

## HSE for fisheries Project

Final Report Summary

October 2014

# Health, safety and environment competence among fishermen in Ostrobotnia and Nordland

### *Summary*

The project activities started in March 2014 and ended in August 2014. The project included a literature study on health and safety information related to commercial fishing. The project team visited fishermen and occupational health service providers in Finland (Vaasa area) and Norway (Lofoten) and completed interviews regarding the current state and demand for occupational health services specifically designed for fishermen. The project team visited key stakeholders, particularly representatives of fishing organizations, to hear their views on safety and health in the fishing industry. We obtained occupational injury claim data for Finnish fishermen, analyzed the data, and compared it to similar data for Norwegian fishermen. The finding of this short pilot project was that occupational health services are available for fishermen in Finland but they are not well developed, and not well utilized. More information about the availability and benefits of the services are needed, and specialized courses for health providers about fishermen's work environment are needed. In Norway the fishermen do not have specific occupational health services currently, and there is a need to establish such services, educate advisors and health providers, and promote the services among fishermen.

Overall, the project was able to accomplish the goals in the very short project period; identifying the current situation and needs related to occupational health services in the fishing industry in the Osterbotten and Nordland areas. The findings clearly show that there is a need for further developing the competence of occupational health service providers by better training. Further, there is a need for fishermen to utilize occupational health services to reduce their high risk of injuries and occupational disease and maintaining their health, wellbeing, profitability and sustainability in their profession.

### *Background*

Fishing is an important industry sector in the Botnia-Atlantica region. In Nordland County, 2348 residents report their main occupation as fishermen and 529 have fishery as their secondary occupation. In addition, 222 persons work in the aquaculture industry (Directorate of Fisheries 2012). In Ostrobotnia, the number of full-time fishermen was 169 (marine and inland fishery) and the number of part-time fishermen was 367 in 2013 (Statistics of Finnish Game and Fisheries research). While relatively small in numbers, the importance of fishermen in contributing to the Nordic diet and food security is enormous. In the coastal areas of the Botnia-Atlantica region, fishing is a major occupation thus supporting the viability and vitality of the area.

While doing their work, fishermen are exposed to hazards resulting from constantly varying weather conditions as well as injury hazards on boats and facilities and the economic pressure from regulations and making a living while the catch is unpredictable. Fishermen suffer some of the highest occupational injury and fatality rates in many countries, including Finland and Norway. Health and safety programs developed for the general industry are not easily applicable in fisheries. Many of the workers in this sector are self-employed. They lack the organizational structures where the employers, employees, government and other organizations can jointly address the problems in health, safety and environment among workers.

In Finland, an occupational health service program has been developed for fishermen, specifically. In Norway, employers are obliged to provide occupational health service in specific sectors e.g. in the aquaculture industry. However, this legislation excludes self-employed fishermen. It has been unclear how well the current program in Finland is utilized, how satisfied fishermen are with the service, and what future development needs exist to enhance the competence of the service providers. In Norway, there are no similar programs, and it has not been known what problems exist, and what type of programs could work. Collaboration and learning from the Finnish experience could likely help Norwegian authorities and fishermen to develop an occupational health service program that would be responsive to the fishermen's needs.

Some occupational health service providers in Norway have expressed that small businesses in general are often unprofitable customers and therefore they have to pay a higher cost for the service. Yet, providers may lack the training and competence to provide a service that is of value to the fishermen.

The main actors and stake holders in this project were the fishermen themselves, fisheries-related associations like Kalatalouden keskusliitto (FIN) and Norges Fiskarlag (N), both public and private occupational health service providers, research and extension institutions like Norsk Landbruksrådgiving (N) and MTT Agrifood Research Finland (Natural Resources Institute Finland as of 1.1.2015), and insurance companies like the Farmers' Social Insurance Institution, Mela (FIN) and Nordlys (N). From a wider perspective, also anybody committed to promoting social sustainability of fishing as an occupation and fish as a source for healthy food, is a stakeholder.

The cooperation between Norsk Landbruksrådgiving and MTT Agrifood Research Finland has been established in several earlier projects concerning occupational safety, health and well-being at work in agriculture and horticulture. This expertise and existing contacts with interest groups and stakeholders helped shape this "Occupational health and safety for fisheries" pilot project.

### ***Project goals***

The project goals were to investigate:

- the competency and utilization of the existing occupational health service program in the Österbotten area in Finland, and
- how to develop an occupational health service program that is part of the required company internal control system, in Nordland, Norway that considers the Finnish experience, as well as the views of the fishermen in Nordland.

