

**Suggested input for concept papers on the  
themes of the UN Ocean Conference Partnership Dialogues**  
as per paragraph 3(c) of A/RES/70/303

World Animal Protection, on behalf of the Global Ghost Gear Initiative (GGGI) membership

## 1. Addressing marine pollution

### Introduction

Whereas it is undisputed that the majority of ocean pollution comes from land-based sources (80 percent), it is equally true that the explicit references to this fact unnecessarily discourages action on marine-based sources of marine debris. Case in point, UN Member States first urged all States to take action on the issue of abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear in paragraphs 77 to 81 of A/RES/60/31. Since then, UN Member States have recalled these 5 paragraphs in every Sustainable Fisheries resolution but have failed to take decisive action on this issue. As a result, a total of 800,000 metric tons of fishing gear is lost or abandoned in our oceans each year with increasingly pervasive and destructive economic, social and environmental impacts (as per A/RES/71/123)

### Prioritization of action on marine pollution

Based on the above, one must question whether the singular issue of 'quantity' is the best determinant for prioritization of action and attention, particularly as the overall aim is to sustainably enhance the health **and** productivity of our oceans.

An alternate approach to prioritization of action would be to differentiate or rank different types of marine debris in relation to its relative impact on ocean health and productivity. The issue of abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) or 'ghost fishing gear' as it was referred to in the most recent General Assembly resolution on Sustainable Fisheries (A/RES/71/123) is a good example of this. According to the FAO and UNEP, ghost fishing gear makes up about 10 percent of all marine debris yet it is, by far, the deadliest form of marine debris. Recent studies by the Joint Research Centre, the European Commission's in-house science service, Ocean Conservancy and others indicate that ghost fishing gear is 4 times more likely to impact on marine life, through entanglement, than all other forms of marine debris combined.

With reports showing that 45 percent of all marine mammal species on the IUCN Red List have been affected by lost or abandoned fishing gear, it is clear that ghost gear is a major biodiversity concern. Also, while generalization is difficult as individual studies focus on specific species in particular geographic areas, there is an increasing consensus that ghost fishing gear is directly responsible for a 10 percent decline in fish stock levels globally. This is the second most dominant contributing cause of fish stock decline after overfishing.

Moreover, as ghost fishing gear is often made from plastic and other non-degradable materials that eventually disintegrates, it acts as the source of around 10-15 percent of all marine micro plastics which potentially threatens the health of all marine life and, by extension, human health as plastic particles and chemicals become part of the food chain.

Therefore, if ocean productivity, in terms of quantity, quality and safety, is a serious concern then ghost fishing gear must be at, or near, the top of our priority list.

Alternatively, if priority is based on a differentiation by ease of action or likely success of action, keeping in mind that maintaining momentum in the implementation of SDG 14 is paramount and therefore early success is essential, ghost fishing gear must again be at the top of the priority listing.

- ✓ Thanks to the 2009 FAO/UNEP study<sup>1</sup> it is clear what action needs to be taken to both prevent fishing gear from being lost or discarded and how existing ghost gear can be removed.
- ✓ Through each annual Sustainable Fisheries resolution since 2009 all UN Member States have already committed to taking urgent action and implement the FAO/UNEP recommendations;
- ✓ Effective action on ghost fishing gear is policy-heavy and means of implementation-light; and
- ✓ With the launch of the Global Ghost Gear Initiative (GGGI) in September 2015 there is now a multi-stakeholder public-private partnership through which action on ghost gear can be coordinated and which can act as a clearing house for information, knowledge, capacity-building and technology exchange.

Therefore, whereas prioritizing land-based sources of marine debris appears to be a logical choice because of the size of the problem, alternate approaches to prioritization suggest that the issue of ALDFG or ghost fishing gear must be recognized as an issue where action can be taken quickly and effectively on a global scale and where success will have a distinct and substantial impact on the achievement of SDG 14.

