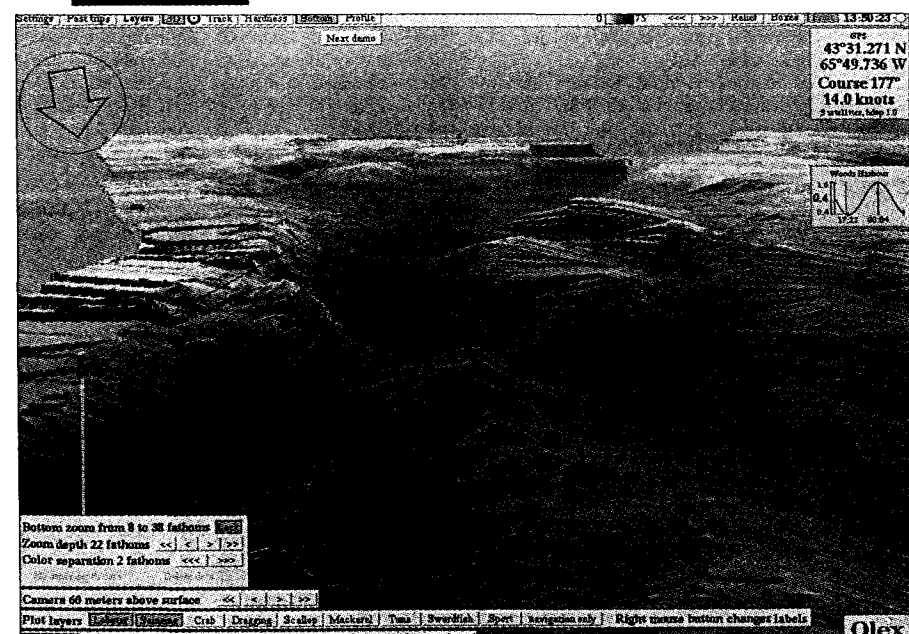


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