

Join us to stop

# GHOST GEAR

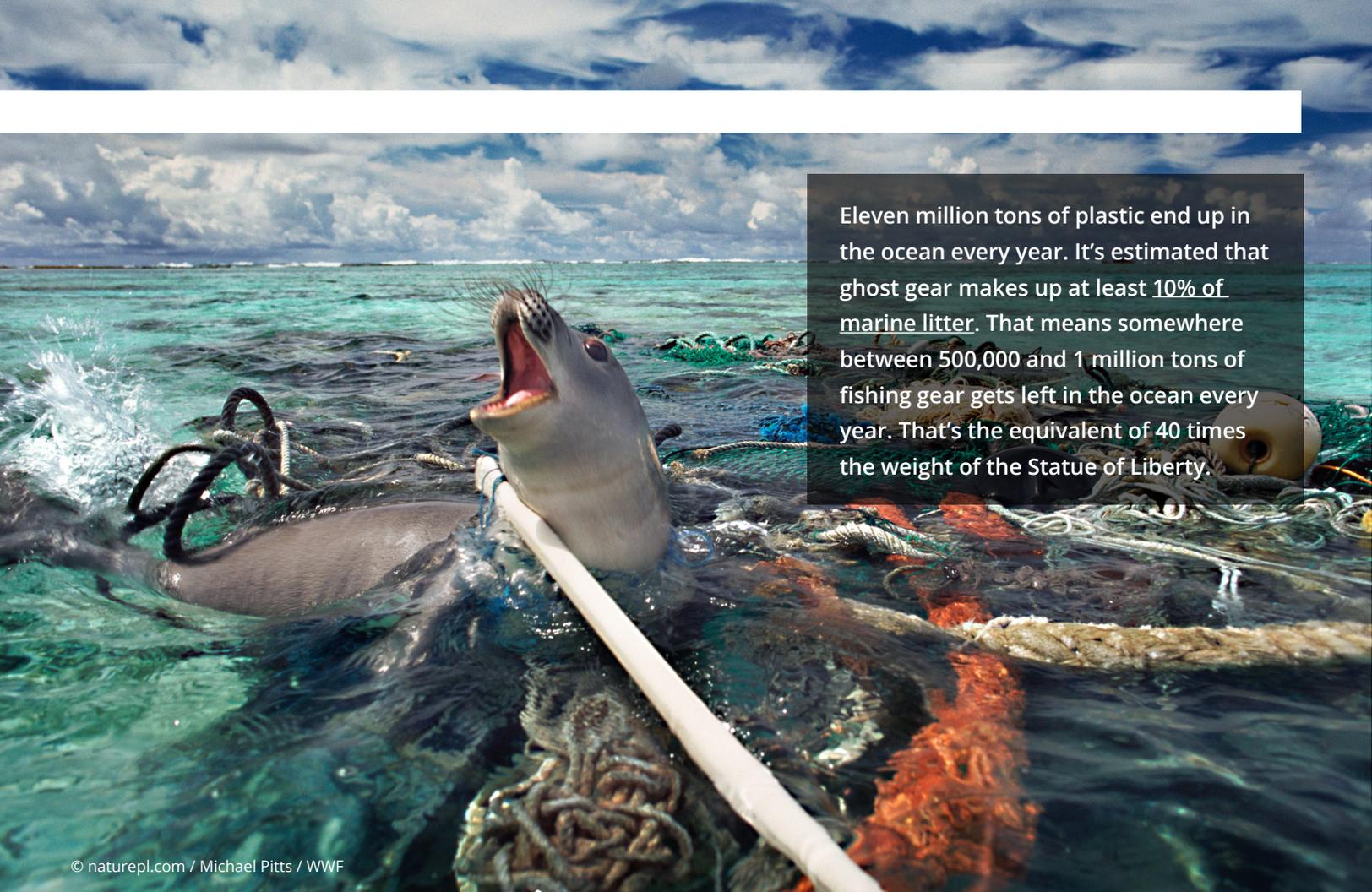


## The Deadliest Marine Plastic Debris

Plastic waste pollutes every corner of the ocean, threatens aquatic wildlife, and even ends up in the seafood we buy and eat through bioaccumulation in species which can potentially impact human health. Despite growing awareness, the problem continues to get worse. Three billion people depend on fish as a major source of protein. With a rising population, there is an increased demand for fish, and therefore more fishing gear is being used. Ghost gear is one of the deadliest forms of [marine plastic debris](#), given it is one of the most damaging types of marine plastic pollution for both species and habitats.

Gillnets, traps and pots, fish aggregation devices, and other gear types are compounding the problem of plastic in our ocean as they end up abandoned, lost, or discarded. Ghost gear can continue to catch target and non-target species unselectively for years, potentially decimating important food resources as well as endangered species, such as marine mammals, seabirds, sharks, and turtles.