#### Coherence

Finally, in the interest of coherence, prioritizing action on ALDFG or 'ghost gear' will produce positive impacts on several targets of Sustainable Development Goal 14 as ALDFG is by far the most destructive form of marine debris (target 14.1); is a major cause of global fish stock level decline (target 14.4); has a severe impact on marine ecosystems and is a substantive source of marine plastics (target 14.2); and is strongly related to resolving the issue of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing (target 14.6).

Moreover, effective global action on ALDFG will enhance fish stock recovery, reduce micro-plastic accumulation in the human food chain and substantially reduce waste generation and therefore contributes to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 2, 3 and 12.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fao.org/docrep/011/i0620e/i0620e00.htm>

#### 4. Making fisheries sustainable

SDG targets 14.4 and 14.6 seek to change fishing practice and re-orient public sector support for fisheries so that fish stocks can recover to sustainable levels and destructive and illegal fishing is dis-incentivized. However, with the issue of governance of areas beyond national jurisdiction still under discussion and the fact that real-time enforcement of fishing regulations is unlikely and uneven across countries at best, the options for truly effective global action seem limited. Perhaps a positive approach seeking to incentivise sustainable and legal fishing can achieve the outcomes desired. In this regard, perhaps the following suggestions could be considered:

- ✓ Fisheries subsidies have, to date, incentivized overcapacity and overfishing and in some instances encourage IUU fishing. However, rather than removing or prohibiting subsidies and by doing so removing a financial inflow into the fisheries sector, the option of re-purposing subsidies for more sustainable purposes can be considered. For instance, to encourage full capacity usage of the fishing fleet, a subsidy for fishermen to recover and remove ghost gear from the ocean would enhance the fishing sector's profitability, encourage fish stocks to recover, and remove a significant contributor to the marine plastics and microplastics problem. Alternatively, using subsidy schemes to encourage port-side gear disposal or gear buy-back schemes for the purpose of recycling would prevent marine pollution and enhance achievement of SDG targets 12.2 through to 12.5.
- ✓ The encouragement of seafood traceability schemes will enhance the broader public's awareness of the threats to the sustainability of our oceans but also encourage fisheries efforts to comply with traceability requirements. To enhance current traceability it is encouraged that future schemes do not just focus on 'where' and 'when' the fish was caught but also 'how' the fish was caught. This would allow for a stronger correlation between traceability and the implementation of RFMO/A management measures and private sector-led best practice frameworks as well as the work undertaken by FAO on developing global guidelines for the marking of fishing gear.
- ✓ Related to the above and in order to enhance full participation by all stakeholders, national authorities and regional bodies would do well to recognize and encourage the application of best practice frameworks by the fisheries sector and seafood corporates alongside the implementation of science-based management plans and measures. Most fishermen do not want to lose their fishing gear, and few intentionally dispose of it in the ocean (except if fishermen are engaged in IUU fishing and gear detection). Despite this there are several ways to reduce gear loss or having to abandon fishing gear in the first place, and to lessen the impacts of ALDFG once gear has gone through enhanced best practice measures within fisheries management. The GGGI has developed a Best Practice Framework for the handling and usage of fishing gear from manufacture to end-of-life disposal and recycling aimed at actors throughout the seafood supply chain which provides a holistic combination of principles for best practise, considered and targeted best management practices and case studies to build awareness and enable practitioners to reduce the incidence of ghost fishing worldwide.
- ✓ It is not just fishermen who can influence gear loss – gear manufacturers, fishing organizations, fisheries managers and regulators, port operators, researchers, seafood businesses and NGOs all have a role to play in preventing fishing gear being lost and reducing its subsequent impact on the marine environment.

It is critical that greater dialogue and cooperation between players in the fishing industry and the rest of the seafood catching and post-harvest supply chain, including those government bodies overseeing the fishing sector, work together to determine why fishing gear is lost and what can be done to prevent and mitigate this problem. This effort will need to be at multiple levels, from local, small-scale fisheries to regional fisheries management organizations. The Global Ghost Gear Initiative (GGGI), a multi-stakeholder public-private partnership established in September 2015 to contribute to the achievement of SDG 14 can act as a convenor for such a dialogue and as a clearinghouse for the exchange of experience, technical expertise and technology exchange.