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# The IFISH Innovation Exchange: A Brief Update on Plans to Support Collaboration and Progress Between Conferences

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## ABSTRACT

For many years, the International Fishing Industry Safety and Health Conference (IFISH) has focused on highlighting research, training and advocacy work and fostering collaboration among stakeholders to foster a healthier, safer seafood industry. While prior conferences have included many opportunities for trans-disciplinary discussions and problem-solving, the IFISH Planning Committee has been exploring the option of developing a platform for collaboration and information exchange in between events, which only happen every few years. At the IFISH 6 Conference, held at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Rome, participants were invited to attend the “**International IFISH Innovation Exchanges**” post-conference workshop, which was held on the final day of the conference. The focus of the workshop was to get participant feedback on how to create a platform for collaboration in between conferences. This brief report provides an overview of the concept, participant feedback and the work that has been conducted post-conference to make the IFISH Innovation Exchange a reality.

## KEYWORDS

Collaboration; fishing health; fishing safety; innovation; partnership

## The IFISH innovation exchange concept

A resounding theme from each of the prior IFISH conferences had been how useful it was to meet other researchers, trainers, advocates, and stakeholders who are similarly dedicated to the health and safety of seafood and aquaculture industry workers. Participants have discussed learning about late-breaking research, regulations, research, or training methods, as well as creative solutions and the value of bringing this knowledge to their own regions and target populations. To keep the momentum going in between conferences, the IFISH Innovation Exchange hopes to create an engagement platform that encourages *knowledge exchange, transdisciplinary problem-solving, data publication, skills development, and the dissemination of evidence-based health and safety solutions* to international worker populations in various geographic locations. The Exchange also seeks to increase partnerships between stakeholders in both developing and developed countries to ensure solutions are equitably disseminated to seafood workers in a variety of coastal communities around the world.

While there are examples of collaboration and information exchange that have occurred informally in the past, the Exchange mechanism seeks to further support and increase interactions between disciplines and regions in ways that catalyze the development and adoption of scalable solutions in the years ahead. One example includes the development of an international personal flotation device (PFD) quarterly call, which was organized after a lifejacket panel discussion that was held at IFISH 5. During this quarterly call, researchers, manufacturers, and trainers meet to discuss new PFD ideas, programs, research, and models.

## Participant feedback on the IFISH innovation exchange concept

The IFISH Innovation Exchange workshop was well attended, and for those attending, there was widespread support for the concept. To explore how an Exchange could be organized, participants were asked to consider and discuss several key components of

making the Exchange a reality. These included: 1) options for financing the Exchange (such as administration, promotion, developing an online platform, travel, etc.); 2) the basic components of the Exchange and how these would function; 3) how to invite participants to the Exchange, and how to facilitate short-term, in-person scientific or training opportunities, if this were possible, and an application process for in-person exchanges; and lastly 4) an organizing governing body that monitors activities, looks for funding, and reviews applications for short-term, in-person exchanges. Participants were asked to break into four separate discussion groups focused on one of the previously listed components of the Exchange (i.e., finance, Exchange components, participant engagement/application process for in-person exchanges, and a governing body). Each group was led by a discussion facilitator and notes were taken to highlight the primary themes raised in each of the discussion groups. A summary of participant feedback is featured in the following sections.

### **Funding**

In this group, participants shared a number of ideas regarding fundraising and who might be willing to underwrite Innovation Exchange activities. One suggestion was to develop a Core Fundraising Team to develop a funding case statement. This could be used to pitch the concept to potential funders. In addition to fundraising, participants underscored the need to set up a system for accepting and managing funds, as well as dispersing them. The system would need to be managed by an independent company with a designated legal team and accounting firm. The particulars around mailing reimbursements and working with applicants on the paperwork would also need to be considered. In order to gain interest from funders, it would be important to formalize the Innovation Exchange as an international organization, which would allow organizers to build relationships across global, national, regional, and local entities/agencies. The “Application Process” group also noted that matching funds should not be required as this would exclude individuals or organizations who could benefit from the resources.