While the consequences of plastic use are finally beginning to receive the attention they warrant, the impacts of ghost gear are less visible and understood. Increasingly, companies are becoming interested in learning more about this problem and can now engage to be part of the solution to stop ghost gear by joining the Global Ghost Gear Initiative now.



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Eleven million tons of plastic end up in the ocean every year. It's estimated that ghost gear makes up at least 10% of marine litter. That means somewhere between 500,000 and 1 million tons of fishing gear gets left in the ocean every year. That's the equivalent of 40 times the weight of the Statue of Liberty.

Marine debris impacts 66% of marine mammals, 50% of seabirds, and all species of sea turtles. Recent scientific research documented that over 5,400 animals from 40 different species of marine mammals, reptiles, and elasmobranchs such as sharks and rays were recorded as being entangled in ghost gear worldwide.



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### What is Ghost Gear?

Ghost gear is a common name for abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear such as gillnets, traps and pots, or fish aggregation devices. Gear is abandoned when the fisher cannot retrieve it, which happens when gear is snagged on reefs, rocks, or other obstructions. Gear is considered lost if a fisher cannot locate it or has lost operational control over it.

Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing also contributes to considerable amounts of ghost gear, as illegal fishers abandon or discard fishing gear to conceal their activities. Sometimes fishing gear is also discarded into the ocean deliberately. This behavior can be motivated by lack of adequate onshore disposal facilities, high disposal costs, or lack of storage space onboard.

## Why Should Companies Care?

### Worsens plastic pollution

Companies are already making commitments to reduce their plastic footprints as part of their corporate responsibility strategies.

- Ghost gear is one of the deadliest forms of marine plastic debris, which damages vital ocean habitats and poses dangers to navigation and livelihoods. For example, nets, lines, and ropes from fishing and shipping make up 46% of the plastic floating in the North Pacific.
- The persistence of this issue is already impacting the sustainability of our resources and affecting seafood supply chains in the long run.

### Impacts species & habitats

Being associated with species loss and habitat destruction can be damaging for corporate brands and images.

- Across all species groups, ghost gear is the most lethal plastic pollution type. In the Upper Gulf of California in Mexico, for example, one of the areas where US companies buy important quantities of seafood, abandoned gillnets have driven the vaquita porpoise to the brink of extinction.
- Ghost gear also damages valuable marine habitats. It can smother coral reefs or get tangled in mangroves.
- This protective function of reefs is estimated at US \$9 billion per year, while mangrove forests provide more than \$80 billion per year in avoided losses from coastal flooding.

### Causes economic damage

Ghost gear can undermine the sustainability and economic returns from fisheries as part of company harvest loss.

- Some studies estimate that over 90% of species caught in ghost gear are of commercial value. For example, a blue crab harvest increase of 13,504 tons, valued at US \$21.3 million, was documented after removing 34,408 derelict crab traps over six years in the US.
- The economic harm caused to fishers also includes the loss of the gear itself. Other sectors are affected too like tourism which may lose clients due to ghost gear spoiling an area's natural beauty.

## What is WWF Doing?

### Multilateral advocacy

WWF continues to monitor and raise awareness about ghost gear by demonstrating the scale of the problem at hand with scientific data, identifying gaps in existing legal frameworks, and highlighting the need for national and international preventive policies and practices.

- WWF works with governments, fishing gear producers and designers, fishers, companies, and the general public to take decisive action and stop ghost gear from drowning the ocean we all depend on.

