

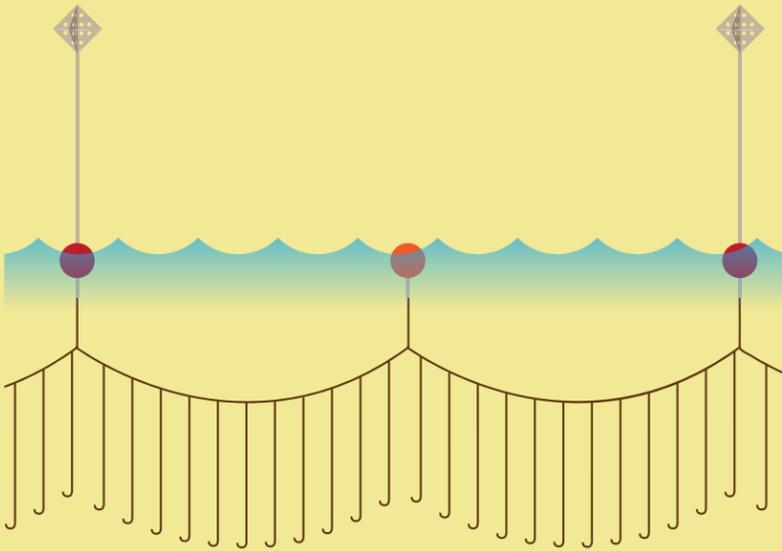
# SWITCHING GEARS IN THE GULF OF MEXICO

Commercial fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean use surface longlines to catch yellowfin tuna and swordfish. This fishing gear incidentally catches and kills approximately 80 types of marine wildlife, including spawning bluefin tuna and endangered sea turtles. Alternate, more selective gear, such as greensticks and swordfish buoy gear have been shown to reduce this unintended catch while effectively hooking the targeted fish. Restoration funds provided by BP and other companies that were responsible for the Deepwater Horizon oil spill could help pay for a gear transition program that would replace wasteful surface longlines with more selective methods and keep fishermen in business.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Fisheries Service, or NOAA Fisheries, is drafting new regulations that could protect spawning bluefin tuna and help encourage the shift to more-discriminate fishing methods by closing the Gulf to surface longlines. With this rule, the agency also can reduce bluefin mortality in the western Atlantic by enforcing a firm annual limit on bluefin bycatch for the entire surface longline fleet. Furthermore, NOAA Fisheries can improve monitoring of the surface longline fleet to ensure compliance with the annual limit and help stop the waste of Atlantic bluefin.

## ❌ SURFACE LONGLINES

From 2007 to 2009, 51% of the Gulf surface longline catch was discarded. And 65% of those discards were thrown back dead.

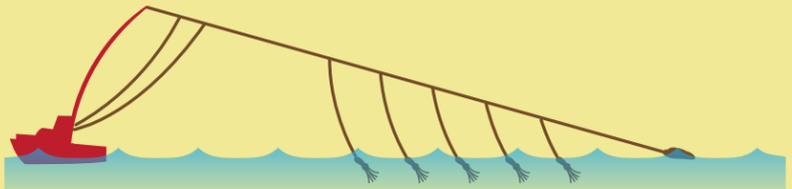


Typical surface longlines in the Gulf of Mexico stretch for 30 miles, on average, and dangle approximately 750 hooks. The mainline is suspended near the surface by buoys. Fishermen tether approximately 25 baited hooks per mile to the mainline.

Personal communication with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Southeast Fisheries Science Center staff

## ✅ GREEN STICK GEAR

This fishing gear is highly effective with minimal bycatch. According to study data from 2009 to 2010, total green stick catch was 84% target species. And 100% of discards were released alive.

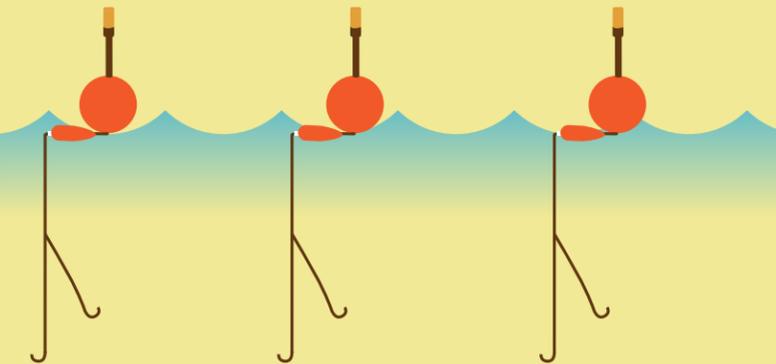


Green stick fishing rigs consist of a 35- to 45-foot fiberglass pole that is mounted vertically at or near the middle of the boat. The green stick tows a mainline (300 to 400 feet) behind the vessel with 5 to 10 baited drop lines attached to it. Hooks are baited with plastic squid and trolled across the water's surface. At the end of the mainline is a fish-shaped weight, known as a "bird," that holds the mainline taut while the boat is moving and allows the bait to skip across the water mimicking flying fish, a common prey of yellowfin tuna. When a fish is hooked, the mainline breaks away from the greenstick and is retrieved via hydraulic winch.

Personal communication with National Marine Fisheries Service

## ✅ SWORDFISH BUOY GEAR

Data from 2007 to 2009 show that for every 1,000 hooks fished, buoy gear retained approximately 145 swordfish. On the other hand, Gulf surface longlines historically land approximately 3 swordfish per 1,000 hooks while fishing for yellowfin tuna. Additionally, during this period, total buoy gear catch was 91% swordfish. And approximately 93% of discards were released alive.



Swordfish buoy gear (SBG) functions like a very small section of surface longline. Each piece of SBG has one or two branch lines attached to a mainline, which varies in length from 150-600 feet. The mainline is then attached to a lighted float or radar-reflecting buoy that allows fisherman to track the gear. No more than 35 individual buoys are allowed per vessel, with a maximum of two hooks per piece of gear. Fishermen typically deploy 12-15 pieces of gear per set. Depending on local currents and winds, each piece is set approximately 600 feet apart in a line. SBG must be free floating and not connected in any way.

Personal communication with Dr. David Kerstetter, Nova Southeastern University  
Personal communication with National Marine Fisheries Service

## GEAR COMPARISONS

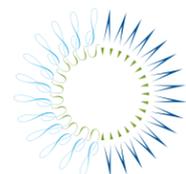
Green sticks and swordfish buoy gear use far less line, fewer hooks, and catch a higher percentage of target species than surface longlines. Because of this, these alternative gears dramatically reduce non-target catch. When compared to surface longlines, far more animals are released alive than dead.

	AVERAGE LENGTH OF LINE	DISCARDED CATCH	DISCARDS DEAD
<b>SURFACE LONGLINES</b>	30 MILES, 750 HOOKS	51%	65%
<b>SWORDFISH BUOY GEAR</b>	375 FEET, 2 HOOKS (per buoy)	9%	7%
<b>GREEN STICK GEAR</b>	350 FEET, 10 HOOKS	16%	0%

GREEN STICK GEAR: 350 FEET  
SWORDFISH BUOY GEAR: 375 FEET  
SURFACE LONGLINE: 158,400 FEET (30 MILES)

**For more information, please contact:**  
Lee Crockett Director of Federal Fisheries Policy 202-552-2065 lcrockett@pewtrusts.org

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