

GOT GHOSTED?

Ghost fishing Is Harming Our Oceans

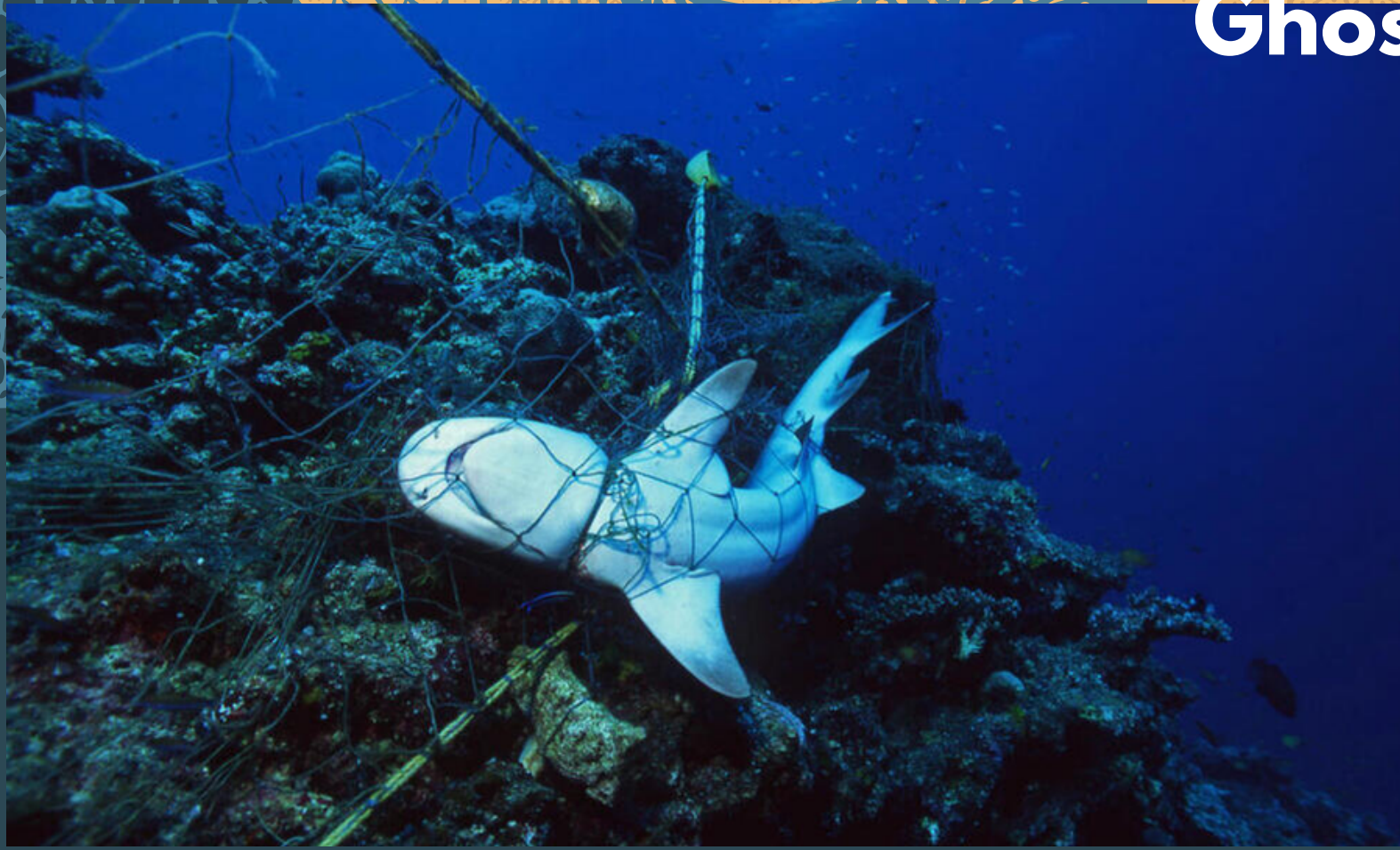


Photo from the World Wildlife Fund; Image of shark caught in ghost gear.

Ghost gear is abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear— and a leading cause of marine plastic debris [1]. In fact, recent studies have found that ghost gear makes up 70% of all macro plastics in the ocean, and represents 46% of the 79,000 tons of plastic observed in the infamous Great Garbage Patch in the North Pacific Ocean [6][9]. However, what makes ghost gear particularly harmful amongst marine pollutants is that it continues to fish and trap animals; in addition to damaging sensitive habitat and acting as a hazard to ocean navigators [6]. Carried by winds and ocean currents, ghost gear can travel extremely long distances, continuing to entangle and kill marine mammals, birds, and reptiles before sinking or accumulating along shorelines [11]. A single abandoned net can kill on average 500,000 marine invertebrates, 1700 fish, and 4 seabirds [2]. With a rising demand for fish as a source of protein, it is critical that we address the harms of fishing gear as the need to fish increases in response [2].

What Has Been Done?

Ghost Gear Fund:

- Implemented by the Government of Canada in 2019, the fund encourages Canadians to take action to produce plastic in the ocean [6]
- Provided up to 10 million dollars in funding for proposals for the 2022/2023 season [4]

Lost Fishing Gear Reporting System:

- Fish harvesters and authorized retrievers can report lost or retrieved gear [5]
- Initiative to help DFO target concentrated areas with ghost gear, and identify common causes of gear loss [5]
- Very recently created in 2020/2021 [5]

United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Voluntary Guidelines on the Marking of Fishing Gear

- Guidelines produced by the FAO in 2019 to assist fisheries management to prevent and minimize ghost gear through its identification and recovery [11]
- Includes special considerations for developing states and small-scale fisheries [11]

Why Is Gear Getting Lost?

- Bad weather conditions [2]
- Mechanical problems [2]
- Human error [2]
- Gear snagging [2]
- Deliberate discarding to conceal IUU fishing/pressures from IUU fishing [9]
- Disposal method when gear stops functioning [2]
- Onboard repairs, such as net cutting [2]
- Over-allocation of licenses [9]
- Inadequate zone legislation [9]



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Creating systems to better identify and mark fishing gear in order to keep people accountable, as well as to reunite people with lost gear
- innovating gear types and alternatives that reduce the loss of fishing gear, lessen the impact of the lost fishing gear on marine life, and/or are recyclable
- Designing and implementing programming that incentivizes fishers to actively participate in the prevention of ghost gear, either through the sharing of knowledge or use of less harmful fishing gear
- Enforcing policy directed towards fishing gear industries to create gear types and alternatives that mitigate ghost gear
- Considering the impact of IUU fishing when designing policy around ghost gear, and creating more transparent and sharable data systems that prevent IUU fishing
- Consulting stakeholders and local communities in the enforcement and zoning of areas available to fish



Photo from World Animal Protection UK; Image depicting the damage done to sensitive ecosystems such as coral reefs through ghost gear.

Contacts

The Honourable Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard
Government of Canada
joyce.murray@parl.gc.ca
613 992 2430

BC Commercial Fishing Caucus
info@bcfishcaucus.ca

Christina Burr ridge, Executive Director
BC Seafood Alliance
executivedirector@BCseafoodalliance.com
604 377 9213

Don Davies, Member of Parliament (Vancouver Kingsway)
don.davies@parl.gc.ca
604 775 6263

Personal Contact

Kei Poon
keipoon14@gmail.com
Twitter: @keifishy



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