



Ghosts beneath the waves

2nd Edition



Introduction

The 2018 *Ghosts Beneath the Waves* report described in detail the origins, causes and effects of the problem of ghost gear. For the first time, World Animal Protection reported on a baseline study of how 15 of the world's largest seafood companies were dealing with the issue of ghost gear in their operations. This 2019 report provides an update on the ghost gear problem and important work undertaken to address it during 2018. The second iteration of the company assessment includes analysis of an additional 10 companies' management of ghost gear.

The problem of ghost gear

Ghost gear is the name given to abandoned, lost, and discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) that, instead of being disposed of responsibly, stays in the ocean, killing and mutilating millions of marine animals – including whales, seals and turtles. Animals are four times more likely to be impacted by fishing gear through entanglement than all other forms of marine debris combined.

It is estimated that ghost gear is accumulating in the ocean at a rate of at least 800,000 tonnes every year, or about 10% of all the plastic that enters into the ocean. That's one tonne every 40 seconds and this is considered to be an underestimate the true scale of the problem.

Causes

Gear loss is often attributed to bad weather and gear conflict, but recent research is contributing to our understanding of the causes of this global problem. Fishers identify snagging of nets and gear conflict as the primary causes of gear loss. However, these causes lie at the end of a chain of events that leads eventually to fishing gear loss. Ultimately, over-allocation of legal fishing licenses and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing are significant factors which can result in overcrowding, leading in turn to gear conflict or driving vessels to riskier grounds where gear is more likely to snag or be swept away.

Policy solutions

The year 2018 marked several major milestones in the international policy response to the growing challenge of ghost gear, which was the result of advocacy by World Animal Protection, the Global Ghost Gear Initiative (GGGI) and other partners. New commitments and policy tools support action, collaboration and increased accountability for governments. Some key policy steps include:

- Member States of the United Nations (UN) Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) adopted the Voluntary Guidelines for the Marking of Fishing Gear, which gives FAO a platform to ensure its members take action on ghost gear. FAO has also committed to develop a global strategy to address ALDFG as well as an umbrella programme of work delivering this strategy.
- In 2018 the European Commission tabled an important legal proposal to tackle marine litter, which will address single use plastics as well as derelict fishing gear and contribute to Europe's transition towards a circular economy. The European Plastics Strategy has the potential to act as a benchmark for the world in establishing systems to responsibly manage fishing gear.
- The International Whaling Commission (IWC) adopted the Ghost Gear Resolution during its meeting in Brazil (IWC67). This new resolution will enable the IWC – and the countries that are members – to dedicate more efforts and resources for the responsible management of fishing gear to prevent whale entanglements.
- World Animal Protection has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the United Nations Environment (UNEP) to support the work of the GGGI and advance the aims of their Clean Seas campaign. The engagement with UNEP also included supporting the First National Seminar on Marine litter in Brazil, which led to the creation of the National Commission on Marine Litter, coordinated by the Brazilian Government.



Image: A loggerhead turtle is trapped in a ghost net in the Mediterranean sea.

Jordi Chias / naturepl.com

Cover image: Scalloped hammerhead in net. Malpelo Sanctuary, Colombia, Pacific Ocean.

Pascal Kobeh / Nature Picture Library

GGGI: Growing support, new projects and solutions

Since it was launched by World Animal Protection in 2015, the GGGI has grown to 96 participant organisations spanning 5 continents and has the official support of 14 governments.

In 2018, the GGGI officially launched eight solutions projects, with a number of others in development. The working groups also collaborated to plan and deliver workshops and capacity-building support to encourage the uptake of best practices to prevent the risks of ALDFG. Through our advocacy, governments have recognised that ghost gear is an important problem and are putting ambitious targets in place to tackle the issue head on. The European Union adopted stronger policies on fishing gear – with an ambitious target of collecting 50% of fishing nets and recycling 15% of fishing nets by 2025 – while countries such as the Netherlands and Indonesia are collaborating on implementing the new gear marking guidelines.