### Global action

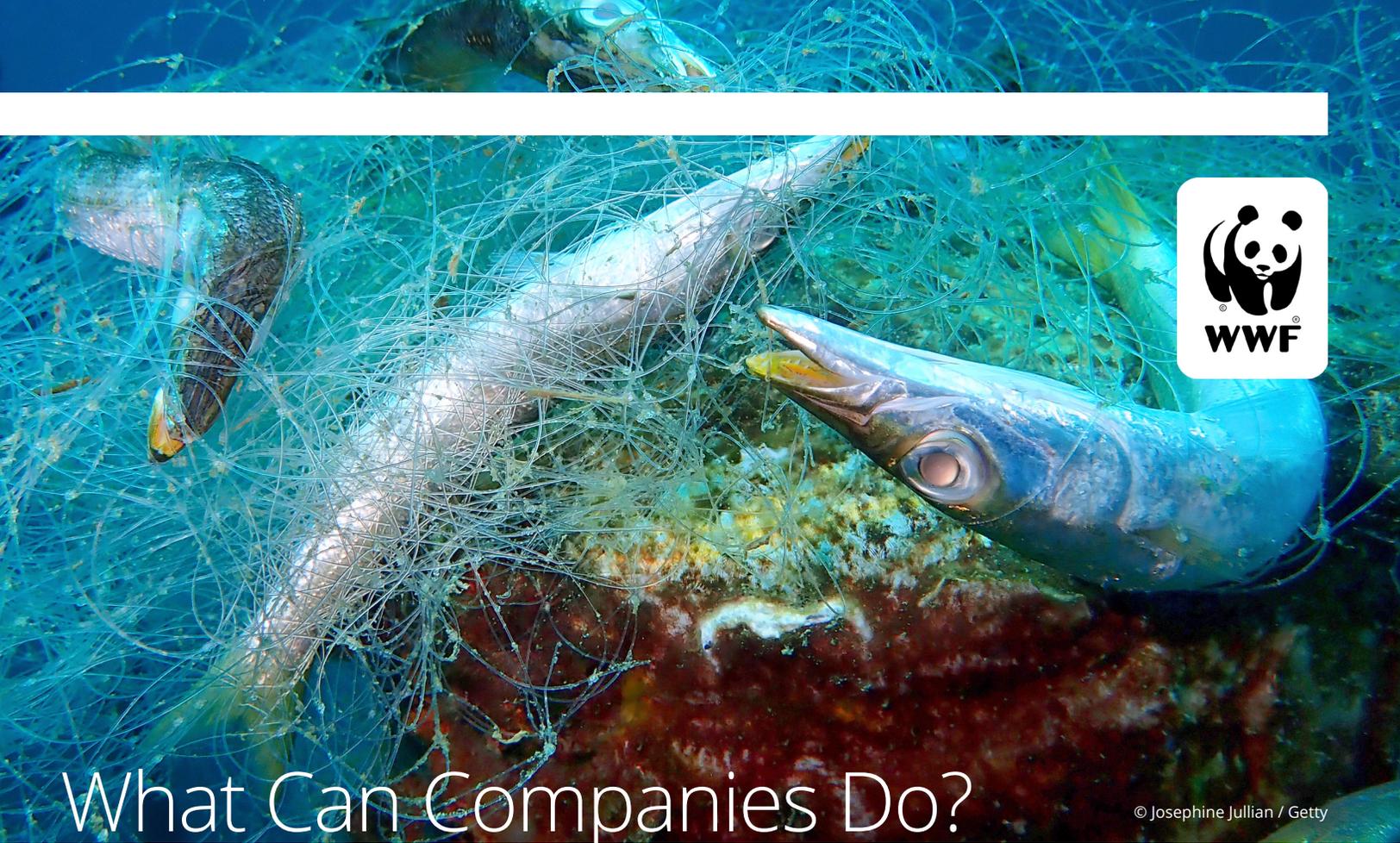
WWF considers ghost gear and plastic waste a global problem in need of a global solution. Existing laws are fragmented and ineffective. A coordinated global response in the form of a UN Treaty is required to help governments and businesses level the playing field and drive change at scale.

- Leaders from over 100 countries as well as more than 1.8 million people around the world have already joined the call for a global agreement on marine plastic pollution.

### The Global Ghost Gear Initiative

WWF is part of the Global Ghost Gear Initiative (GGGI), an alliance of more than 100 organizations formed in 2015.

- GGGI aims at developing effective strategies by addressing the root causes of gear loss, and recognizing the safety, economic, and conservation issues with which fishers must work. GGGI calls for restricting the use of high-risk gear in certain areas or times of year, the use of biodegradable components, and retrieving as much lost and abandoned gear as possible.



# What Can Companies Do?

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- Companies can contribute to the solution by joining the [Global Ghost Gear Initiative \(GGGI\)](#), the world's only global cross-sectoral alliance committed to driving solutions to the ghost gear problem. Over 135 leading retailers, brands, fishing companies, governments, and non-government organizations have already joined the initiative, including WWF.
- **Why join the GGGI:** By joining the GGGI, companies can contribute to a cleaner, safer, and more resilient ocean and can participate in the collective cross-sectoral impact of GGGI and its members. Members can also access critical technical support to address ghost gear in their source fisheries and assist in developing the global capacity to solve this problem.
- **Membership benefits** include receiving tailored recommendations for your projects, access to the latest technologies and research regarding ghost gear, and the opportunity to participate in different policy and outreach events.
- **Member commitments:** Once a member, the company would commit to promoting the mission of the GGGI, attend its different sector-specific events and committees, communicate about their membership publicly through their website or communication materials, and complete annual surveys related to the annual GGGI report.
- Brands, packaging suppliers, and retailers are also encouraged to join [WWF's ReSource: Plastic](#) platform to turn ambitious plastic reduction commitments into meaningful, measurable action. Using the ReSource Footprint Tracker, WWF's team helps businesses track year-over-year progress and provides expert guidance across a business's entire plastic portfolio.
- Businesses can additionally advocate for the policy changes needed to shift from a linear to circular economy in the U.S. and globally and to tackle the issue of ghost gear, including by advocating for principles of extended producer responsibility, environmental justice and international leadership to re-imagine our linear economies, as outlined in [OneSource Coalition's Statement of Solutions](#); and by [advocating for a UN treaty](#) on plastic pollution.

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