

Gear for life

Fishing for swordfish with pelagic or surface longlines has a long history of irresolvable bycatch problems, exceedingly high management costs, and a destructive impact on marine life. Fortunately, there is an alternative.

Take a picture of this...

A big blue marlin, feeding on the edge of the continental shelf, sights a squid dropping through the water column. What's actually a squid-baited hook – just one of a thousand or more like it, hanging from a 30-plus mile mainline set by a commercial longliner plying the blue waters of the Atlantic Ocean – is meant for a swordfish. But the hungry marlin doesn't know that. Neither does the bluefin tuna, the hammerhead shark, the loggerhead turtle, and innumerable other ocean creatures, many prohibited or endangered species, that make up the unwanted "bycatch" of longlining. The marlin swallows the squid. She runs, she dives, but she's caught. And she won't be cut loose for

up to 10 or 12 hours, when the vessel's crew hauls back the long, long line. By then it's too late, the fish is dead. Chalk it up as collateral damage, part of the cost of doing business with longlines.

Now imagine...

The same commercial fishermen quit longlining for a new way of catching swordfish. They set a very short mainline with one or two branch lines descending, attached to a buoy. There may be a dozen such "buoy-gears" set, with no more than 2 hooks per buoy. The fishermen actively tend the gear so they can retrieve it as soon as the buoy signals that the bait's been taken. Over 90% of what they catch is swordfish. If a juvenile sword or a non-target species is hooked, it can be released soon after, alive. But blue marlin, turtles, bluefin tuna and other vulnerable species are rarely if ever caught.

The gear is called swordfish buoy-gear, and it was developed by commercial

fishermen on the east coast of Florida after longlines were banned there over a decade ago. It's now being tried all around the U.S. coast and overseas. It's part of a shift away from so-called modern, quote-unquote "efficient" methods of fishing, like longlines and drift nets, which are wasteful and ultimately unmanageable.

The future belongs to safer, more selective, more sustainable fishing methods that are not only friendly to the environment, but friendlier to fishermen and fishing communities, too. Actively fished gears like buoy gear provide fresher, higher quality swordfish, too. You want efficiency? Catch rates with buoy-gear come in at 300+ swordfish per 1,000 hooks versus only 8 swords per 1,000 on longlines! Fishermen want to fish, consumers want local, fresh seafood caught in an environmentally-responsible way. Sounds like a win-win for everyone. **Imagine!**



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