

IUCN Interventions at FAO COFI 28th Session, Rome, 2-6 March 2009

Dr. Eric Gilman, Marine Science Advisor, IUCN (eric.gilman@iucn.org)

IUCN Intervention, Agenda Item 8, Managing Bycatch and Reducing Discards

Thank you, Mr. Chairman

My delegation, IUCN – the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, shares the view that responsible fisheries conduct requires the effective management of all sources of fishing mortality, including both retained and discarded bycatch, and including unobserved mortalities. 'Bycatch' in marine capture fisheries is the retained catch of non-targeted but commercially viable species (referred to as 'incidental catch') plus all discards. Managing bycatch is an integral component of implementing the ecosystem approach to fisheries management. Overexploitation of bycatch species negatively affects marine ecosystem functioning: Bycatch can alter biodiversity and ecosystem functions by removing top predators and prey species at unsustainable levels. It also alters foraging behavior of species that learn to take advantage of discards. Unsustainable bycatch management also has concomitant negative socioeconomic consequences for fishing communities, as bycatch is an important income source and contribution to food supply in some fisheries and countries. For instance, overexploitation of commercially important non-target bycatch species, including bycatch of juvenile and undersized individuals of a commercial species, can adversely affect future catch levels, and can result in allocation issues between fisheries. Furthermore, discarded bycatch raises a social issue over waste: From 1992-2001 an average of 7.3 million tonnes of fish were annually discarded, representing 8% of the world catch.

With a view to catalyzing concerted action by nations, by FAO, inter-governmental bodies and the civil society, IUCN supports the development of a new FAO International Plan of Action on Managing Bycatch and Reducing Discards, starting the process with expert and technical consultations.

In December 2008, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the text of the draft sustainable fisheries resolution where in Section VIII of the resolution on Fisheries by-catch and discards, paragraph 76 asks COFI to consider such an International Plan of Action.

Furthermore, document *COFI/2009/6 provides information* on current and ongoing actions to fight IUU. The paper addresses bycatch and discards as an emerging IUU-related issue.

There is an acute need for augmented international attention to assess, monitor and effectively manage bycatch problems. International measures to sustainably manage retained and discarded bycatch and reduce discards needs to apply to all States, entities and fisheries. Mechanisms are needed at the State level to conduct baseline assessments, regular monitoring and regular review and adaptive management of all sources of fishing mortality, including from retained and discarded bycatch.

The efficacy of specific bycatch mitigation approach at reducing unwanted bycatch rates, economic viability, practicality and safety are fishery-specific and therefore require fishery-specific assessment before recommending a specific mitigation approach. Several practices have the potential to effectively mitigate (avoid, minimize and offset) problematic bycatch, as well as improve the survival prospects following gear interactions of discarded bycatch species:

- Modifications to fishing gear designs and materials and fishing methods;
- Gear restrictions;
- Input and output controls;
- Compensatory mitigation;
- Marine protected areas, temporal and spatial restrictions on fishing;
- Fleet communication;
- Industry self-policing;
- Changing gear;
- Handling and release best practices; and
- Market-based mechanisms (e.g., eco-certification, including labeling).

Some bycatch species of cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises), seabirds, sea turtles, elasmobranchs (sharks, skates and rays) and other fish species are particularly vulnerable to overexploitation and slow to recover from large population declines. To sustainably mitigate the bycatch of these sensitive species groups in marine capture fisheries, an IPOA on managing Bycatch and Reducing Discards can identify international guidelines for an integrated, holistic approach to mitigating the bycatch of all sensitive species groups. It is important to identify any conflicts as well as mutual benefits of bycatch reduction strategies amongst species groups. For example, use of wider circle hooks and fish bait to reduce turtle bycatch rates and mortality in pelagic longline fisheries also has been found to cause a reduction in shark and seabird bycatch. However, for instance, in some regions, setting longlines at night to protect albatrosses and other diurnal foraging seabirds has led to higher bycatch of nocturnal white-chinned petrels.