

**Fishing Industry Summit for Health (FISH) Future Search: To create a shared vision, commitment, and action plan to improve the commercial fishing communities total health. October, 2015.**

New England Fishermen are facing challenges to their physical, psychological, behavioral and financial health. As one of the frontline agencies, the Fishing Partnership Support Services convened a Future Search to create a strategic plan that included stakeholder groups with an interest in the well-being of fishermen and their families. Although participants had a shared interest, many had never met before they gathered to discover how to work collaboratively.

**Background:** Fishing exacts a heavy toll on fishermen. Working long days at sea in remote locations for days or weeks at a time is risky. In addition to the strenuous work, it makes keeping a regular schedule, filling a prescription, engaging in preventative health, and keeping infections at bay very difficult. There are many factors beyond the control of fishermen, the weather, the size of the catch, the fluctuations in income and employment, regulations, fuel costs – to name a few. These uncertainties and hardship, in addition to high mortality rates, place great stress families. Previous conferences and meetings elicited feel-good reactions, but little to no follow up that made a difference.

Six months prior to the FISH Future Search, a small group convened by the Fishing Partnership Support Services (FPSS) met to begin the planning process. Getting the Steering Committee together to represent all the voices they felt should be included in the conference was a challenge. After the initial face-to-face planning meeting, all subsequent meetings were by phone and it took some effort to ensure the necessary stakeholders were being invited. The Steering Committee was able to get approximately 60 participants (the number was a moving target) into the room. Stakeholders groups were: Community Shore Side, Navigators, Harvesters, Government Relations/PR/Marketing, Advocacy/Nonprofit, Providers, and Researchers. There were a few legislative and policy leaders who dropped in and out.

**The Meeting:** Some folks came with some hesitation, wariness and skepticism. Some claimed they had been to “meetings like this before.” That experience was dispelled rather quickly as they began to identify shared experiences, goals and frustrations, and build relationships across different perspectives. In the quiet after the Trend Map and Prouds and Sorries, they confronted the present in all its complexity. Creating the future, they began to see the emergence of common ground.

**Outcomes:** By the end of the conference, they identified Action steps in the following Common Ground areas:

- An industry-driven, well-funded, national public awareness campaign resulting in political clout
- Total health and well-being of fishing families and communities
- Fisheries management decisions governed by inclusion of government, academic, industry and collaborative research
- Reduced major injuries and fatalities of fishermen
- Thriving fishing communities where fishermen and their families are living their life with dignity and enjoying a secure standard of living
- Increase demand for locally caught fish and consumers’ awareness



This graphic was created by Pam Tinc, who captured the comments shared about this meeting as we closed the session