

“DEGREE”

Developing low-impact fishing gear

For many years now, a lot of people have expressed their concern about the adverse effects that towed fishing gear can have on the seabed and the benthic communities that live on and in the seabed. To counter these effects, there is growing pressure to close significant areas of the sea to fishing which could have significant socio-economic effects on fishing-dependent communities.

Another alternative would be the development of fishing gear with a lower environmental impact.

Closing established areas to fishing may protect some benthic communities but it may also lead to increased exploitation of more vulnerable components of stock and increase the socio-economic strains on fishery-dependent communities. As an alternative to this approach to environmental protection, **DEGREE** will:

- develop new fishing gear that reduces the adverse effects on the seabed and benthic communities;
- quantify the potential reduced effect on habitats and benthic communities; and
- assess the socio-economic consequences of introducing this gear in established fisheries.

The project started in February 2006 and will last for 38 months. It involves 13 participants from 8 different countries.

They will focus on the development of modified towed gears and more in particular on alternative **otter trawl** components (e.g. doors and groundgear), modified **beam trawls** (electric stimulation, benthic release devices), and an alternative **oyster dredge** design to avoid sensitive habitats.

A generic approach has been chosen in which cases (e.g. North Sea, Mediterranean Sea) can be worked out. The overall ecological impact to benthic systems will be assessed by developing physical/biological models which will be verified by tests at sea. This will provide a tool to fisheries managers to identify gear and sediment type combinations which will minimise impact to the habitat. A group of experts will work to appraise the socio-economic consequences of the new gears and techniques.

Throughout the project, special emphasis will be given to consultation with and dissemination of the results of the work to the fishing industry through national Industrial Liaison Groups and an adequate implementation of alternative fishing gears and techniques.

The development of modified, low-impact fishing gear will help the EU and Member States to meet their international obligations for the protection of the marine environment, habitats and species.

DEGREE will inform fishery management decision-makers about environmental protection and the socio-economic

Project acronym:

DEGREE

Full title of Project:

Development of fishing gears with reduced effects on the environment

EU contract number:

022576

Web-site:

www.rivo.dlo.nl/degree/

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consequences of individual decisions.

In addition, the information collected and the gears developed by DEGREE will assist the EU in meeting numerous aspects of declared fishery policy, such as 'adopting measures to reduce the impact of fishing activity on marine ecosystems' (Council Reg. 2371/2002 Art 4).

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ALTERNATIVE FISHING GEAR
SO AS TO REDUCE THE
ADVERSE EFFECTS ON THE
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COMMUNITIES”**