

## **COMMENTS BY MR. NELSON BEIDEMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BLUE WATER FISHERMAN'S ASSOCIATION**

### **Lifelong Fisherman**

- Boy-charter boats
- Evolved to tilefishing/overfished
- One of those who evolved to pelagic longlining

### **Pelagic Longlining can be one of the cleanest methods of commercial harvest world-wide.**

- Nearly the entire catch is edible and marketable. There are only a few inedible sharks and rays that are primarily released alive.
- The one at a time handling produces high quality and safer products.
- The multi-species nature of hook and line fishing adds substantial strength and flexibility to the economics of the fishery.
- It is primarily only in the U.S., with some influence on Canada, where much of the incidental catch is required by law to be discarded live or dead. Those discards are then used against the fishery.

### **U.S. pelagic longline fishermen work to avoid bycatch.**

- Avoiding bycatch frees up hooks, baits, energies, and storage for more target catch.
- The strongest INCENTIVES to reduce bycatch are Economics and Sleep.

### **In the U.S., we have additional incentives called the MSA, MMPA and ESA.**

- For the U.S. Atlantic pfl fishery—reducing bycatch is directly tied to our continued existence.
- Everyone needs to realize that bycatch cannot be totally eliminated in any fishery but it can be reduced to the extent practicable, in many fisheries.

**In the mid-1980's, this U.S. Atlantic fishery switched from Yankee style gear to modern day monofilament style gear.**

- This major gear modification was likely the largest bycatch reduction step ever taken by this fishery until our recent conversion to 100% circle-style hooks.
- This evolution was undertaken for economic reasons to increase the catch of tunas that yield higher prices.
  - These modifications also increased our swordfish catches. Amazingly, in the past, the U.S. swordfish fishery harvested up to 35% of the N Atlantic swordfish reported to ICCAT using only 8-10% of the total hook effort.
- At that time, this was a very efficient fishery.

**This evolution included switching from shark hooks with 4-5 inch shanks connected to multi-strand snootums then to heavy nylon leaders to a much smaller Big-game fish hook with 2-3 inch shanks connected to a single strand monofilament leader.**

- A substantial portion of our unwanted shark catches simply bit off the monofilament above the hook shank.
- Astoundingly, this dramatic gear modification was barely noticed by many of the scientists that study this fishery.
- Even today, the resulting declines in shark CPUEs during that timeframe are mis-characterized. Because they didn't know how to quantify the reduction due to gear modification—these factors were simply not fully accounted for.

**Back then, our fishery had little interest in advertising these innovations.**

- We were not organized and we were not actively participating in ICCAT.
- Some foreign fisheries have yet to catch up to this keener and cleaner fishing gear.

**As John described, in 2000 , a highly controversial method of extrapolation of 2 observed trips on the Grand Banks estimated that our fishery may be exceeding its Incidental Take Statement for loggerhead and leatherback sea turtles.**

- NMFS implemented vast closed areas for U.S. Flag vessels fishing the Northeast Distant area.
- Fortunately, our fishermen and NMFS agreed to conduct cooperative research to seek ways to reduce takes and reduce harm to any remaining takes.
- *We all knew from the start that implementing bycatch reduction measures for the U.S. alone would do little to effectively benefit sea turtles. We'd have to find reasonable and practical solutions that would be acceptable to foreign fleets that account for more than 95% of the Atlantic fishing effort and likely a higher percentage of the bycatch.*

**This cooperative research project was a truly amazing and rewarding experience. It was a true joint effort;**

- we all sweated through each detail,
- we all complied with a rigid Experimental Design and research protocols, and
- we all spent weekends and late nights tracking the hurricanes and storms that our boats were dodging.
- we all learned a lot together, scientist and fishermen benefited greatly from our joint venture.
- We documented the comprehensive benefits of circle-style hooks and developed tools and methods to the Careful Handling and Release of bycatch.

**The beauty of the circle hook is that it may provide very comprehensive benefits across many bycatch species that interact with pelagic baited hooks, not just sea turtles and not just the pelagic longline fishery.**

- These are unquantified benefits that will take years to document.

