

**News item from Norwegian TV 2 20 May 2005**

Spanish fishermen are letting fish for millions of Norwegian Crowns decay in the sea. They put out far too many nets and don't care about taking them up again. The result is that the fishing grounds have become a junkyard, says Norwegian fishermen.

These are ghost fishing nets, and there are many of them. Year after year, the ghost fishing nets drain the sea for fish. When the crabs have eaten all the fish, the nets start fishing again.

And here are the culprits. The Norwegian Coast Guard surprised this Spanish fishing vessel outside Stadt on the western coast of Norway. Most of the fish is rotten, because the nets have been in the sea for two weeks. And when the stinking fish has been taken aboard the vessel, they dump the nets, and they end up as ghost fishing nets.

Nils Myklebust, leader of the Fishermens association in the County of Sogn og Fjordane says:

*We describe this as the worst kind of environmental crime.*

The last couple of years, an alarming culture has evolved on the fishing grounds on the coast of Scotland and Ireland. Every fishing vessel fish with thousands of nets which is in the sea for several weeks before they are tended to.

Some of the nets are up to 350 kilometers long. That is the same as casting nets from Bergen across the North Sea to Shetland. The vessels need up to one week to tend the nets.

Nils Myklebust, leader of the Fishermens association in the County of Sogn and Fjordane says:

*This has now become an enormous problem. The fact that there are a lot of nets which are constantly fishing without being tended, is a great concern to us.*

Spanish fishermen are the worst of the bad guys. The explanation for this meaningless fishery is that the fleet of nets are so huge that the vessel would sink if the fleet of nets had been taken aboard the vessel. Therefore the fleets of nets are being put back into the sea while the vessels go to port to land the catch.

What is unbelievable, is that this is totally legal. In contradiction to Norway, EU doesn't have any rules for net fishing.

Robert Misund, senior adviser, Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries says:

*It is our opinion that the EUs technical regulations are insufficient in this area. Neither does EU have controls at sea that we can fully trust.*

Back on the Spanish fishing vessel, 65 per cent of the catch was rotten. Since the Coast Guard was filming, the rotten fish was put in plastic bags. When the vessel was outside Norwegian waters, all the plastic bags of rotten fish were dumped in the sea.

Norwegian marine scientists estimate that 25 000 nets are lost in the deep sea fisheries in these waters every year. The total numbers of ghost fishing nets are probably several hundred thousand, where fish for millions of Norwegian Crowns is decaying.

**News item from Norwegian TV 2 21 September 2005**

Old ghost fishing nets left on the bottom of the sea threaten to extinguish several deep sea species. Norwegian authorities are among the few in Europe who is taking this environmental threat seriously. So far they have removed more than 11 000 ghost fishing nets retrieved from the fishing grounds along the Norwegian coast.

A half-eaten halibut draws its last breath among the dead and rotten fish surrounding it. As meter upon meter of ghost fishing nets is taken aboard, the pile of dead fish and the stench on the deck grows. In a period of 10 days, more than 550 nets were retrieved along the coast of western and northern Norway.

Robert Misund, senior adviser, Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries says:

*There are substantial amounts of fish in those nets, it is really alarming, and it is frightening to see.*

These pictures are taken from the Directorate of Fisheries annual retrieval of ghost fishing nets along the coast. From one single fleet of nets, they cut of 1 500 kilos of fish. Several of the nets have been ghost fishing for a period of almost 10 years.

Robert Misund, senior adviser, Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries says:

*What is even worse, is that several of the species found in these nets, are in a very poor state. I am specifically thinking of species such as Greenland halibut and anglerfish. These species are according to the marine scientists not harvested sustainably.*

Over the last 25 years, more than 11 000 ghost fishing nets have been retrieved. Norwegian authorities have taken this environmental threat seriously, while many other countries do not.

Knut Arne Høyvik, public relation manager, Norwegian Fishermens Association says;

*I think lost nets is a minor problem in Norway compared to the situation in the EU. Having said that, it is important that we see this in Norway as well so that we continue to retrieve lost nets. The cooperation between the fishermen and the authorities in this field, and the system with reporting lost nets, should constantly be improved.*

In any case, the Norwegian Sea will never be emptied of ghost fishing nets.

Robert Misund, senior adviser, Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries says:

*We can't solve the problem, not at all, but hopefully we can reduce it.*

**News item from Norwegian TV 2 25 September 2005**

EU is considering banning gill net fishing outside the coast of Scotland and Ireland. The reason is that Spanish fishermen are leaving the nets in the sea for several months at the time, without tending them, which is a threat to rare fish species.

For the first time, and with Norwegian assistance, one has now started to remove ghost fishing nets.

The trawler “India Rose” comes to port after a very special fishing expedition. But there is no hearty atmosphere on board. The crew is shocked about the catches they did in the Atlantic.

Myles Mulligan, Irish Directorate of Fisheries says:

*We were hauling up bits and pieces of rotten fish or maybe even like the Walt Disney cartoons where you only have the bone.*

But this is not a cartoon. Tons of rotten and useless fish is hauled up on deck.

Myles Mulligan says:

*We used three anchors side by side.*

With technology developed in Norway, the sea bottom is trawled for thousand of nets lost or dumped in the sea. For the first time, Ireland has carried out a retrieval of nets, like Norway has done for the last 20 years. About time!

Myles Mulligan says:

*We got to the area. We literally tossed the anchors over the stern into the water. We trawled for one hour, hauled it up, and there was nets on it. We took three hauls on spec, and we get nets. So how much gear is actually down there – I don't know!*

Tons of fish rot in the ghost fishing nets, which never stop to fish. When the crab has had its meal, new fish swims into the trap.

Marine scientist Nils Roar Hareide who was in charge of the Irish cruise, is shocked over the extent.

Marine scientist Nils Roar Hareide says:

*All these blue lines are net that nets that vessels have left out there. We have calculated that this is about 300 kilometers. You see this area here, and how big it is compared to the rest of the world!*

On one single cruise, this one vessel has retrieved 800 nets from the sea bottom outside the coast of Ireland.

TV 2 have previously shown Spanish owned fishing vessels who leave very long nets fish for several months without tending them. The fishermen don't seem to care about the fact that most of the catch is rotten and only a small part of it is eatable.

Myles Mulligan says:

*Why are they doing it? It is big money, serious money. If you shoot enough gear and you get x percentage out of that, you are making money.*

What is unbelievable, is that this is totally legal. There are no rules against this meaningless fishery. But after pressure from Norway, EU considers to ban all net fishing in this area. The decision can be taken as early as next week.