### **Logistics**

Discussions in this group focused on the mechanics of developing a network of participating organizations. Questions for group discussion included consideration of adding an Innovations Exchange page to the IFISH website and a list of what could be included (e.g., participating organizations, applications for short-term missions, a list of research, training, and publication opportunities, or virtual team meetings for groups focused on specific topics in fishing OSH). Participants were also asked to consider how participating organizations might be vetted for inclusion. Discussions indicated participants were in favor of adding an Innovations Exchange page to the website following the model of the International PFD Work Group. The page would include the contributions of any interested parties.

### **Application process**

Participants focused on this Exchange component were asked to consider the process for vetting Innovation Exchange applications for participation in short term, in-person scientific or training exchanges. Considerations included eligibility and application criteria, who should review proposals, the length of exchanges, and output/reporting requirements. Participants believed short-term exchanges should be focused on occupational safety and health and that fishermen should have a role in the selection process. Applications should emphasize diversity, the development of consensus on safety or health best practices, opportunities for generating valuable data, and improving training or prevention practices. Participants believed eligibility should be broad, but should prioritize individuals with direct access to fisheries and worker engagement. The review of applications could be led by an interdisciplinary review team with diverse backgrounds, and the panel would be updated regularly to rotate out longer serving members and include new reviewers. Participants also emphasized the inclusion of groups like the Food and Agricultural Organization.

### **Exchange governance**

Individuals in this group were tasked with outlining how an exchange could be organized and agencies/

individuals who should be assembled to provide oversight and input on its structure and functioning. This was a difficult task given that the Exchange was more of a concept vs. a fully functioning initiative, but participants offered their thoughts about how a website devoted to the Exchange should be set up, how the governing body would interact, and how they might create policies for the Innovation Exchange. In particular, workgroup participants noted the governing body should be transdisciplinary and should establish a certain number of seats for government, academics, NGOs, industry, etc., with members rotating on and off depending on representation needs. Members should have clear definitions of their roles and responsibilities, be proactive in their governing role and their terms of service, and develop a plan for ensuring representation and drafting bylaws. Fishing industry and developing country representation on the board would be important, and members should be aware of convening legislation, conventions, and other applicable legislation.

## Next steps

### *Innovation exchange online hub*

Building on the feedback from the IFISH Innovation Exchange workshop participants, the IFISH Planning Committee has already tackled several post-conference action items. To provide an online information exchange hub through the IFISH website ([www.ifishconference.ca](http://www.ifishconference.ca)), a U13 conference grant was submitted to the United States', National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Funding would provide the support necessary to develop upgrades to the website so many of the ongoing, online information exchange activities outlined by IFISH participants can be facilitated. This would include a section to help organize various workgroup meetings. Meeting information and archived meetings would be available in this section of the online Exchange hub. In another section, materials, papers, funding opportunities, surveillance activities, apps, and other relevant resources would be featured and regularly updated by the research team and participants. Resources would be downloadable or links would be provided for easy access. The online Exchange Hub would also be

designed to support collaboration by sharing contact information for those interested in networking. Lastly, a section of the Exchange Hub would also contain updated lists of safety trainings, industry events, calls for feedback on proposed legislation, relevant meetings, and calls for abstracts. This would allow attendees and participants to share event information and updates regularly. The Planning Committee hopes to have an update on the proposal by 2025 and, if funded, work on the Innovation Exchange section of the IFISH website would start immediately.

### *Short-term, in-person scientific research or training exchanges*

In addition to the online Exchange Hub, the Planning Committee has been looking into ways to fund short-term, in-person scientific or training exchanges. These exchanges would allow individuals from one country to travel to another country to learn about evidence-based programs, innovative and effective training methods or research methodologies. The Exchanges would be roughly 4–6 weeks in length and would allow participants to further develop key collaborations. To further explore this facet of the Exchange, several IFISH Planning Committee members will be traveling to Cape Town, South Africa to discuss this idea at the FISH Platform Meetings that are being organized by a number of International Fisheries Health and Safety advocates. Feedback from this meeting will be used to identify and pursue opportunities for developing funds for this component of the Innovation Exchange.

Anyone interested in learning more about the exchange is invited to contact either Julie Sorensen ([Julie.sorensen@bassett.org](mailto:Julie.sorensen@bassett.org)) or Jennifer Lincoln ([jxw7@cdc.gov](mailto:jxw7@cdc.gov)).

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