

BRIEFING – BEST PRACTICE FRAMEWORK (BPF) FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF FISHING GEAR GILLNETS AND TRAPS/POTS

INTRODUCTION

Abandoned, lost and otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG), including fishing litter, causes economic losses, environmental damage and harm to marine wildlife. Although gear is most often lost accidentally and/or abandoned due to bad weather or safety concerns, in some cases, gear can also be deliberately discarded, especially when being used in illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fisheries. The scale of the problem is vast, with an estimated 640,000 tonnes of fishing gear being lost in our oceans each year.

In 2016, the Global Ghost Gear Initiative's (GGGI) best practice working group developed a "Best Practice Framework for the Management of Fishing Gear" (BPF). The framework provides guidance to various actors in the seafood supply chain on effective approaches to reducing gear loss / abandonment and ways to lessen the impacts of ALDFG once gear is gone.

APPROACH AND SCOPE OF THE BPF

The BPF includes a synopsis of most common fishing gears used on a global scale by catch volume and fishing effort, as well as a subjective risk assessment for each gear's propensity to become ALDFG with its associated impacts – ghost fishing, harm to the marine environment and entanglement of marine animals.

The framework presents a holistic combination of principles for best practise, targeted best management practices

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organized by stakeholder group and examples using case studies. Adopting best practices for fishing gear management can ensure lost and abandoned fishing gear is minimized.

CONTRIBUTION OF GILLNETS AND TRAPS/POTS TO ALDFG

Gillnets are used widely in artisanal fisheries and in small to large-scale commercial fisheries worldwide. Traps and pots are used in a wide variety of crustacean and finfish fisheries. Gillnets and traps/pots are used both in temperate and tropical waters but our best practices for these gears focuses on fishing in shallower coastal waters as this is where they are mainly deployed.

Both gillnets and traps/pots are susceptible to becoming ALDFG which often results from gear and vessel conflicts, environmental conditions (e.g., strong tides and currents) and other weather conditions such as storms. Once lost, these gear types have a high likelihood of impacting the marine environment compared to other gears. This includes ghost fishing and/or entangling marine mammals, reptiles, birds and other animals.

Gillnets can continue to fish before the net breaks down, even after buoyancy is lost, and because they are made of light material, they are not easily seen by fish and other marine animals. Traps and pots are usually baited when set, so once lost, they will continue to attract fish or scavengers which may become trapped and die, forming more bait for newcomers. Larger animals are vulnerable to becoming entangled in the ropes of lost traps and pots.

BEST PRACTICE INTERVENTIONS FOR GILLNETS AND TRAPS/POTS

PREVENTION

- Built in traceability components to gear[†]
- Limiting size (lengths and/or depth) of gillnet gear fleets, trap strings, etc., to increase control over fishing gear and reduce risk of damage or loss*
- Soak time limits – longer soak times increase the risk of gear loss*
- Ensuring there is adequate storage space on boats/vessels for redundant and damaged gear
- Using and sharing seabed and local current mapping data*
- Establishing and participating in gear zoning initiatives to reduce conflicts with other fishers and vessel traffic**
- (Requirement for) marking of static gear including identity of vessel to make it visible to others*^α
- Using biodegradable components that disable gear (e.g. escape cords on traps and pots)*
- Facilitate gear recycling and buy-back schemes, and provide port reception facilities for the disposal of end-of-life fishing gear^{††}
- Proper disposal of end-of-life gear and related garbage*
- Develop Code of Practice for responsible fishing with members⁺
- Gear loss and its consequences should be included in all seafood sustainability standards^β
- Ensure seafood sourcing avoids high risk fisheries and that they participate in relevant ghost gear prevention and mitigation initiatives[‡]
- Trial BPF in Fisheries Improvement Projects (FIPs) ^{β‡}

MITIGATION

- Reporting location and details of lost gear for later retrieval*
- Implement lost gear reporting protocols and systems^{+α}

CURE

- Retrieving lost gear if it is safe to do so (e.g., carry retrieval tools on vessel and training of crew on their use)*
- Clear lost gear hotspots⁺

KEY STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED IN ABOVE INTERVENTIONS

- †Gear manufacturers
- *Fishers
- *Fisheries organizations
- ^αFisheries control agencies, and fisheries managers and regulators
- [‡]Port operators
- ^βSeafood ecolabel standard and certification holders
- [‡]Seafood companies

THE GLOBAL GHOST GEAR INITIATIVE

The Global Ghost Gear Initiative (GGGI) is a cross-sectoral alliance committed to driving solutions to the problem of lost and abandoned fishing gear worldwide. The GGGI aims to improve the health of marine ecosystems, protect marine animals, and safeguard human health and livelihoods. It is the first initiative dedicated to tackling the problem of ghost fishing gear on a global scale.