

At Sea Sampling- *Data from the Deck*



The Marine Institute *At-Sea Sampling Program* collects data at sea on commercial demersal, pelagic and shellfish vessels and is an important input into the fisheries assessment process. The data collected from the deck of commercial vessels covers the full length-frequency and the full breath of all species that interact with the gear on any given trip. As not all fish that interact with the gear are brought ashore sampling at sea is vital to capture this data. Fishing operations are driven by many factors including target species, stock abundance, quota allocation, fishing gear design/deployment, environmental factors such as weather tide etc and the *At-Sea Sampling Program* is not designed to “see what is on the ground” it is designed to see how that trip and its fishing operations interact with the species it encounters. The data collected on the *At-Sea Sampling Program* helps give a better stock assessment mainly by capturing more accurately the fishing related mortality on various species. The program running for more that 30yrs also tracks developments in gear/fleet operations and how this fishing related mortality has changed.

Operationally the *At-Sea Sampling Program* is run via two streams a) The *Sampler@Sea* component and b) the *At-Sea Self Sampling* (a subsample of what *Sampler@Sea* would collect) With the *Sampler@Sea* program a MI trained sampler sails with the vessel on a standard fishing trip and collects the data on as many fishing operations as possible according to the MI sampling protocol collecting data on the gear deployment/retrieval, capturing catch data, taking samples, measuring fish in unison with the natural flow of a fishing trip. With the *At-Sea Self Sampling* the skipper and crew collect data and samples according to the *At-Sea Self Sampling* protocol. This protocol developed in conjunction with the Irish fishing industry is designed to sample with minimal intrusion on fishing practices according to a protocol that follows the natural flow on a boat. As this stream is not as comprehensive as *Sampler@Sea* program it is in addition and does not replace data collected by the *Sampler@Sea*. The skipper collects metadata on the fishing operations & catch and brings a sample ashore for MI trained staff to collect, measure and input. A nominal amount is paid to the vessel for the provision of the data and samples. The *At-Sea Self Sampling* stream facilitates collection of data at sea where there are space limitations on carrying a sampler. If possible, carrying a sampler is most effective way to collect data at sea with a trained expert doing the work with only a minimal intrusion on crew.

The *At-Sea Sampling Program* as stated is a critically important input into the stock assessment process. It is dependant on the close co-operation of the fleet with the scientists and relies heavily on the goodwill of the skippers/crews involved. The program works best with maximum participation where the engagement is widespread across the fleet and more importantly where the sampling is spread across multiple vessels and trips. Analysis has shown that better more accurate data is returned from increased number of trips. We would ask you all to get involved, please contact Macdara Ó Cuaig Fisheries Liaison Team Leader (087 2075988) for further information on how to participate. We all know data from the deck is best please assist in getting more data from the deck into the stock assessment process.