

**6-DAY PRINT SUBSCRIBER**  
**THE VANCOUVER SUN**  
[www.vancouversun.com](http://www.vancouversun.com)

▶ **online**  
**ANYTIME**

**EXCLUSIVE**

**Register today!**



**canada.com**

▼ **NEWSPAPERS**

▼ **TELEVISION**

▼ **CITIES**

▼ **CHANNELS**

▼ **CLASSIFIEDS**

▼ **RADIO**

**SEARCHWORD:**

Search the Web

YellowPages.ca **Canada** 4 1 1

Wednesday, May 5, 2004

Sample  
**THE VANCOUVER SUN**  
 Electronic Edition

# THE VANCOUVER SUN

**WEATHER**  
 13°  
 Partly cloudy

FORECAST OTHER CITIES

About vancouversun.com | **S** = subscriber only

Welcome, Janice Doyle [Profile] [Logout]

**CLASSIFIEDS**

- Find a job
- Find a car
- Find a home
- Find an ad
- Place an ad

**IN THE SUN**

- News
- Editorial
- Letters
- WestCoast News
- Arts & Life
- BusinessBC
- Sports
- Columnists
- Headline Scan
- Online Extras
- Sound Off!
- 7-Day Archive
- Births archive
- Obituaries archive
- Electronic Edition

**YOUR SUN**

- Subscribe
- Help
- Send us a news tip
- Letters:
  - To the editor
  - About your event
  - Site Feedback
- Advertising
- About Us
- Contact Us

**Vancouver city site**  
 CLICK HERE

**VANCOUVER**

- Vancouver city site
- Global BC
- Regional Papers
- Event Listings
- Sports Events
- Live Music

**WESTCOAST NEWS**

## Unintentional catch wreaks havoc on oceans

Vancouver conference hears that 'ghost fishing gear' continues to kill long after it's lost

**Larry Pynn**

Vancouver Sun

May 4, 2004

VANCOUVER - The unintended capture of marine species in both commercial and recreational fisheries is exacting a terrible toll on the world's oceans, 1,500 delegates to the World Fisheries Congress in Vancouver were told Monday.

The biological carnage extends to turtles, dolphins and seabirds caught in gillnet and hook-and-line fisheries, the needless loss of deep-dwelling fish suddenly brought to the surface by anglers, and the unknown toll from ghost fisheries -- fishing gear that continues to catch hapless marine life for months or even years after it is lost by fishermen.

"It's a huge amount," said Amy Poon of the Fisheries Centre at the University of B.C., who is in the midst of an ambitious project aimed at estimating the amount of crab and lobsters lost world-wide to ghost traps.

Her initial research shows the estimated losses to ghost fisheries as a percentage of the reported catch ranges from 37 per cent in Florida's west coast blue crab fishery to less than one per cent in Washington state's Dungeness crab fishery. She estimated 10,000 lobster traps, or 10 per

ADVERTISEMENT

ADVERTISEMENT

**6-DAY PRINT SUBSCRIBER**

**EXCLUSIVE**

**You'll enjoy...**

- **Exclusive subscriber only content**
- **7-day searchable archive**
- **Breaking news updates**
- **Save articles to read offline**
- **Access anywhere, anytime**
- **Register today!**



**THE VANCOUVER SUN**  
[www.vancouversun.com](http://www.vancouversun.com)  
 ▶ **online**  
**ANYTIME**

Movies  
Restaurants  
Bars  
Contests  
Sound Off!  
Local Links

cent of the total, are lost each year off New England alone.

Poon said some jurisdictions have laws requiring that traps contain biodegradable parts that eventually corrode and release the otherwise doomed crustaceans.

But even this process can take up to two months, resulting in a staggering death toll as marine life continues to funnel into the traps to eat the last victim, only to become victims themselves.

Without biodegradable parts, these traps can continue to kill for many years before they eventually rot away, she said, adding these huge kills are not taken into consideration by fisheries managers when they set annual catch limits.

Poon, a master's student working under the direction of highly acclaimed fisheries scientist Daniel Pauly, urged more jurisdictions to mandate biodegradable trap components and to consider management options that would reduce the chance of recreational boaters accidentally severing the lines of commercial crab traps during fishing openings.

Among recreational fisheries, it is common to catch and release fish such as trout and salmon with a high degree of success. However, the prevailing view among those same anglers is that a deep-dwelling rockfish brought to the surface cannot be released successfully because its swim bladder has been damaged en route to the surface.

Researchers in Florida, however, are finding that is not necessarily the case. A new technique being used with success on certain grouper and bass species allows anglers to vent the bladder and successfully return the fish to the ocean.

It simply requires a tiny incision with a syringe -- but not a knife -- in the body cavity, no more than five centimetres behind the pectoral fins. Care must be taken not to puncture the stomach. Gentle pressure on the fish's abdomen might also be necessary.

"It's a sharp little jab," said John Stevely, an educator with the University of Florida's Sea Grant Extension Program. "Don't skewer the fish."

In some cases, built-up pressure in the fish can force the stomach out the mouth or the intestines out the anus.

Without proper venting, the fish has no chance of survival even if released back to the water. With venting, the chance of success depends on the size of the swim bladder, the level of damage, the skill of the angler, and other damage caused by the hook.

But research shows that a bladder that is not too badly damaged can heal within four days.

Stevely said he sees no reason why the same venting process cannot be applied to rockfish, a category of fish that is subject to increasing conservation concerns on B.C.'s west coast.

"We've already had a number of inquiries from the west coast about rockfish," he said. "This is something the fisherman can do."

Bill Otway, a former sport fishing ombudsman with the federal fisheries department, agreed that anglers are not aware of such venting techniques. He urged Ottawa to get involved, and perhaps provide written



**7:00 PM**  
Entertainment  
Tonight  
**7:30 PM**  
Train 48  
**8:00 PM**  
That '70s Show  
**8:30 PM**  
Promo Filler  
**8:32 PM**  
Friends  
**9:00 PM**  
Gilmore Girls  
**10:00 PM**  
Blue Murder



instructions in future at the time anglers purchase their licences.

As part of a continuing effort to combat unintended fish mortality, a coalition of fishermen, scientists and conservation groups is offering a global contest with a \$25,000 prize for fishing gear that does the best job of reducing bycatch.

Organizations chipping in for the prize include the World Wildlife Fund, the Fisheries Conservation Foundation, the American Fisheries Society and the National Fisheries Institute. Contest details can be found at [www.smartgear.org](http://www.smartgear.org).


The WWF estimates one-quarter of the world's annual catch is wasted, the equivalent of 20 billion kilograms of fish annually, including 10 to 20 million juvenile red snapper caught every year by shrimp trawlers in the Gulf of Mexico.

The organization also reports 200,000 loggerhead and 50,000 leatherback turtles are caught annually in commercial long-line fisheries. Another 308,000 whales, dolphins and porpoises die annually during entanglement in fishing gear, in addition to untold billions of corals, sponges and other invertebrates.

The fisheries congress -- the largest and most prestigious of its kind in the world, held every four years -- continues through Thursday.

© The Vancouver Sun 2004

 **Print Story**

 **Send to a Friend**

---

[Search canada.com](#) [About Us](#) [Advertise](#) [Site Map](#) [Privacy](#) [Terms](#) [FAQ](#) [Our Partners](#)

---

Copyright © 2004 CanWest Interactive Inc. All rights reserved.  
CanWest Interactive Inc. is an affiliate of [CanWest Global Communications Corp.](#)  
[Copyright & Permission Rules](#)

**canada.com**