March 2026

Hello Hub friends and supporters,

We hope the start of 2026 has brought you success and happiness as spring approaches. This year, Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP) and the Bycatch Solutions Hub (the Hub) remain dedicated to building lasting partnerships, working toward a future

where a sustainable seafood industry and thriving marine ecosystems go hand-in-hand.

By supporting the people driving this movement – fishers, conservation professionals gear innovators, and engaged consumers – we aim to build meaningful connections and inspire deeper collaboration that will scale the use of existing best practices and innovative new technologies to reduce impacts to marine wildlife.

Anne DiMonti
Protecting Ocean Wildlife Program Manager

Hub Happenings

We're proud to announce that SFP and the Bycatch Solutions Hub have been selected as Giving Green's 2026 Biodiversity Green Spotlight. We are honored by this recognition and deeply grateful for the acknowledgment.

As shared in previous newsletters, we are planning an update to the Hub website to make it more user-friendly and easier to navigate. The project is now underway, so keep an eye on the site over the next few weeks to see the changes. We welcome your feedback as we improve the platform.

To further strengthen and implement sustainable solutions that eliminate bycatch of endangered, threatened, and protected (ETP) species, SFP is building on the success of the many projects carried out in 2025:

Fishermen Marc Palombo and Rob Martin hauling an on-demand lobster trap.

Following the success of the 2025 Innovative Gear Workshop, SFP is collaborating with seafood industry leaders and partner NGOs to expand support for innovative pot and trap technologies – particularly in the pot and trap fisheries in Massachusetts, US, and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Canada – to reduce potential interactions with whales. As part of these efforts, discussions are also underway to identify methods to bring on-demand-caught products to consumers. SFP hopes to host another workshop to maintain momentum. Stay tuned for updates.

To further address this critical issue, SFP has joined the West Coast Entanglement Coalition to stay informed and engaged regarding on-demand fishing developments along the US West Coast.

In 2026, SFP is also working with several gear technology innovators to explore new and creative approaches to reducing bycatch in longline, gillnet, and purse seine fisheries. These efforts include, but are not limited to, safe hooks, acoustic pingers, light-based technologies, safe release mechanisms, and ghost gear mitigation strategies.

Updates will be posted in this newsletter and on the Hub website. Many of these emerging technologies will be showcased at SFP events at the 2026 Seafood Expo North America (SENA).

Looking Ahead...

In case you missed our earlier message, Seafood Expo North America is just around the corner! Join us March 15–17, 2026, at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center.

SFP has an exciting lineup of events and activities focused on reducing bycatch in wild fisheries, including panel discussions on:

- **Bycatch and Innovative Fishing Gear Technologies: Solutions for Delivering Seafood Sustainability**
- **Ghost Gear: Protecting Ocean Health and Seafood Supply Chains**
- **Tuna Transparency Science Fair**

These are wonderful opportunities to learn more about these important topics and connect with colleagues to advance seafood sustainability. Additional information can be found on our Seafood Expo North America webpage. And if you're in Boston, stop by SFP's Booth #1266 (a new location this year) to say hello!

Project Support

So far, the Bycatch Solutions Hub has directed more than USD 1 million toward advancing bycatch mitigation efforts. As a reminder, the Hub's Funding Opportunities page connects bycatch solution projects seeking support with interested seafood industry partners. Several innovative projects are still listed and actively seeking assistance, including but not limited to:

Snow crab Smart Buoy gear tracking: In Canada's Gulf of St. Lawrence, the third-largest snow crab fishery in the world faces a growing challenge: the co-occurrence of North Atlantic right whales (NARW) in dense fishing areas has increased the risk of whale entanglements, threatening both an endangered species and the livelihood of multi-generational fishing families.

Snow Crab

Blue Ocean Gear's Smart Buoys are equipped with GPS, accelerometers, and depth sensors designed in consultation with marine mammal scientists to detect entanglement events in real time. Combining these sensor data points through a cloud-based algorithm, Smart Buoys can identify anomalous gear movements that indicate a potential whale interaction or gear tampering, then automatically transmit alerts and location information to harvesters.

Iluminar el Mar Update: This project uses small, low-cost green LED lights attached to fishing nets to reduce the accidental capture of threatened and endangered species, including sea turtles, sharks, rays, dolphins, and whales. Out

of more than 800 applicants to Ecuador's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) OCEAN Grant, Iluminar el Mar was selected as one of fewer than 10 grantees. The project will receive $150,000 in funding to support our goal of equipping 500 vessels with lights by 2029. To fully achieve this target, additional efforts are needed to secure the required match funding. While the project focuses on implementing green LED lights in artisanal gillnets in Ecuador, where bycatch rates are among the highest in the Eastern Pacific, the study's findings are expected to have global application.

