

Reducing Gill-Net Mortalities of Incidentally Caught Species. An Industry Perspective

The abundance of coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kitsuch*) has declined over much of their southern range on the Pacific Coast of North America. As a result, Fisheries and Oceans Canada implemented conservation strategies for coho salmon in 1998. Avoidance is an effective and commonly used method to reduce bycatch mortalities. However, an avoidance only strategy would severely reduce the opportunity for commercial salmon fishing. Therefore, if gill-netters are to continue to be used in fisheries that inadvertently intercept stocks of concern, then a reduction in the mortality rate of released bycatch is necessary. In 1998, management applied mortality estimates of 60-70% for coho released by commercial salmon gillnet fisheries in British Columbia. In a series of studies involving industry and scientists, we demonstrated that short term (48 hr) mortality rates can be reduced to as little as 6% by using short net soak times, modified nets, careful handling of fish on removal from the net, and a newly designed recovery box. This package of selective fishing tools and techniques combined with training and education programs for fishers expand the possible role of gillnets in selective fisheries. Our progress will be discussed from an industry perspective with a brief look at the tools in the gillnet sector selective fishing toolbox. There will also be a short discussion of the problems in successfully implementing this reform.

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