The GGGI has also worked to inform the practices of large seafood companies, including Thai Union and Tri Marine, to tackle ghost gear in their operations and supply chains. Certifiers, such as the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), are considering taking the recommendations of the Best Practice Framework for the Management of Fishing Gear (BPF) on board in the revision of their sustainability standards this year.

The eight new projects started this year through GGGI demonstrate a range of solutions from preventing lost gear through to implementing a circular approach for managing old or abandoned fishing gear to create new streams or revenue and environmental benefits. Projects span fisheries and coastlines around the globe and engage a range of stakeholders from individual fishers to volunteers to large corporations and governments. Together, these projects are making a real difference in their local communities while showing the way toward a global response to the ghost gear menace.



Image: World Animal Protection's gear marking project in Indonesia is helping to tackle the problem of ghost gear.

Company assessments

This time we have expanded the set of companies covered to 25. Using a rigorous and objective methodology, we examined how the performance of the original 15 has changed in the intervening year. The results show a distinct improvement. There's a lot still to be done, but seafood companies are beginning to recognize their crucial role in protecting the oceans and the people, businesses, communities and animals that depend on it through better management of ghost gear.

Almost all of the companies assessed are active on marine conservation and fisheries sustainability, and many already have elements of the management systems and processes they need to effectively manage the issue of ALDFG. However, it is also clear that ghost gear is not yet receiving the explicit attention that it needs for seafood companies to fully address their part in the issues associated with ALDFG.

Our analysis and discussions with companies suggest that this reflects a lack of awareness, a lack of clarity on the actions that might be taken, the lack of obvious practical ways that they can take action or contribute, and the lack of external pressure to address ghost gear. If we can address these three barriers, we will create the conditions for seafood companies to be more fully engaged in the issue of ALDFG. This report outlines practical steps that all stakeholders can take to advance global action to address ghost gear.

Overall results

Tier 1 Leader: setting best practice on ALDFG	Tier 2 Achiever: ALDFG integral to business strategy	Tier 3 Improver: established, but work to be done on approach to ALDFG	Tier 4 Engaged: on the agenda, but limited evidence of implementation on ALDFG	Tier 5 Not engaged: no evidence that ALDFG is on the business agenda
None of the assessed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bolton Group • Thai Union • Tri Marine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bumble Bee Foods • Grupo Nueva Pescanova 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Seafoods • Cargill Aqua Nutrition • Dongwon Industries • Grupo Calvo • High Liner Foods • Nippon Suisan (Nissui) • Nutreco • Pacific Seafood Group • Princes • Young's Seafood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Andrew Marr International • Austevoll • Beaver Street Fisheries • Camil • Clearwater Seafoods • Cooke Seafood • East Coast Seafood Group • Frinsa • Maruha Nichiro Corporation • Samherji

A global problem, a global solution

Marine plastic pollution and the harm it causes to sea life and the environment received unprecedented attention from the scientific community and global news media during 2018. With the sense of urgency to tackle this problem increasing, the number of effective, innovative solutions has grown exponentially too, changing the narrative from raising awareness about the issue to highlighting how people can be part of the solution.

However, ghost gear as a major global problem is not yet adequately addressed by key actors of change such as seafood companies. While three of the world's leading seafood companies have taken action on ghost gear and have now made best practice on ghost gear integral to their business strategies compared to last year, no companies achieved Tier 1 status.

If we agree that ghost gear has a significant impact on global fish stock levels, the marine environment, our future health and all marine life, then we must also agree that global coordinated and effective action is necessary as part of the effort to make fisheries sustainable. Industry, as well as players like governments, non-government organisations, the private sector and academia, all have a role in shaping a better future for our oceans and the life within them. By raising more awareness, presenting clear actions and increasing external attention to the problem we can create a clearer pathway and incentive for change, and will see more companies and others join us in the fight against ghost gear.