**Also, the circle style hook comes with built-in INCENTIVES that commercial fisheries world-wide cannot ignore.**

- While the inward hook point of a true circle-style hook substantially prevents deep hooking, it also is very effective at hooking fish and/or bycatch in the corner of the mouth or jaw.
- The target species remain livelier on the gear and can be (bled-out for better processing) leading to a higher quality product that will command a higher price.
- Bycatch also remains livelier and the hooking location allows for more efficient and less harmful releases.
- Circle hooks may actually increase tuna catches.
- So far, the sacrifices of using circle hooks seems to be contained to up to a 30% loss by weight of swordfish catch to the coastal sector of our fleet due to the softness of a swordfish's corner of the jaw. In some areas and circumstances this loss can be made up but overall we're still working to recoup these lost swordfish catch. Unless resolved, circle hooks may be more acceptable to tuna longline fisheries than swordfish longline fisheries.

**Also, the Careful Handling/Release tools and procedures developed at the Grand Banks can also have universal and comprehensive application to reduce harm to any bycatch that is to be released.**

- The INCENTIVES to use these tools is more efficient handling and release of bycatch on deck. Quicker and easier releases allow more time and energy for target species, especially important because more fish are now coming in alive.
- Also, removing hooks saves expenses.
- Our fishery is conducting cooperative training workshops and has recently moved forward with Industry Sea Turtle Handler Certification Classes in order to increase the proficiency of these new bycatch friendlier technologies throughout the fishery, as quickly as possible.

**Coming off the very successful Grand Banks research program; our fishery has recently become very discouraged at the prospects of continued pelagic longline bycatch reduction research in the U.S.**

- **There is a lot of potential to fine tune bycatch reduction by area and specific fisheries; however, I am afraid that our government may lack the political will to stand up to those who want to eliminate the pelagic longline fishery entirely rather than work to resolve any remaining bycatch problems.**
- An important next step is to conduct Coastal PLL Bycatch Reduction Cooperative Research. We set out to do this in a meaningful way; however, recently our Exempted Fishing Permit Application was subjected to a major delay due to recreational and environmental industry pressure. Some groups adamantly oppose even bycatch reduction research in closed areas where the historical CPUEs are highest. NMFS caving to such political pressure is not a good sign.
- Also, for many years, the U.S. Young of the Year Swordfish Index was a critical piece of an accurate international swordfish stock assessment. In 1999, unilateral Swordfish Nursery Ground Closures eliminated this index. A cooperative effort with NMFS's leading scientists has been unable to initiate a 2 vessel, 200 sets per year survey in the closed area using historical gear to continue this very important Index of Abundance. This also is a very bad sign of politics over-riding the need for critical data.

**The U.S. Atlantic Pelagic Longline Fishery is only utilizing approximately 35-40% of our totally rebuilt North Atlantic swordfish ICCAT country specific quota.**

- Reallocation will occur within ICCAT in 2006. The U.S. has run out of excuses over the past several years. Unless the U.S. takes positive action to revitalize it's swordfish fishery in order to more fully utilize its quota---we'll permanently lose our U.S. shares to other Nations that may not care so much about bycatch.
- Most other ICCAT nations have poor bycatch records as well as directed species compliance records relative to the US. In other words, reallocation

of US ICCAT quotas will result in an increase in bycatch mortality of sea turtles, billfish, juvenile swordfish, etc.

- Our fishery's primary problem is overly extensive Time/Area Closures implemented to help rebuild the stock. Our fleet has lost most of our productive fishing grounds even though we now have a fully rebuilt swordfish stock. Bycatch reduction research, if successful, could present alternatives to adjust the offshore borders of some closures where large swordfish can be harvested.
- However, at least so far, politics is preventing the necessary research inside the closed areas. NMFS and the scientific community should stand-up and support legitimate scientific research that is being delayed for purely political reasons.
- Today, unfortunately, our fishery is very discouraged about the prospects of future bycatch reduction research given our recent experiences in the south Atlantic area.
- Everyone agrees that if the U.S. doesn't act, we'll be waiting forever for foreign fleets to conduct the necessary research. Can we afford to wait?
- *If you have any questions about these issues and our Grand Banks research I would be happy to answer in greater detail.*