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News Release

Revolutionary New Sustainable Fishing Technology Unveiled in New Zealand

Video: First underwater images of [Precision Seafood Harvesting](#) shows the future of sustainable fishing.

Auckland New Zealand – Imagine if every fish landed on a trawler was alive, in perfect condition and small fish, sharks and other species could be safely released underwater before a catch was lifted on-board.

The first [underwater](#) images ever released of revolutionary New Zealand fishing technology show how a [partnership](#) between New Zealand scientists and three Kiwi fishing companies will radically change the global fishing industry and make that a reality for wildfish harvesting.

The technology known as '[Precision Seafood Harvesting](#)' does away with traditional trawl nets and, instead, sees fish contained and swimming comfortably underwater inside a large flexible PVC liner where they can be sorted for the correct size and species before being brought on-board the fishing vessel.

The break-through design of the harvesting system allows fishing vessels to target specific species and fish size and greatly increases protection for small fish that can swim free through 'escape portals' and non-target fish (by-catch), which are released unharmed.

Once on the deck, the fish are still swimming inside the liner, in perfect condition, meaning fresher, more sustainable fish for consumers and higher value products for fishing companies using the technology.

Precision Seafood Harvesting is the commercialisation phase of nearly ten years of New Zealand research. Fishing companies [Aotearoa Fisheries](#), [Sanford](#) and [Sealord](#) are investing \$26 million into the project under a Primary Growth Partnership with the New Zealand Government, which is matching the industry investment. Scientists at Plant & Food Research are partnering with the fishing companies to develop and trial the technology on commercial fishing vessels.

Sanford CEO and Chairman of [Seafood New Zealand](#), Eric Barratt, who unveiled the

new technology for the first time to the New Zealand fishing industry at its [annual conference in Auckland](#) today, says the [Precision Seafood Harvesting programme](#) was set up in April 2012 and will run for six years to commercialise new technology in the New Zealand fishing industry.

“This is the biggest step forward for commercial fishing in 150 years. What we’ve developed in New Zealand has huge benefits for fish stocks, the environment, consumers and New Zealand’s seafood industry. In the process we’re set to change the global fishing industry for the better.”

Alistair Jerrett, from [Plant and Food Research](#) says the new way of harvesting wildfish is a close collaboration between his team and the New Zealand seafood industry ‘who want to do things better’. “This is New Zealand science in action and the industry partners deserve a pat on the back for bringing fishing into the 21st century.”

Jerrett’s team built their own underwater cameras to see into traditional trawl nets. He says the ‘aha moment’ was asking: “Why do we have to strain these fish out, why do we have to exhaust them, why do we have to damage them during harvest - the new system changes all of that.

“One of the objectives is to make sure that any animal that reaches the surface, if we can’t select it out underwater, is delivered back to the sea unharmed.” He says this is true for bigger animals as well, like rays, sharks or any animal that is inadvertently captured.

“In terms of selectivity we design everything to make sure unwanted animals are discharged as fast as possible at depth – we don’t want them to even see the light of day.”

“When you realise you can design a highly selective harvest, you are winning in many different ways. You’re winning in unexplored properties, values we haven’t realised, and you’re producing a humane harvesting system.”

The head of Aotearoa Fisheries, Carl Carrington says it’s good news for sustainability by improving New Zealand’s credentials and “enhances our access to sustainability-conscious consumers, improves product taste and quality, and is good for value growth”.

That’s echoed by Sealord CEO, Graham Stuart who believes Precision Harvesting is an opportunity for New Zealand to ‘lead the world with another great kiwi innovation’. “Seeing Hoki landed from a depth of 300 meters, alive and in fantastic condition is remarkable and will totally change how our fish are brought to market.”

Sanford, Sealord and Aotearoa have been actively trialing the new technology on their fishing vessels for the past six months. Vessel Manager at Aotearoa Fisheries, Nathan Reid says fisherman onboard their vessels are excited about the condition of the fish when they are landed. “Replacing old trawl technology is really important for the industry. We’re going to see better stock recruitment and better

stock in the water – it’s better for everyone.”

Sealord too is seeing the positive impact of the technology on its crews. Bill Healey is the Vessel Manager for Sealord. He says crews were skeptical at first, but that’s all changed. “When we talk to them now, when we see their reactions to the fish coming up, we know we’re onto something. I know we’re doing something unique and great when I look at the crews”.

Greg Johansson from Sanford says the new harvesting technology is just the start. “This will lead on to changes in vessel designs and layouts, the way we handle fish and get it to consumers. The opportunities are endless.”

“The customers should really enjoy the story of how this fish was caught, the sustainability, the environmental impact of this technology versus other forms of harvesting.

“This will increase the value of all New Zealand seafood products when the global markets see that we’re taking a big step forward by using a more environmentally-friendly way of harvesting fish.”

Recreational fisher and host of the popular [“Gone Fishin”](#) television show, Graeme Sinclair has seen the technology in action and says it’s ‘the future of commercial fishing.’ Sinclair says there’s a tendency with recreational anglers to assume that the commercial industry is not doing anything about problems such as dumping and mortality.

“I’ve seen some innovations and some clever buggers in my time, and I think this is revolutionary: it’s Kiwi, it’s clearly innovative, and what it does for mortality and for targeting specific species is incredibly exciting. It alleviates a whole lot of issues all in one hit.” ENDS

For all media enquiries on Precision Seafood Harvesting, please contact Trish Sherson at Sherson Willis on **021 570 803** or e-mail trish@shersonwillis.com

Media Assets

Still images, full interviews and all on-board and underwater footage of Precision Seafood Harvesting are available at: <http://precisionseafoodharvesting.co.nz>



Eric Barratt
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