

Driftnet fishing essay sample



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From the beginning of human existence to present day, humans have required food for survival. Over the years, the methods of getting food have multiplied extensively, been facilitated, and have become more efficient. Fishing is a technique that has been used throughout the course of history and is still used today. There are several different ways to fish, such as individual fishing and commercial fishing. Many of the commercial fishing techniques are similar, using large nets or traps, targeting a certain type of marine life that is in high demand. Unfortunately, these forms of fishing can be dangerous to people and to the wildlife. Driftnet fishing is a technique of commercial fishing that started out prosperous and effective, however, it was soon found to be hazardous to the environment on a variety of levels.

Driftnet fishing is a technique that uses nets several hundred meters in length and width to catch any wildlife that swims into it. The nets are left in the water for a number of hours, usually overnight, and are pulled back the next day. The term driftnet fishing describes a scaled up fishing technique that uses nets to corral a school of fish. It has been an especially efficient form of fishing through the ages for many species of pelagic fish, small and large, that travel the oceans in large schools (Cooperative Efforts Dealing with Driftnet Fishing 2). The main purpose of driftnet fishing is to get as much of the target species as possible and sell it at top price. Driftnetters claim to target squid, but they tend to sell everything they get that is marketable (Clifton 1). Driftnet fishing provides large amounts of fish to countries all over the world. The task may seem simple, but is really a difficult business.

Driftnet fishing is not an easy process; it is an arduous task that requires patience and skill. The process of getting the nets in and out of the water takes several hours because of their large size. Depending on the length, it takes two to four hours to set the net, which is done in the late afternoon and early evening (History of Driftnet Fisheries in Operation 2). While the nets are left to drift, they tend to catch whatever swims into them. The size of the holes in the net are usually small enough so nothing gets out once it is caught. Retrieval takes between six and fourteen hours depending on the total length of the net and the amount of catch and by-catch (History of Driftnet Fisheries in Operation 2). The crew of the driftnet boat must work together to get the job done quickly so the catch does not begin to spoil.

In the past years, driftnet fishing has taken its toll on many types of targeted fish. Laws and bans have been put in place to preserve the population of fish and to keep driftnet fishers in line. The United Nations first touted driftnets in the 1950s as a cheap way for developing nations to exploit protein resources. The practice has since proven so destructive it has been banned from the coasts of nearly every nation (Hogshire 5). The United Nations called for a worldwide moratorium on South Pacific driftnetting by 1991 and a ban on all driftnetting by 1992 (Hogshire 5). Bans have also been placed to control the total size of the driftnets. In 1991, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling for a ban on driftnets that exceed a cumulative length of 2.5 kilometers (History of Driftnet Fisheries in Operation 10).

The size restriction for driftnets is not the only problem the anglers face, in some places driftnet fishing has been outlawed altogether. Japan, home to one of the largest driftnet fleets in the world, will not allow its own ships to

use driftnets within one thousand miles of its shores (Hogshire 5). The primary criticisms were that driftnet fishing techniques were not compatible with sustainable fisheries management practices and they caused too much harm to unintended targets (Cooperative Efforts Dealing With Driftnet Fishing 2). Although there are laws against driftnet fishing and bans against certain methods, it is not enough to stop people from doing their job.

Driftnet fishing is illegal in some places, but is still done for the large amount of fish it provides. In some countries where fish make up a large part of the populations diet, people are still allowed to driftnet fish. In recognition of Japan's traditional reliance on salmon fishing, the International North Pacific Fisheries Commission (INPFC) reduced and restricted the areas that Japanese salmon driftnet vessels could fish gradually (History of Driftnet Fisheries in Operation 6). Other countries are not so fortunate, but the damage being done to the populations of fish could result in the extinction of the species. Ireland also has an inshore salmon driftnet fleet that fishes illegally and threatens the existence of the salmon stocks in both Ireland and Scotland (History of Driftnet Fisheries in Operation 9). Bans and laws against driftnet fishing can hurt populations of people because of their dependence on fishing, but if the populations of fish are wiped out because of driftnet fishing, it will harm humans more than the laws.

The most important aspect of driftnet fishing is the net. The net is the object that catches everything in its path. The characteristics of the driftnets vary in different regions, but most nets are made of synthetic materials that will hold up against the ocean. Driftnets will often be attached together to make larger panels. Made from almost invisible monofilament nylon mesh, each

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net is suspended beneath floating buoys, about thirty feet beneath the surface (Clifton 1). Individual driftnets can be as long as fourteen kilometers (Amodeo 1). The size and material of the driftnet affects the success of the catch; the bigger and more durable the net, the higher the amount of fish will be caught.

