

Interview training for fisheries scientists: Truth or dare?

Vandendriessche Sofie, Greet Riebbels, Jochen Depestele, Bart Vanelslander, Tomas Willems, Hans Hillewaert and Arne Kinds

Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research ILVO, Burgemeester Van Gansberghelaan 92, 9820 Merelbeke, Belgium
E-mail: Sofie.Vandendriessche@ilvo.vlaanderen.be

News on fish, shellfish and crustaceans is of public interest and is widely reported in the general media. Consequently, fisheries scientists are frequently consulted and interviewed. Unfortunately, they often bring “bad news”: declining fish stocks, increasing pollution, fish fraud, damage to the seabed, wasteful discarding practices, etc. In many cases, this is bad news for fishermen as well, not in the least because public perception drives the market demand. Fisheries scientists, however, partly depend on their interactions with these fishermen in doing their research. Think about seagoing observers gathering data during commercial fishing trips, about fishing gear innovations being tested onboard fishing vessels, or the retrieval of tagged fish in scientific tagging programs. Consequently, communicating about fisheries science is often like walking a tight rope, balancing between informing the public and safeguarding future cooperation with the fisheries sector.

Keeping this balance while interacting with journalists is difficult: interviews may take an undesirable turn, quotes may be taken out of their context, or nuances may get omitted during video or text editing. After an incident where a quote of an ILVO scientist about tropical shrimp fisheries was taken out of its context, to the dismay of the North Sea shrimp fishermen, ILVO scientists decided to organize a practical interview training. A professional journalist was asked to conduct provocative interviews with 10 volunteers, both scientists and technical staff members. These interviews were filmed, edited and discussed in group. The interview training resulted in guidelines, do’s and don’ts, and practical tips and tricks for interacting with the general media.