



Executive summary

Fishing's phantom menace



How ghost fishing gear is endangering our sea life

Ocean death trap

Our oceans are an unsafe place to live. Every year millions of animals, including whales, seals, turtles and birds, are mutilated and killed by 'ghost' fishing gear - nets, lines and traps that are abandoned, lost or discarded in our oceans.

This report shows the scale of this problem, and the particular threat ghost gear poses to our most iconic marine animals. Among the animals most frequently reported wounded and killed are fur seals, sea lions, and humpback and right whales.

Critically, we conclude that it is possible to solve the problem through cross-sectoral cooperation and action between the seafood industry, governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) conservatively estimate that some 640,000 tonnes of fishing gear are left in our oceans each year. In just one deep water fishery in the north-east Atlantic some 25,000 nets, totalling around 1,250km in length, were recorded lost or discarded annually.

#seachange

We were known as **WSPA**
(World Society for the
Protection of Animals)



Photo left: Juvenile gray whale entangled in ghost gear. North Pacific Ocean. Brandon Cole/naturepl.com”

Photo reverse: Female grey seal entangled in a ghost net, Devon, United Kingdom. Alex Mustard/naturepl.com

Each net is a floating death trap. For example, when 870 ghost nets were recovered off Washington State in the US, they contained more than 32,000 marine animals, including more than 500 birds and mammals.

Animals entangled may either drown within minutes, or endure long, slow deaths lasting months or even years, suffering from debilitating wounds, infection and starvation.

Analysing the current scientific evidence available, World Animal Protection estimates that entanglement in ghost gear kills at least 136,000 seals, sea lions and large whales every year. An inestimable number of birds, turtles, fish and other species are also injured and killed.

What lies beneath

Ghost fishing gear often travels long distances from its point of origin and accumulates in hotspots around oceanic currents. Even remote Antarctic habitats are not free from this pollution – every ocean and sea on earth is affected.

A recent scientific expedition to southern Alaska’s beaches found up to a tonne of garbage per mile, much of it plastic fishing nets and lines washed in by the tides.

The materials used to make fishing gear cause long-lasting dangers. The plastics used are very durable, some persisting in the oceans for up to 600 years. Some are almost invisible in the water, and they are extremely strong and resistant to biting and chewing by entangled animals so they cannot escape.

The net effect

As well as causing needless animal suffering and death, ghost fishing gear causes large-scale damage to marine ecosystems and compromises yields and income in fisheries. US researchers have estimated, for example, that a single ghost net can kill almost \$20,000 (USD) worth of Dungeness crab over 10 years.

Governments and marine industries spend many millions of dollars annually to clean up and repair damage caused by ghost gear. It also threatens human life and health, particularly divers and those trying to navigate the oceans in both small and large vessels.

Sea change in the oceans: campaign to save a million lives

Launching in 2014, World Animal Protection’s Sea Change campaign aims to save 1 million marine animals by 2018. We will do this by measurably reducing the volume of ghost gear added to our seas, removing gear that is already there, and rescuing animals already entangled.

At the heart of our campaign approach is our plan to form a cross-sectoral Global Ghost Gear Initiative, uniting people and organisations with the knowledge, power and influence to deliver solutions for ghost-gear-free seas.

With the Global Ghost Gear Initiative, we aim to forge an alliance of governments, industry, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, with a shared commitment to understanding and tackling the problem of ghost fishing gear.

The initiative will share data, intelligence and resources to understand global ghost gear abundance, causes, impacts and trends. Critically, it will enable the expansion and replication of the most effective solutions to reduce ghost gear at source and remove existing gear, as well as the development of new solutions. The initiative will direct and drive solution delivery in ghost gear hotspots, and create opportunities for provision of seed funding of solution projects using best practice models. It will also enable global monitoring and showcasing of the impact of solution projects to catalyse further change.

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