



INC-4 Item 4

Statement by Ocean Conservancy's Global Ghost Gear Initiative

Contact Group 1: Joint SG1.2 and SG1.3 on fishing gear

Ocean Conservancy's Global Ghost Gear Initiative (GGGI) is a cross-sectoral alliance dedicated to driving solutions to address the problem of abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG), also referred to as "ghost gear." The GGGI brings together stakeholders across the entire seafood supply chain, including 23 government members and a further 135 members globally across fishers, community groups, fishing industry, private sector, academia, and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

Given the significant environmental and socio-economic ramifications of this pervasive form of marine plastic pollution, we believe it is pertinent to specifically address plastic fishing and aquaculture gear in the international legally binding instrument (ILBI). Provisions should go beyond solely waste management as proposed in the (revised) zero draft text, and instead should cover their full life cycle including upstream, midstream, and downstream measures. To that end, we are deeply encouraged to see continued support from Member States and the consensus and ambition demonstrated on this topic during INC-4, including the development of the provisional text incorporating gear design, gear marking, lost gear reporting, end-of-life gear management, sound disposal, and the safe and effective collection and retrieval of ALDFG.

In further refining the provisional text, Ocean Conservancy's Global Ghost Gear Initiative encourages Member States to consider the following:

- Regarding design, encouraging gear innovation whereby manufacturers and retailers develop built-in traceability for gear and its components to allow traceability of gear from production to fishers, through to on-water usage.
- Regarding lost gear reporting, we encourage Member States to support a "no-fault" mandatory reporting system so that fishers are not penalized or fined for reporting gear loss during normal operations. Third-party reporting should also be encouraged and incentivized under this provision. We also encourage the use of an open, inclusive, and accessible database to facilitate lost gear reporting, which would also support the requirement for reporting on progress (Part IV 3. Reporting on progress).
- Regarding gear marking, we encourage member states to implement the effective marking of gear that is locally appropriate and in line with the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Voluntary Guidelines for the Marking of Fishing Gear and other relevant and applicable regional and international agreements and guidelines including those issued by RFMOs.
- We recognize and support that any dedicated provisions for plastic fishing and aquaculture gear, wherever the final placement of the text is, should be in addition to plastic fishing and aquaculture gear being inherently considered a plastic commodity under *all* elements in the ILBI. As such, we urge Member States to propose specific language recognizing this in order



to reduce ambiguity and eliminate the risk of misinterpretation for its inclusion in the other provisions.

Furthermore, Ocean Conservancy's Global Ghost Gear Initiative would like to emphasize that such provisions are not intended to prohibit fishing nor penalize fishers and the communities that depend on fishing, rather, these measures are intended to support the health of the environment and further safeguard global food security, fisheries sustainability, and the lives and livelihoods of those who depend on fishing, especially in less developed countries and small island developing states.

We would also like to emphasize the importance of a just, fair, and equitable transition to support countries and communities at all levels, including artisanal, small-scale, and traditional fishers, and the communities that depend on fishing. And, given the disproportionate impact this pervasive form of marine plastic pollution has on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and less developed countries, environmentally but also socially and economically, we believe it is essential that we continue to galvanize support and substantive action to prevent plastic fishing and aquaculture gear from becoming lost in the first place. It is also important to remediate ghost gear that is already in the environment through targeted removal efforts. To help achieve this, Ocean Conservancy's Global Ghost Gear Initiative is committed to providing technical guidance, sharing best practices, facilitating education and awareness raising, fostering collaboration, and building capacity and technology transfer throughout the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) process and beyond for all Member States and to all actors across the seafood supply chain.

Additionally, Ocean Conservancy's Global Ghost Gear Initiative recognises some regional and international frameworks exist, for example under the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the FAO, and that efforts have been made by intergovernmental fora, regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs), and Regional Fisheries Bodies (RFBs) to address ALDFG. However, the existing governance frameworks are largely voluntary and lack a comprehensive global strategy to address the entire lifecycle of plastic fishing and aquaculture gear. As such, Ocean Conservancy's Global Ghost Gear Initiative sees a unique opportunity for the ILBI to serve as an umbrella to coordinate, strengthen, and advance governance around ALDFG and gear at the end of its useful life to prevent plastic pollution, but also to safeguard global food security, fisheries sustainability and the lives and livelihoods of those who depend on fishing.

Ocean Conservancy's Global Ghost Gear Initiative looks forward to continuing to work with Member States, and other stakeholders, in-session and intersessionally to provide technical guidance and expertise to inform unambiguous and ambitious provisions that cover the full life cycle of plastic fishing and aquaculture gear in the ILBI.

