

Oceana Exposes 9 Dirtiest U.S. Fisheries

WASHINGTON (Oceana) — Oceana released a new report exposing nine of the dirtiest fisheries in the United States. These nine fisheries combined throw away almost half of what they catch and are responsible for more than 50 percent of all reported bycatch in the U.S., injuring and killing thousands of protected and endangered species every year.

In the [report](#) [1] titled Wasted Catch: Unsolved Bycatch Problems in U.S. Fisheries, [Oceana](#) [2] explains that despite significant progress in the last decade, the catch of non-target fish and ocean wildlife, or “bycatch”, remains a significant problem in domestic fisheries. In fact, researchers have estimated that approximately 20 percent of the total U.S. catch is thrown away each year.

“Anything can be bycatch,” said Dominique Cano-Stocco, campaign director at Oceana. “Whether it’s the thousands of sea turtles that are caught to bring you shrimp or the millions of pounds of cod and halibut that are thrown overboard after fishermen have reached their quota, bycatch is a waste of our ocean’s resources. Bycatch also represents a real economic loss when one fisherman trashes another fisherman’s catch.”

Though some fishing methods are more harmful than others, researchers, fisheries managers and conservationists all agree that bycatch is generally highest in open ocean trawl, longline and gillnet fisheries. These three gear types alone are responsible for the majority of bycatch in the U.S. and are used by these nine dirty fisheries.

“Hundreds of thousands of dolphins, whales, sharks, sea birds, sea turtles and fish needlessly die each year as a result of indiscriminate fishing gear,” said Amanda Keledjian, report author and marine scientist at Oceana. “It’s no wonder that bycatch is such a significant problem, with trawls as wide as football fields, longlines extending up to 50 miles with thousands of baited hooks and gillnets up to two miles long. The good news is that there are solutions – bycatch is avoidable.”

Unfortunately, the bycatch problem in the U.S. is likely much worse than realized, because most fisheries do not have adequate monitoring in place to document exactly what and how much is caught and subsequently discarded. In some fisheries, as few as One in 100 fishing trips carry impartial observers to document catch, while many are not monitored at all, leading to large gaps in knowledge and poor quality data.

Nine Dirty Fisheries (based on data published by the National Marine Fisheries Service):

- Southeast Snapper-Grouper Longline Fishery (66% discarded) –More than

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- 400,000 sharks were captured and discarded in one year
- California Set Gillnet Fishery (65% of all animals discarded) – More than 30,000 sharks and rays as well as valuable fish were discarded as waste over three years
 - Southeast Shrimp Trawl Fishery (64% discarded) – For every pound of shrimp landed, 1 pound of billfish is discarded; thousands of sea turtles are killed annually
 - California Drift Gillnet Fishery (63% of all animals discarded) – Almost 550 marine mammals were entangled or killed over five years
 - Gulf of Alaska Flatfish Trawl Fishery (35% discarded) – More than 34 million pounds of fish were thrown overboard in one year, including 2 million pounds of halibut and 5 million pounds of cod
 - Northeast Bottom Trawl (35% discarded) – More than 50 million pounds of fish are thrown overboard every year
 - Mid-Atlantic Bottom Trawl Fishery (33% discarded) – Almost 200 marine mammals and 350 sea turtles were captured or killed in one year
 - Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Longline Fishery (23% discarded) – More than 75% of the wasted fish in this fishery are valuable tuna, swordfish and other billfish targeted by the fishery
 - New England and Mid-Atlantic Gillnet Fishery (16% discarded) – More than 2,000 dolphins, porpoises and seals were captured in one year

“Reducing bycatch is a win/win for fishermen and conservationists,” said Cano-Stocco. “By eliminating wasteful and harmful fishing practices we can restore and maintain fish populations that are essential to renewed abundance and healthy oceans, while also preventing the deaths of whales, dolphins, seals and sea turtles.”

“The solution can be as simple as banning the use of drift gillnets, transitioning to proven cleaner fishing gears, requiring Turtle Excluder Devices in trawls, or avoiding bycatch hotspots,” said Dr. Geoff Shester, California program director at Oceana. “Proven solutions and innovative management strategies can significantly reduce the unnecessary deaths of sharks, sea turtles, dolphins and other marine life, while maintaining vibrant fisheries.”

In order to reduce the amount of wasted catch and the number of marine animals killed in U.S. fisheries, Oceana is calling on the federal government to do three things: 1) COUNT everything that is caught in a fishery, including bycatch species; 2) CAP the amount of wasted catch in each fishery using scientifically based limits; and 3) CONTROL and avoid bycatch by making improvements such as using cleaner fishing gear and enhanced monitoring.

To access all of Oceana’s materials, including the full report, summary of the findings, fisheries fact sheets, map of the nine dirty fisheries, expert interviews, b-roll, photos, infographics and more, please visit www.oceana.org/wastedcatch [1].

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Links:

[1] <http://oceana.org/wastedcatch>

[2] <https://twitter.com/Oceana>