Advancing sustainable trawl fisheries through FloMo gear tracking: The FloMo Modular Harvesting System was developed to address sustainability issues and environmental damage caused by traditional commercial trawling. It features a novel trawl net that enhances catch selectivity, fish survivability, and quality. FloMo nets use a specialized fabric cylinder that inflates hydrodynamically from water movement, creating a low-turbulence zone that decreases fish-on-fish and fish-on-net damage. The cylinder is designed with apertures of various sizes and shapes, which help reduce water velocity inside the net while primarily enabling the escape of undersized fish and non-target species. The Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation (CFRF) in Rhode Island, US, has identified three fisheries to test the system: summer flounder (fluke), silver hake (whiting), and longfin squid. Testing with FloMo in these fisheries could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the innovative net design and offer the broadest range of opportunities to expand trial results to other similar high-value or high-volume fisheries in the US New England region and beyond.

If you are interested in knowing more about any of these projects, please do not hesitate to contact me or visit our Funding Opportunities page.

Project Spotlight:

Joining forces to enhance supply chain transparency in tuna

A major challenge in effectively managing tuna fisheries and protecting ocean wildlife is the lack of transparency and inadequate monitoring and data collection of activities at sea. Strengthening transparency through

improved vessel level monitoring and open data sharing is essential to close these knowledge gaps, particularly around bycatch.

Basket of tuna

By revealing what is happening on the water, stakeholders can prioritize action areas, inform coordinated responses, design evidence-based policies, and promote sustainable, accountable fisheries management that protects both marine biodiversity and the livelihoods that depend on it.

SFP, Global Fishing Watch (GFW), and the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) are collaborating to improve transparency in global tuna fisheries by leveraging our extensive databases to help buyers more holistically assess the environmental impacts and compliance of their tuna supply chains.

The collaboration will utilize SFP's FishSource and Seafood Metrics platforms, which buyers widely use to monitor sourcing. It will also integrate information from ISSF's Proactive Vessel Register (PVR) and Vessels in Other Sustainability Initiatives (VOSI), as well as GFW's Vessel Viewer and Marine Manager. These databases include sustainability indicators beyond the health of fish stocks and management practices, to reflect market needs and ensure responsible tuna sourcing.

Visit SFP's Tuna Transparency Science Fair at Seafood Expo North America on March 16 at 1:00pm.

Learn more about the project

Spotlight Organization:

International Whaling Commission (IWC)

The IWC was established in 1946 as the global body responsible for management of whaling and conservation of whales. Today the IWC has 89 member countries and the IWC work program has evolved to meet a fast-expanding array of threats to whales and their habitats.

INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION
80 years of science and stewardship
1946 - 2026

IWC Whale Disentanglement Team Response

Current work programs include capacity building training on entanglement response, bycatch and strandings, other threat-based work including on vessel strikes, pollution from plastics, noise and chemicals, and climate change.

The IWC has also developed a global Whale Watching Handbook for operators, regulators and tourists, and conducts species-based conservation management plans. This work sits alongside the long-standing scientific program to assess the size, structure, behavior and status of whale populations.

IWC Whale Disentanglement Training

Over 300,000 whales and dolphins are estimated to die annually due to bycatch and entanglement in fishing gear. In response to growing concern over the rising number of entanglements and their impact on both whales and responders, the IWC launched a Global Whale Entanglement Response Network (GWERN) in 2011.

The program is a partnership with the Center for Coastal Studies (CCS), Provincetown, Massachusetts considered one of the global leaders in entanglement response. GWERN training has been delivered on five continents, reaching over 1,700 people from more than 43 countries. Trainees range from scientists, conservationists, whale watching operators and fishers to government representatives, regulators and members of naval or coast guard services. A "train the trainer" apprenticeship program has also been developed and led to the training of six additional trainers, including native Spanish and Portuguese speakers.

For more information and video visit the Hub Active Projects Page

Bycatch in the News

- The Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan closure and restricted area for trap/pot and gillnet fisheries gear in Southern New England is now in effect through Spring 2026.

- On February 2, 2026, Canada released its Whalesafe Gear Fishing Gear Strategy (2026-2030). This initiative provides a process to develop and support the implementation of fishing gear innovations designed to reduce the risk of harm to whales from entanglement in fishing gear.

- California has approved the commercial use of innovative pop-up (on-demand) fishing gear for the spring Dungeness crab fishery, allowing commercial crabbing to continue after the April 1 seasonal closures.

- The Maine Department of Marine Resources has released new findings from its Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) program in the US Gulf of Maine. The program recorded more than 80,000 confirmed right whale calls in the Gulf between August 2023 and June 2025.

- NOAA has issues a press release regarding consideration for deregulation of the North Atlantic Right Whale Vessel Speed Rule.

Don't forget to visit the Hub's Bycatch News page for regular bycatch news updates and information.

Upcoming Meetings and Events

Save The Date!

- **April 21-23, 2026:** Seafood Expo Global 2026
- **The** North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium **and** Ropeless Consortium **2026 Annual Meetings will take place between November 16-19, 20926 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.**

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