

The impact of fishing

Resource card

Fishing is an important global industry. It provides a vital source of employment and a valuable natural food resource for people all round the world. It's essential that we recognise the negative impacts of fishing and support fishers who are fishing responsibly.

What's the problem?

Discuss some of the problems associated with unsustainable fishing: overfishing, bycatch and habitat destruction. How can these problems be reduced? Explain that fishing can be made more sustainable by:

- 1) Fishing at night. By fishing at night, when seabirds are less active, fewer birds get caught up in fishing lines.
- 2) Gear modifications. There are many ways in which fishermen can modify their fishing gear to avoid bycatch. For example, they can:
 - Use nets with larger mesh to allow young fish to swim through so they don't get caught before they are mature enough to breed.
 - Use "circle" hooks that are much less likely to be swallowed by turtles than traditional J-shaped hooks. These are also easier to unhook from a snagged animal.
 - Target shoals of fish of the correct species, density and size by using electronic fish-finding equipment.
- 3) Fishing according to the rules. There are strict rules about the amount of fish that can be caught and the time of year that fishing can take place. Sometimes illegal fishers break the rules by:
 - Fishing during a closed season when fish are supposed to be left undisturbed to allow them to breed.
 - Catching more than the annual weight limit set for that species.
 - High-grading or choosing the best fish and dumping the rest back, dead or dying, so they can catch more valuable fish.
 - Catching endangered species.

Talking points

Show the class the picture of a turtle caught in a fishing net and discuss the following talking points:

- How does the picture make you feel?
- What environmental problem does it show?
- How does bycatch damage the marine environment?
- In what ways can fishermen reduce bycatch?
- How can sustainable fishing keep our oceans healthy?
- How can we support sustainable fishermen?

Whole-class activity



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Image courtesy of
Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery.
Photo: K.J. Bedford.

Ask the children to design an underwater collage. It's a great way to recycle old magazines, packaging and pieces of fabric. This activity helps to develop imagination and creativity, and build teamworking skills.

One end of the collage should depict an area of the ocean that has been overfished and polluted by humans, while the other shows a healthy sea that has flourished due to sustainable fishing practices. Encourage the children to use appropriate colours and textures to highlight the differences between the overfished and the healthy ocean.

Homework idea

How would you persuade fishermen to use sustainable methods? Write a short article for the 'Fishing News' about the impact of fishing on the world's oceans. Describe two sustainable fishing methods, and mention at least three benefits that will encourage fishermen to change the way they fish.



Young hawksbill turtle caught in a fishing net.

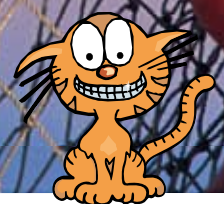


Photo: © Jeff Rotman/naturepl.com

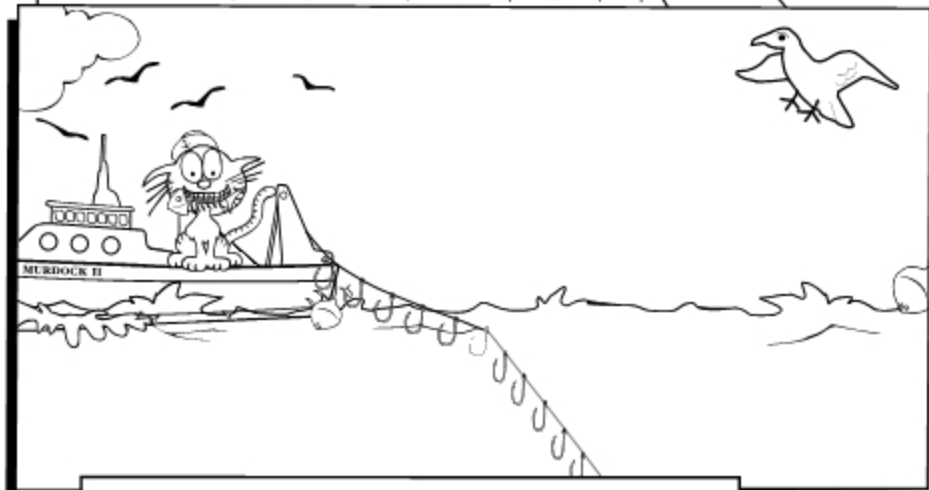
The impact of fishing www.fishandkids.org



Look after the sea!



This scarecrow keeps birds away from the farmer's crops. Draw something that will scare birds away from the fishing boat shown in the next picture.



Now I know

Birds can get tangled up in fishing line.
We can help stop this from happening by keeping them
away from fishing boats.

