



WWF Polska

Tel: +48 22 849 8469

ul. Wiśniowa 38
02-520 Warszawa
Polska

Fax: +48 22 646 3672
www.wwf.pl

WWF together with Baltic Sea 2020 will retrieve ghost nets

On the 2 July 5 fishing cutters (5 Polish and 1 Lithuanian) will begin the actions aimed at searching and retrieving ghost nets from the Baltic. These nets, lost or abandoned by fishermen, are killing fish and threatening the marine ecosystem. Actions will be carried out by WWF Poland in co-operation with the Lithuanian Fund for Nature and Baltic Sea 2020.

Lost or discarded fishing nets continue to fish indiscriminately. Research has proved that the fishing pressure exerted by lost nets could range from 20% of the usual net capacity after 3 months, up to 6% after 27 months. Because they do not readily degrade, ghost nets continue to trap and kill marine life, including fish, birds and sea mammals until they are removed from the sea.

In the framework of the pilot project carried out by WWF Poland with the support of Baltic Sea 2020 in 2011, it was estimated that each year approximately 10 thousand of nets are lost or abandoned in the Baltic Sea. In addition, approximately 450 tonnes of fishing nets are entangled on ship wrecks in the Polish Economic Zone.

Ghost nets are virtually invisible to the public but taking into account the number of these nets in the Baltic and their impact on the living marine resources, they constitute a serious problem to the marine environment – says Piotr Prędko from WWF Poland – Last year we removed 6 tonnes of lost nets. There is still a lot more to be done... Therefore, for the second consecutive year, WWF Poland, together with fishermen and divers, will carry out actions aimed at removing ghost nets from the sea.

In Poland, 4 fishing vessels will spend in 40 days at sea to remove at least 12 tonnes of ghost nets. In addition, 4 tonnes of lost nets will be removed from ship wrecks in the Polish Economic Zone. The actions carried out at ship wrecks shall contribute to mitigating the negative impact of ghost nets on the marine environment and increasing safety of divers.

The problem of ghost nets does not only occur in the Polish waters. Ghost nets can be found in all fishing grounds. Therefore, this year, the actions aimed at removing ghost nets will also be carried out in the Lithuanian waters.

In co-operation with the Lithuanian Fund for Nature, in Lithuania, one cutter will be removing lost nets during 20 days– adds Prędko. – In addition, ghost nets will also be removed from ship wrecks. We plan to collect 6 tonnes of ghost nets from Lithuanian waters.

Additionally, in the framework of the project, an interactive database will be created to allow fishermen to report all cases of fishing gear loss. The database will help to create an



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interactive map of the existing “hooks” that means spots around which fishing gears entangle.

This database is the first step in establishing measures aimed at limiting the ghost net phenomenon – says Conrad Stralka from Baltic Sea 2020 which has provided the funding to the project – Next steps shall include joint measures undertaken by the administrations of the Baltic countries, leading to the elaboration and implementation of the Baltic strategy aimed at combating the negative ecological effects of ghost nets.

Please include the information: The Project “Collecting ghost nets in the Baltic Sea” was funded by Baltic Sea 2020.