

Banishing Silent Destroyers in the Sea: Overcoming Challenges in Mitigating the Impact of “Ghost Nets” in Sri Lankan Waters

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Abandoned, Lost, and Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG), otherwise known as ‘ghost nets’ is a persistent form of marine litter. ALDFG causes substantial ecological and socio-economic problems such as ‘ghost fishing’. ‘Ghost fishing’ is the term given to the continued effect caused by fishing gear, such as the entanglement of numerous species. The objective of this study is to examine mechanisms implemented by relevant local authorities/institutions to mitigate and monitor the impact of ALDFG. A common questionnaire designed in order to collect information including prevailing rules, regulations and other measures with regard to ALDFG management implemented by identified national institutions (Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, Marine Environmental Protection Authority, National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency, Fisheries Harbours). Expert interviews were conducted to collect data and secondary information too was utilised. This study identified the current structure to govern the impacts of ghost nets, challenges the institutes face due to non-reporting of lost gear, improper gear disposal, and lack of research when implementing mandates/regulations. It therefore, suggests remedies to prevent and mitigate problems relating to ALDFG. In conclusion, it was identified that there is a need to harmonise ALDFG data collection protocols where they are in place. A trans-boundary system to report problems on ALDFG can contribute to reducing the amount of ALDFG in the water and thus reduce ghost fishing. Further, a programme to remove lost gear and derelict gear too should be implemented.

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