

PROBLUE GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT FORUM

Lost At Sea: Combating Abandoned, Lost and Otherwise, Discarded Fishing Gear

Salons de l'hôtel des Ars et Métiers, 9 bis avenue d'Iena, 75116 (Paris, France), Sunday, May 28, 2023, 13:00 – 16:30 (Paris time)

ALDFG: A Small-scale Fisheries Perspective

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Overview

Small-scale fishing is often a way of life and an integral part of unbroken traditions and culture of many coastal communities, including the Indigenous Peoples.

Small-scale fishers are men, women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples who are dependent on fisheries for their lives and livelihoods. They provide cheap nutrient-dense fish to millions of poor people across the world, including children and lactating mothers.

Marine small-scale fishing is likely the sector with the largest employment in the ocean economy. There are currently an estimated 14.6 million marine small-scale fishers in the world, including 2.7 million women (18.7%), and another 16.8 million subsistence fishers.¹

Most of the small-scale fishers are located in developing countries in Africa and Asia, and small island developing States, including low-income food-deficit countries and they do not have easy access to other employment opportunities.

¹ FAO, Duke University & World Fish. 2023. Illuminating Hidden Harvests - The Contributions of Small-scale Fisheries to Sustainable Development. Rome: <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc4576en>.

Small-scale fisheries account for the largest share of fishing vessels in the world. Of the 4.1 million fishing vessels—mostly marine— 37% are non-motorized.² Of the 2.5 million motorized fishing vessels, 83% are below 12 m OAL. Small-scale fisheries also account for the largest number of people fishing with gear, but without any vessel.

Small-scale fishers use a variety of passive gear such as beach seine, traps and pots, handlines and long lines, several types of gillnets (fixed gill net, set gillnet, anchored gillnet, drift gillnet), trammel net; gears with aggregating devices; and active gears such as non-tuna purse seines and trolls. They are fully dependent on synthetic gear material, and the market for procuring it.

While 66% of the catch is taken in passive gear, 11% is taken in encircling gear and 3% in gears with aggregating devices.³

One percent of the total plastic pollution in the world is from fishing activities, and two percent of all fishing gear is lost or abandoned each year.⁴

It has been shown that the highest-risk ALDFGs are: trammel net, set and fixed gillnet, drift gillnet, traps and pots and gears with aggregating devices, and the lowest risk ALDFGs include beach seine, demersal long line, troll, and non-tuna purse seine.⁵

All these gears, especially the highest-risk types are extensively used in passive small-scale fishing operations.

In light of international negotiations toward a legally-binding agreement on plastic pollution in 2024, among other things, to improve cooperation, coordination and coherence across authorities, manufacturers and users, we propose the following action points to reduce the impact of ghost fishing from ALDFGs on the marine environment and marine and coastal biodiversity.

² FAO. 2022. The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture – Towards Blue Transformation.

³ FAO, Duke University & WorldFish. 2023.

⁴ Richardson, K. et al. 2019. Estimates of fishing gear loss rates at a global scale: A literature review and meta-analysis. *Fish and Fisheries*, vol. 20, no. 6, pp. 1218–1231.

⁵ Gilman et al. 2021. Highest risk abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear. *Nature Scientific Reports*. 11:7195 <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-86123-3>.

Action Points

- **Introduce cost-effective marine litter recovery, recycling and disposal** initiatives/facilities with community participation at the local level, including with the participation of women in litter segregation and recycling and upholding extended producer responsibility (EPR) in relation to all plastics, including fishing gear;
- **Provide a litter-free marine environment** in nearshore waters to undertake small-scale fishing;
- **Organize marine traffic**, among other things, to prevent damage to and loss of fishing gear;⁶
- **Adopt measures to minimize catch by ALDFG** through gear modifications, observance of closed areas and seasons and zones reserved for small-scale fishing in consultation with fishing communities. Segregate fishing grounds for active and passive fishing gear operations;⁷
- **Develop and apply technologies, materials and operational methods that minimize the loss of fishing gear** and the ghost fishing effects of ALDFG;⁸ In this context, promote non-entangling gear designs and materials, natural, improved-natural and biodegradable materials in the construction of FADs, and fabrication of fishing nets/traps/pots and raise awareness among fishing communities;
- **Implement a gear marking system applicable to small-scale fishing, in consultation with fishers**, together with reporting, recovery and safe disposal of ALDFG, taking into account how gear marking can reduce conflicts, help monitor and retrieve ALDFG, combat IUU fishing and improve safety at sea:^{9, 10}
- **Apply a risk-based approach to implementing gear marking systems** to reduce ALDGF by addressing factors contributing to ALDFG such as the type of fishing gear, weather, sea bottom conditions, equipment failure, the level of fishing effort in a particular area, human error and safety considerations

⁶ FAO. 1995. Code of Conducts for Responsible Fisheries. Rome. (Article 8.4.1)

⁷ FAO. 1995. Code of Conducts for Responsible Fisheries. Rome. (Article 7.6.9)

⁸ FAO. 1995. Code of Conducts for Responsible Fisheries. Rome. (Article 8.4.6)

⁹ FAO. 1995. Code of Conducts for Responsible Fisheries. Rome. (Article 8.2.2)

¹⁰ FAO. 2019. Voluntary Guidelines on the Marking of Fishing Gear. Rome.

as well as gear conflicts and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing;¹¹

- **Develop standards and best practice frameworks** for managing fishing gear;
- **Provide subsidies** to reduce ALDFG through gear modifications, to move to biodegradable fishing gear, to buyback used gear and/or to provide gear replacements; treat these subsidies as good subsidies contributing to improved fisheries management;
- **Ensure social protection to fishers to offset income losses** from fishing gear modifications reducing catch efficiency, from extended closed areas and seasons, and from the introduction of a gear marking system to combat ASDFG.

While welcoming a legally-binding international instrument to end plastic pollution, including ALDFG, in 2024, the latter should be addressed also in a consultative and participatory manner—sensitive to the livelihood, employment, culture, food security and nutrition dimensions of small-scale fishing and coastal fishing communities—through improved fisheries management, applying a human rights-based approach, and upholding the principles of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).¹²

¹¹ FAO. 2019. Voluntary Guidelines on the Marking of Fishing Gear. Rome.

¹² See : <https://www.unep.org/reducing-plastic-pollution-through-extended-producer-responsibility>