LIFE18-NAT/IT/000103

COLLECTIVE ACTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE CONSERVATION STATUS OF THE EU SEA TURTLE POPULATIONS: BORDERING AREAS (LIFE MEDTURTLES)

Code of conduct for fishermen

August 2022

Collective actions for improving the conservation status of the EU sea turtle populations: bordering areas (LIFE18NAT/IT/000103). Project is carried out with the assistance of LIFE financial instrument of the European Union / **info@medturtles.eu**

Abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear (ALDFG), also known as “ghost gear”, include all kinds of fishing equipment that are lost in marine environments. The so-called “ghost gears” are considered to be the deadliest form of waste to marine life. They are an inevitable by-product of global fishing which most of us neither see nor consider dangerous. Many aquatic life that gets caught or entangled in the abandoned fishing gears, nets or traps die, suffering a slow and painful death from suffocation or exhaustion.

Unfortunately, not even fishermen who spend their lives overseas realize the detrimental effects of the fishing gears that they lose or abandon each season.

Due to the adverse effect that lost nets have on marine environments, immediate action must be taken to reduce them.

Gear tags and lost/taken gears reporting requirements require individual accountability to be effective and linking them as a custodial responsibility attached to the fishing license could be an effective approach. It is essential to have licensing authorities under the relevant fisheries management entities.

Fishermen’s awareness and trust building with fishers is essential to ensure effective results supporting the ethical motivation of fishermen for the responsible management of fishing equipment.

Some action fishermens can do to reduce the amount of ghost gears:

- In case when the lost equipment is not found, the owner of the boat must notify the relevant inspector for
    a) external identification number and name of the fishing boat;
    b) type of the lost gear;
    c) the time of the loss of this gear;
    d) position of the lost gear;
    e) measures taken to find the lost gear.
- Whoever finds thrown, lost or abandoned equipment such as boats or other equipment, must report this to HAS as soon as possible. Whoever saves lost equipment has the right to get rewarded. This reward will be determined in accordance with the amount considered to be reasonable. The amount of the reward cannot exceed the value of what was saved.
- Fishermen must mark their fishing equipment. Designers and manufacturers of fishing equipment must design and build equipment that are tracked by marking their main components. This will allow fishermen to keep track of their gear, support effective recovery efforts as well as help combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. In this way, we can make an effective inventory of the amount of gears used in fishing thus helping to quantify their lost amount.
- Fishermen using fixed equipment and floating lines must report to the Coast Guard when and where they will deploy and retrieve their equipment. The locations of deployed devices will be posted on a website, which allows other boats in the area to avoid the equipment and possible entanglement. This system helps reduce net conflict and prevent net loss.

- Anyone who loses an equipment has a duty to search for it. Fishermen are required to retrieve the lost gear or if recovery fails, report the loss within 24 hours of the recovery attempt to the national authority that has licensed the fishing vessel. Reporting the loss of fishing gears or nets carries no penalty. If reporting is made at the time of loss. Penalties apply only for those not reporting, for example when a lost device is found and traced back to an owner who did not report the loss.
- Fishermen should place weighting poles so that they do not drift in high currents or tidal changes to avoid losing their nets.
- Fishermen should use fishing equipment of biodegradable materials in the construction. Incorporating biodegradable components so that devices can be disposed of quickly if it gets lost is an effective way to prevent "ghost nets". Fishermen have to be aware that if non-biodegradable fishing gear continues to be dumped at sea, nobody will win the battle against ghost nets.
- Fishermen must equip their fishing nets with securing lids and escape panels with biodegradable cotton escape cord to enable escape of all captured marine life if lost.
- Weighting lines should sink below surface and avoid being cut by passing boats.
- Fishermen must be trained and prepared to retrieve lost fishing gear to the extent that it is safe to do so.
- Fishermen are instructed to collect the damaged nets and those that are no longer used in the special bins placed by HAS on the wharves of the fishing ports, so that they are sent to the recycling points.
- Fishermen must also get involved to increase recycling of marine plastics. In this way we stop fishing gear from being lost to the ocean at all. Alongside tracking fishing gear and offering financial incentives for recycling, the development and use of alternatives needs to be accelerated.