

NEAFC

Note on Ghost Fishing and Lost and Abandoned Gear

Prepared by the Secretariat

Introduction

The Secretariat participated in the DEEPNET project, which has specifically addressed ghost fishing in deep waters in the North East Atlantic. The project was organised by Nils-Roar Hareide, Norway in cooperation with the Marine Institute, Ireland, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, Ireland, the Directorate of Fisheries, Norway, Marine Institute, Norway, Seafish Authority, Great Britain, North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) and Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), Great Britain. The project undertook observer cruises and a gear retrieval campaign.

The Secretariat was also invited to participate in a workshop where “ghost fishing by lost fishing gear” was addressed. The workshop provided expertise to elaborate a final report on the issue.

The workshop

The workshop took place in Brussels on 10-11 May 2005 and a report was produced after the findings of the different workgroups established according to geographical areas and/or specific gears and practices.

Participants represented fishermen's organisations (GBR, NOR, SWE), national authorities (FRA, GRC, GBR, IRL, NOR, POL, PRT, SWE), supra-national organisations (EC-DG Fish, NEAFC) and universities, research centres and international consultants, totalling 24 participants.

The final report

‘Ghost fishing’ is the term given to the continued fishing by fishing gear that has been lost or abandoned. It is largely confined to ‘passive gears’ such as gillnets, trammel nets, wreck nets, and traps. It is a phenomenon that has attracted attention over the past two decades given the sometimes graphic images of fish and other marine life entangled in lost nets, illustrating the potentially wasteful and destructive impacts of lost fishing gear. However, the real extent of the problem is not well known at the present time.

The previous statement opens the final report produced by IEEP and POSEIDON in August 2005.

The report is divided into seven major chapters addressing the different perspectives of the “ghost fishing” problem. These chapters are:

- Existing information and studies;
- Prevention and mitigation of gear loss – retrieval programmes;
- Environmental impact of lost gear;
- Research gaps;
- Selection of key fisheries for detailed overview;
- Assessment of cost and benefit of management options;
- Conclusions.

Conclusions of relevance to NEAFC

“Extent of ghost fishing

- *Each fishery is very different and should be judged on its own merit. The causes and extent of net loss varies considerably*
- *Perhaps of over-riding importance is that a key finding of both the literature review and workshop is that the deep water gillnet fisheries targeting deep water shark and monkfish almost certainly represent a problem that is of a greater scale than all other net fisheries in European waters. As well as posing problems in this fishery, the practices pose a threat to the reputation of all other gillnet fisheries. Ghost fishing in other fisheries considered during the study is of far less concern, and it is important that they are not tarred with the same brush as the deep water fisheries. However, even in these fisheries some ghost fishing may occur, and therefore future management and research actions may also be appropriate, although less pressing.*
- *The impact of ghost fishing has to be taken in the context of overall catches and the environmental impacts of other (active and passive) gear, and when compared to the environmental impacts of active gear are probably minimal*
- *The fate of lost gear varies under different conditions – FANTARED showed that gears in shallower dynamic conditions tend to stop fishing earlier sometimes after just a few months, while gear lost/discarded in deep water with little tidal/current activity can continue to fish for years rather than months. In all cases however, the catching efficiency of lost nets decreases rapidly at first, with the rate of decline in catching efficiency decreasing over time*

Management options

- *The lack of perfect knowledge about ghost fishing should not be taken as a reason for inaction – a wide range of management initiatives could be undertaken immediately at relatively low cost*
- *The prioritisation of management options at the workshop was very different between fisheries – serving to emphasize that different approaches are essential at regional or fisheries-specific levels. The ranking of management options as*

presented in section 7.3 provides direction for future management action in the fisheries considered as part of this study

- *Specific steps need to be developed specifically for deep water fisheries, both in EU and international waters. These include enforcing existing laws and developing new measures*

Retrieval programmes

- *While gear retrieval programmes may be considered necessary where there is a high concentration of lost nets, as a curative management measure, preventative measures should take priority. At the least, gear retrieval programmes should be used in conjunction with preventative measures*
- *Only small areas of fishing ground can be covered in retrieval campaigns so very precise information on the location of lost gears is essential – requiring, in turn, accurate reporting of gear losses by fishermen*
- *Self-retrieval by fishermen immediately after loss is preferable to government-organised retrieval programmes*
- *Government-organised retrieval programmes may be more appropriate (and essential for continuation of the fishery) for deeper fisheries where the risk of gear loss may be unavoidable*
- *The relative costs and benefits of retrieval programmes should be evaluated before taking a decision to deploy them*

Key environmental issues

- *Lost fishing gear may impact on the environment in a large number of different ways, including:*
 - *continued catching of target species;*
 - *capture of non-target fish and shellfish;*
 - *entanglement of sea turtles, marine mammals and sea birds in lost nets and debris;*
 - *ingestion of gear-related litter by marine fauna;*
 - *physical impact of gears on the benthic environment; and*
 - *the ultimate fate of lost gear in the marine environment with particulate matter being introduced to the food chain*
- *When comparing static gear with mobile gears, mobile gear has much higher impacts in terms of non-target species catch and discards, as well as habitat and biodiversity damage. Actively fishing static gears tend to be very selective and have negligible habitat impacts, although they may occasionally incur incidental catch of marine mammals in certain situations. Once control of these nets is lost, the potential for habitat damage is more likely, but still not considered profound nor extensive. There is however increased potential for entanglement of marine mammals and sea birds as net fragments are washed inshore.”*

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Note Both reports are available on NEAFC's website.