

Pelagic Longline Bycatch Reduction

Phase IV Proposed Early Restoration Project

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The goal of the proposed Pelagic Longline Bycatch Reduction Project is to restore pelagic (open-ocean) fish. Many species of pelagic fish were likely exposed to oil and dispersants that were released during the *Deepwater Horizon* spill and response.

In the Gulf of Mexico, some pelagic fish are an important target of commercial fishermen that use longline fishing gear. This type of fishing gear uses a long line—often miles in length—called the main line, with baited hooks attached at intervals. In the Gulf’s pelagic longline (PLL) fishery, these lines are set near the surface to target sustainable stocks of yellowfin tuna and swordfish.

Pelagic longline gear also unintentionally catches other fish species as well as individuals of target species that are too small to harvest. This incidental catch is known as “bycatch.” Most bycatch is discarded due to regulatory requirements or because it has limited dockside value.

The proposed project aims to reduce bycatch by compensating fishers in the Gulf for voluntarily refraining from PLL fishing for a six-month period each year, known as the repose period. The project would also provide participating fishermen with two alternative types of gear—greenstick and buoy gear—which are less likely to impact non-target species. Fishers participating in the repose would use the alternative gears to continue harvesting yellowfin tuna and swordfish during the repose period.

Fishers would be provided with training and technical support on alternative gears throughout their period of participation. The proposed project includes components designed to improve alternative gear catch efficiency in the Gulf of Mexico and technical assistance to educate fishers on improvements identified as a result of these efforts.

A robust monitoring plan using fishery observers, vessel logbooks, and vessel monitoring systems has been developed to assess the benefits of the proposed project.

ESTIMATED COST: \$20,000,000



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