

What's stopping you from keeping you & your mates safe?

Barriers to the adoption of work, health and safety in the fishing industry.

This project arose from growing concern over increasing numbers of fishers losing their lives at sea, in spite of improved work, health and safety (WHS) equipment, regulation and other measures.

Led by Dr Kate Brooks (KAL Analysis) working with other WHS specialists, industry support and the participation and support of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (with funding from the Fisheries Research & Development Corporation), the project involved three components:

1. A review of previous work and research done on the education about WHS in the Australian fishing industry, and common barriers to its adoption in the fishing and other industries both here in Australia and internationally

The review indicated that improving industry 'safety culture' does result in improved safety at work. However, safety culture does not lie with a single group of people, but is dependent on the collective actions and interactions of fishers, regulators, trainers and management agencies etc. The literature review can be found here: https://www.frdc.com.au/Archived-Reports/FRDC%20Projects/2017-046-Appendix%203_Lit%20Review.pdf

2. A survey of the current perception by fishers of the safety culture in the industry, both face to face in case study regions and voluntary participation on line

Face to face interviews with fishers (N=130) in two case study regions (NSW and WA, from both large and small operations) and an online survey (completed by a further 89 fishers from around Australia) was used to gauge industry's feelings about the Australian wild catch fishing safety culture. Overall, the 291 participants had a slightly positive view of industry's safety culture, acknowledging there is significant room for improvement. Part of this is the need to change the way everyone (industry, regulators etc.) talk about WHS. The survey project report can be found here: https://www.frdc.com.au/Archived-Reports/FRDC%20Projects/2017-046-Appendix%204_WHS%20Survey%20Findings.pdf.

3. A series of focus groups to understand the reasons for the survey responses in much greater depth

Working with 69 fishers from the NSW and WA case study regions, the project team drilled down into the survey results, determining that:

- Fishers **do** want to get themselves and their mates home to their families and friends and see the importance of safety in achieving that;
- There is a separation between what fishers do to keep themselves safe, and what they perceive regulators see as essential to safety, or do to satisfy regulatory requirements;
- Industry is open to improving safety, but don't see that what they perceive as current 'box ticking' approaches, or traditional training courses (e.g. General Purpose Hand (Deckhand) (GPH) Courses) make a difference to their safety as they are not specific to their industry and or sector.
- There are unintended effects of other fisheries regulations, which if addressed could improve safety;
- Opportunities exist for industry to work with regulators, to bridge the separation that currently exists between fisher safety behaviours and regulatory requirements;

The full details of the focus groups findings, using the (unidentified) words of participants, can be found at: https://www.frdc.com.au/Archived-Reports/FRDC%20Projects/2017-046-Appendix%205_Focus%20Group%20Findings.pdf

RECOMMENDATIONS:

As a result of these three components, the project team recommend the following:

1. The seafood industry needs to **share positive experiences and knowledge around WHS, identifying that safety is not only about getting home, but being a smart and successful fisher, who retains crew**. This is not just limited to fishers, but can also be supported by regulators, trainers and management agencies etc.
2. The industry **identifies and promotes** their own **'safety champions'** in each State, sector, co-op, and vessel, to initiate and push ongoing conversations about safety, its benefits, and its connection with being a smart and successful fisher.
3. **Review communication** channels; how the industry receives WHS information from regulators and how feedback from fishers is encouraged, on proposed changes &/or recommended new and improved safety behaviours, equipment and regulations.
4. Improved **collaboration amongst safety regulators and the seafood industry** – ensuring that, through collaboration, is working towards the same goals by improving sector relevance of safety regulations, education and compliance information.
5. Improved **collaboration amongst (State & Federal) government agencies**, to address any unintended safety consequences of non-safety regulatory requirements, or contradictions between state and federal safety arrangements.

AMSA have been working to address elements of these recommendations (see Extension in the final report, p.46) and are reliant on feedback from industry on the effectiveness of these, to ensure better outcomes. These recommended actions are also reliant upon fishers and industry representative groups – sectoral and state– if there is to be a **change in Australia's seafood industry safety culture so that there is nothing stopping you from keeping you and your mates safe!**

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To access the full project report, visit: <https://www.frdc.com.au/project/2017-046>