Driftnet fishing may be an efficient way to obtain large amounts of fish at one time, but this form of fishing is extremely hazardous to the environment. The immense size of the nets and the materials that make them up, make it difficult to be removed from the water. Since driftnets are difficult to mend and easily replaced, usually after one or two seasons of use, there is a great temptation to discard damaged net at sea, particularly if a large animal is hopelessly entangled in it. It was conservatively estimated that more than one thousand kilometers of squid driftnet were “lost” each year (History of Driftnet Fisheries in Operation 3). The nets that are lost or left at sea are usually never taken out of the ocean because of their sheer size. Some abandoned nets were found by a South African fishing vessel, which recovered a portion of these nets containing over three tons of decaying fish (History of Driftnet Fisheries in Operation 13). Although there is far more ocean than there is netting, the careless discarding of them only adds to the garbage in the ocean water that continues to grow each year.

Driftnet fishing is not only problematic concerning the water while they are in use, but also after they have been abandoned. The vast nets of fine-filament mesh have been referred to as floating “walls of death” (Rosen 1). The driftnets used are made of synthetic materials that are extremely slow to decompose. When a net is lost at sea, it becomes known as a ghostnet,

which for years continue to “ fish,” gradually filling with dead wildlife (Hogshire 5). The ghostnets themselves are several hundred meters in length and width, presenting a problem for the marine life that may become entangled in the netting, concentrated in relatively small areas of ocean by winds and currents, ghostnets present a hazard to wildlife, entangling large mammals, turtles, sea birds (NOAA Scientists Battle Ghostnets 1). The driftnets not only pose a threat to many species of fish by wiping out mass numbers, but also to other sea dwelling animals. The nets are so large that they tend to catch whatever is in the general area. Driftnets catch everything bigger than an inch or two wide in a broad area (Clifton 1). Many nets that are lost or abandoned at sea continue to fill with prey and attract predators, which also become trapped, die, and decay (Whitty 4). These ghostnets are dangerous to the ocean life whenever they are in contact with water, killing sea-creatures purposely or accidentally.

The marine life harmed by driftnets is very extensive; including the target species of the fisheries and the by-catch. The target species suffer a great deal because of the massive numbers that are caught. The driftnetters are believed to be taking from thirty-five thousand to sixty thousand tons of albacore tuna from the region, while the sustainable yield, according to the South Pacific Forum Fisheries Agency, is only fifteen thousand tons (Clifton 1). “ When you put a million miles of net out every month, it doesn’t take long to wipe out a fishery,” along with the whole ecosystem that depends upon the fish—from microscopic animals who eat their detritus to the big sea mammals who face loss of their food sources even if they themselves escape the nets (Clifton 2). The use of driftnets has put a great strain on the types of

fish sought after in this process; they do not have enough time to repopulate and will soon go extinct, hurting humans and ocean animals who feed on these species.

The by-catch affected by driftnet fishing is extreme in numbers. By-catch is the wildlife that is not intended to be caught in the driftnets. They include animals such as, dolphins, turtles, sea birds, sharks, and porpoises. Often times these animals will be hopelessly entangled in the nets and will eventually die. The U. S. National Marine Fisheries Service estimates driftnets entangle and drown eight hundred fifty thousand seabirds a year, along with thirty-five thousand to fifty thousand fur seals and countless sea lions, turtles, dolphins, porpoises, and even whales (Clifton 1). The by-catch populations caught in driftnets are distressed almost equally as much as the target species of driftnetters. Occasionally, by-catch makes up a third of the total catch in the net.

About twenty-three thousand sharks are captured annually by driftnets in the Alboran Sea, meaning that one shark is caught for every two swordfish, the main catch of the Moroccan fleets (Amodeo 1). The usual season for driftnet fishing is a few months out of the year, but in some cases, fishing is year round. For the larger by-catch species, such as ocean sunfish, sharks, cetaceans, and turtles, this meant they were threatened with entrapment in large mesh driftnets twelve months out of the year (History of Driftnet Fisheries in Operation 4). Many species of ocean marine life are affected in a negative way because of driftnet fishing; they are being killed in mass numbers, in inhumane ways. If the use of driftnets is kept up, many species of marine life could become extinct.

Driftnet fishing is a method of mass fishing that began with a bright future, but as time went on it has been associated with harming the environment in many ways. Driftnet fishing may seem harmless to the uneducated mind, but in reality, is a serious environmental issue. Bans have been placed and restrictions have been made, yet driftnetting continues despite the damage it has done. The extreme size of the nets puts marine life in danger by polluting their habitat with ghostnets, which present the threat of entanglement. Thousands of species of marine life are killed each year because of driftnet fishing. It may be an efficient method of fishing, but the toll it is taking on the environment makes driftnet fishing controversial and harmful.