

Project Update: July 2016

During our first visit to Karachi, Pakistan in October 2015, we worked extensively with local scuba divers to explore the volume of ghost gear present on dive sites and fishing grounds in the coastal areas. We conducted around 15 dives, surveyed beaches and spoke with fisher folk to gain understanding of the amount of gear lost and the reasons for the loss of gear. Our research was localised to significantly affected areas around Charana Island, Baba and Bhit Islands, Sandspit and Hawksbay, French Beach, Mubarak Fishing Village and Karachi Fishing Harbour. We have established a working relationship between local divers, World Wildlife Foundation – Pakistan (WWF) and Sindh Wildlife Department, in order to pool resources and facilitate our fight against ghost gear in the region. With the help of organisations, we were able to establish a system of net retrieval and data collection in which a core group of divers respond to reports made by fishers. To help facilitate this, local diver and environmental enthusiast, Absar Khan, has volunteered to become our Project Coordinator in the region. He liaises between ORP, local divers and fishers, whilst also managing the retrieval and data collection when ORP representatives are not able to be in the area.

With the generosity of Scuba Diver Pakistan, we held a workshop for over 50 divers and snorkelers, highlighting the problem of ghost gear and the urgent need for community and inter-organisation collaboration. Furthermore, we have been able to visit new markets which allowed us to record the different net types used in the region. Our findings will be added to our regional atlas of known fishing gear type, further allowing us to establish and identify the source of lost fishing gear in the Indian Ocean.

In February 2016, we returned to Karachi, Pakistan in order to continue to build relationships and expand our presence in the area. Having established ghost gear as a significant problem in the region on our first trip, we returned with a better understanding of the problem and how to begin eliminating it. We helped to develop and sign a Memorandum of Understanding, which furthered our relationship with WWF – Pakistan. We conducted over 20 dives in response to reports of lost gear. With the help of WWF and local divers, we established a trusting relationship with the local fishing village of Rehman Goth near Sandspit and Hawksbay. As an important green turtle nesting sight, it was essential for us to understand the link between ghost gear and entanglement in the area. Due to the tension between fishing and diving communities in the region, we needed to establish a positive relationship and express our genuine concern not only for the impact of ghost gear on the coastal environment and marine species, but also how it has impacted the community directly.

With his positive, knowledgeable and self-motivated attitude, Absar Khan, our local project coordinator is indispensable to our efforts in the area. He, along with WWF members and other community members, has conducted a 12 km survey along turtle nesting beaches to collect data on the number and types of fishing net fragments found. The survey revealed that around 24% of all garbage found on the beach was identified as ghost gear, more than double of the global estimate of 10%. A report will be produced on these findings which will hopefully be published in 2016.

With the help of Absar and WWF, we conducted five educational presentations to the community about the impact of lost fishing gear and the effect it has on their livelihoods. The workshops provided a platform for the communities to educate ORP about their findings and how it impacts them. Around 200 fishers and 100 children attended in total. We also conducted a workshop for the trawling community of Karachi, which resulted in 300 informational guidelines translated into Balochi, Pisto, Sindgh and Urdu. The guidelines detailed a point of call to report ghost gear findings or the desire to dispose of old nets. We are pleased to report that nine turtles have already been rescued and commercial trawlers have recovered four ghost nets.

In collaboration with WWF – Pakistan, we are working on an action plan to develop a long-term strategy for the management of ghost gear in the region. The plan includes continuous clean up and retrieval projects, disposal or reuse of end-of-life gear, gear management on boats and gear marking with the help of local net manufactures. As a result of our ongoing support and communication with local fishing villages, they have removed a total of 30 bags, or two van-loads, of nets from turtle nesting beaches in Karachi. Their efforts confirm that given the education and the right tools, these communities will soon be able to sustainably manage and dispose (or reuse) fishing gear.

We are eager to develop ways for the nets to be reused, which is why we have established connections with artists, farmers and builders in the area. In the next phase of this project, we would like to make our connections stronger and further explore various uses for nets. So far, we are considering community arts and crafts projects, agricultural fences, as goal nets, in construction; or into small useful items, like carrier bags.