Background

Ghost gear refers to any fishing or aquaculture gear that is no longer under the control of the operator. Given that fishing gear is purposely designed to catch aquatic species, when gear is lost in the



environment, ghost gear is pound for pound the most harmful form of plastic pollution to marine life¹ as it continues to ghost fish. Ghost fishing threatens aquatic life and the environment but also jeopardizes fish stocks and the lives and livelihoods of those who depend on fishing. And, due to the majority of gear being made of plastic, it is also a significant and pervasive contributor to ocean plastic pollution, including the proliferation of *secondary* microplastics.

For the most part, fishing gear is a significant financial investment, and most fishers do not want to lose their gear. However, gear can enter the marine environment for a variety of reasons including rough weather conditions, mechanical problems, interaction with other marine traffic, human error, or gear snagging on the substrate or subsurface obstructions. Fishing gear can also be lost intentionally or unintentionally during on-board gear repairs and can be deliberately discarded, either to conceal illegal, unreported, or unregulated (IUU) fishing or as a disposal method when gear reaches the end of its useful life and no other options—such as port side reception facilities—are available to fishers. As a result, an estimated 5.7% of fishing nets, 8.6% of traps and pots, and 29% of fishing lines are lost or abandoned in the marine environment annually².

Recognizing that there is no silver bullet to solving the issue of ALDFG, in 2017, following extensive stakeholder consultation, Ocean Conservancy's Global Ghost Gear Initiative published the Best Practice Framework for the Management of Fishing Gear in Capture Fisheries (C-BPF) and later, in 2022, published the Best Practice Framework for the Management of Aquaculture Gear (A-BPF) – both of which are available in English^{3,4} and Spanish^{5,6}. These documents provide the first and only practical guidance for stakeholders in capture fisheries and aquaculture systems focused on preventing, mitigating, and remediating the loss of fishing gear throughout the seafood supply chain. Best practices are defined for each stakeholder group, providing tangible management approaches that can be tailored to local circumstances and fisheries. Both BPF documents include relative risk analysis tables for wild capture and aquaculture gear classes respectively that capture the likelihood of certain gear becoming lost, as well as its likely impact on the aquatic environment and species if and when lost in order to help inform appropriate best practices.

¹ Wilcox, C., Mallos, N.J., Leonard, G.H., Rodriguez, A. & Hardesty, B.D. 2016. Using expert elicitation to estimate the impacts of plastic pollution on marine wildlife. *Marine Policy*, 65: 107–114

² Richardson, K., Wilcox, C., Vince, J. & Hardesty, B.D. 2021. Challenges and misperceptions around global fishing gear loss estimates. *Marine Policy*, 129. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2021.104522>

³ C-BPF English

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/650ded502411400532ea242f/t/651c96e630fccc4b9e8ca592/1696372462549/GGGI_Best_Practice_Framework_for_the_Management_of_Fishing_Gear_2021_Update.pdf

⁴ A-BPF English

static1.squarespace.com/static/650ded502411400532ea242f/t/651c970de6cdee2c360d0759/1696372500735/GGGI_Best_Practice_Framework_for_the_Management_of_Aquaculture_Gear.pdf

⁵ C-BPF Spanish

static1.squarespace.com/static/650ded502411400532ea242f/t/651c95de91beee62052deebd/1696372197291/GGGI_Marco_de_Buenas_Prácticas_Para_la_Gestión_de_Equipos_de_Pesca.pdf

⁶ A-BPF Spanish

static1.squarespace.com/static/650ded502411400532ea242f/t/651c9722d5cf961f28bd1327/1696372528217/GGGI_Marco_de_Mejores_Prácticas_Para_la_Gestión_del_Equipo_de_Acuicultura.pdf



Data collection is also imperative to build an accurate picture of the issue and identify where lost gear exists as well as the quantity of ALDFG necessary to inform policy interventions and retrieval operations. Ocean Conservancy's Global Ghost Gear Initiative's global data portal serves as the largest consolidated repository of ghost gear records submitted by organizations around the world, including the Government of Canada, CSIRO, and dozens of NGOs and research organizations.

To further support the INC negotiations, Ocean Conservancy's Global Ghost Gear Initiative published a ghost gear white paper titled *End Plastic Pollution: Towards an International Legally Binding Instrument, The Impact of Fishing Gear as a Distinct Form of Marine Plastic Pollution*⁷ which provides an overview of the issue and illustrates the importance of addressing this form of marine plastic pollution in the ILBI.

⁷ *End Plastic Pollution: Towards an International Legally Binding Instrument, The Impact of Fishing Gear as a Distinct Form of Marine Plastic Pollution.*

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