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NOAA Names Trawl Gear for Fisherman Involved in Its Invention

NOAA's Fisheries Service has named a fishing trawl recently approved for use in the Northeast for its co-inventor, Phil Ruhle. The Rhode Island commercial fisherman was lost at sea in July when his vessel sank off the New Jersey coast.

"Phil was a real innovator in the industry who did a lot to help us improve the performance of our trawl surveys to generate more accurate assessments of stock abundance and to find innovative ways to selectively target healthy fish stocks," said NOAA Fisheries Service Northeast Regional Administrator Pat Kurkul. "His extensive fishing knowledge and valuable insights will be sorely missed."

Ruhle worked with his son, Phil Ruhle Jr., Capt. Jim O'Grady, Jon Knight of Superior Trawl and University of Rhode Island Sea Grant College Program scientists David Beutel and Laura Skrobe, to develop the new trawl gear. Development of the trawl was funded by NOAA Fisheries Service's Northeast Cooperative Research Partners Program. The trawl can reduce the catch of non-target fish species by more than 50 percent.

The Ruhle trawl was recently approved by NOAA Fisheries Service for use by the ground fishing industry in two special management programs in the Eastern U.S./Canada Area on Georges Bank. This area of Georges Bank is managed through an understanding between the two countries to ensure coordinated management and rebuilding of certain groundfish stocks shared by the U.S. and Canada.

The Ruhle trawl allows fishermen to target haddock and other healthier stocks while avoiding or releasing depleted species like cod. Because cod behave differently than haddock, they are able to escape through the large 8-foot mesh in the forward end of the trawl net.

Ruhle and his fellow collaborators were recognized for their work on the creative trawl design in 2007, taking first prize in the World Wildlife Fund International Smart Gear Competition.

Ruhle was also recognized with a NOAA Environmental Hero Award in 2003. The award recognized the fourth generation fisherman for his cooperative support of NOAA Fisheries Service science and his tireless efforts to preserve and protect our nation's marine environment.

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