### ***Methods and materials used in this project***

The project team had three workshops and regularly web meetings for planning and executing questionnaires, interviews and visits. We created a web site for sharing information to the public. One team member from Finland and one from Norway participated in a NIVA course, held in Denmark, about seafarers' health and safety. We analyzed injury statistic from Finland and used SINTEF report from Norway to characterize and compare the injury situation among coastal fishermen. We collected information about the Finnish occupational health service (OHS) system by interviewing fishermen and OHS providers in the Österbotten area. We met and interviewed experts including Vesa Karttunen from the Federation of Finnish Fishery Association and Leif Kaarto from Österbottens Fiskarförbund. We also met representatives from the insurance company Mela, which partly finances the fishermen's OHS in Finland.

### **Project findings**

We found that OHS is available for fishermen in Finland, but very few have joined it. Workplace visits are done, but independently from OHS providers. Knowledge about the availability OHS is poor among fishermen. OHS providers have little knowledge about fishermen's working environment. There is a great need to inform fishermen about the need and availability of OHS. There is also a great need for training for OHS providers about the specific issues related to health and safety in fisheries.

We visited Nordland Fyllkes Fiskarlag and Norges Kystfiskarlag in Nordland. Both organizations think there is a need for establishing OHS for fishermen. We talked with fishermen and workers at fish landing facilities in Lofoten/Vesterålen. They reported that musculo-skeletal problems, mental health, stress and sleep deprivation are common among fishermen. Currently these health, safety and wellness issues are not addressed in the public healthcare system. We also visited Vesterålen HMS-senter (OHS) and they think there is a need to train advisors to conduct on-site visits as well as courses for health providers about occupational health issues among fishermen.

### **Conclusions**

Fishing is one of the most hazardous occupations in Nordic countries. Safety, health and wellness of fishermen is important in maintaining fishing as a viable occupation in the future, and fisheries as a sustainable part of local and national economies in the Botnia-Atlantica region. Developing well-functioning occupational health services (OHS) for fishermen may benefit this sector in the following ways:

- reduce losses from injury, illness, fishing vessel and property damage among fishermen
- contribute to the attractiveness and viability of fishing as an occupation for future generations
- contribute to promoting the use of domestic fish products as an important part of diet in the Nordic countries
- contribute to the economic viability in the coastal regions in the Botnia-Atlantica region

The following findings of this project should be considered during development of OHS services for fisheries:

- OHS service should be made available to all fishers due to the nature of the occupation.
- OHS must be promoted continuously.
- OHS must be promoted using channels that allow multiple encounters and that fishers respect.
- A common knowledge source about OHS issues among fishermen, sharing of best practices of OHS for fisheries, and training are needed to increase expertise, impact and adoption of these services.
- The relation between the fisher and the OHS system should be more of a partnership, benefitting from better understanding of the individual working environment and work tasks over time, and deepened knowledge of the fisher's health status and its development over time.

### **Future work**

In this pilot project we collected information on the need, feasibility and expectations for well-functioning occupational health services, specifically designed for fishermen. We compiled information from fishermen and their organization, researchers and their institutions, insurance companies, safety and health experts, health policy experts, and officials in government organizations. We found that there is a need in Finland to enhance the competence of the occupational health service providers regarding exposures and health outcomes that are common to fishermen. We also found that in Finland, the fishermen are not aware of the existence of occupational health services, or what types of services are offered to them.



On Norway side, we found that fishermen have some basic training in safety, and the insurance companies and fishermen's organizations have produced good safety and health education materials. The occupational health side is not as well developed. All parties interviewed in Norway were interested and supportive of establishing an occupational health service system and the NLR-HMS organization is well positioned to develop such services.

Based on our pilot project findings, we seek further funding to enhance the occupational health service expertise and promote the use of the system among fishermen. In Norway, we plan to establish a new occupational health service system for fishermen in Nordland. In Sweden, we have established connections to conduct research and, based on the preparedness of the stakeholders, develop a similar occupational health service system as is used in Finland and Norway. In future initiatives we aim to develop capacity of well-trained occupational health service providers and advisors. We aim to work with the fishermen and their organizations designing the system and promoting it to gain high participation and user satisfaction rates. As the final outcome, well-functioning OHS will contribute to better health, safety, wellness and profitability among fishermen in the Botnia Atlantica region. OHS also promotes securing domestic supply of high quality fish products to the consumers in the Nordic countries as well as exports, contributing to the economic viability of the region.