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Islanders leading seafood traceability initiative

Fishing communities on Vancouver Island are leading the country in seafood traceability. Launched by Vancouver-based nonprofit Ecotrust Canada in collaboration with the commercial fishing industry, 'Thisfish' is an online traceability system that allows consumers to trace their seafood back to the fisherperson who caught it.

'This seafood traceability project is helping to bring a traditional resource industry into the Internet Age,' says Phil Kent, mayor of Duncan and chair of the Island Coastal Economic Trust, which provided a grant of \$50,000 to develop the Thisfish system.

Almost five million pounds of seafood from Pacific and Atlantic fisheries were traceable through Thisfish last year. One third of the total was landed in Vancouver Island communities and the fisheries with the highest levels of traceability took place on the Island. About 18% of all troll-caught Chinook salmon on the West Coast of Vancouver Island was traceable through Thisfish, along with 17% of halibut, 10% of Barkley Sound Sockeye and 9% of sablefish.

This initiative began in 2008 when Vancouver Island

fishermen approached Ecotrust Canada to develop homegrown technology to trace our catch,' says Kathy Scarfo, president of the West Coast Trollers Association and a project partner. 'We have pioneered a traceability system that is now catching on across the country and beyond.' Teams of computer engineers, web developers, project planners and fisherpeople worked together to build a high-tech, user-friendly solution for seafood traceability.

Using Thisfish, fishermen identify their catch with a unique code that follows the catch through the supply chain. Fisherpeople upload the codes and catch information to www.Thisfish.info. Seafood companies can also upload details on the processing and handling of catch. Ultimately, consumers use the unique codes to trace the origins of their seafood on Internet-enabled devices, such as smartphones and tablet computers.

In 2011, 262 fishing vessels landed catch that was traceable through Thisfish, including 120 vessels in BC. Eleven different Pacific species of fish were traceable through Thisfish. 