

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 08/07/2020

Contact:
Alexa Goodman
Coastal and Marine Project Coordinator, Coastal Action
alexa@coastalaction.org
514-941-7996

Tackling Ghost Gear: Collaborative Remediation of Abandoned, Lost, and Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG) in Southwest Nova Scotia

Mahone Bay, NS: Fishers across Southwest Nova Scotia are ready to get to work after Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) has approved Coastal Action to lead the *Collaborative Remediation of Abandoned, Lost, and Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG) in Southwest Nova Scotia* project, funded through the [Sustainable Fisheries Solutions and Retrieval Support Contribution Program \(SFSRSCP\)](#). Abandoned, lost, and discarded fishing gear (ALDFG), commonly referred to as “ghost gear”, makes up a large portion of all marine debris. It causes significant negative environmental, economic, and social impacts including habitat degradation, indiscriminate fishing and entanglements, decreased catches, at-sea safety hazards, and vessel damage. ALDFG is generated by unfavorable environmental conditions (like storms and bottom type), gear conflicts among fishers and other industries, poor gear condition, and inappropriate disposal at-sea. Losses can be accidental, fishers are not always at fault, as the marine environment is shared with other industries. Heather Mulock, Executive Director of Coldwater Lobster Association, explained that, “The last thing that fishers want to do is lose their gear. The ocean is where they make their living and protecting the marine environment, and their fishing grounds, is crucial for the long-term sustainability of all commercial fisheries.”

This project will work collaboratively with industry, academia, and government to prevent, reduce, and assess impacts of ALDFG on the South Shore of Nova Scotia (LFAs 33, 34, and 35 – Nova Scotia only) from July 2020 to March 2022. This will be accomplished through implementing waste management systems for responsible disposal of end-of-life gear, retrieving ALDFG from targeted areas, and conducting an impact assessment of ALDFG during retrieval, with ongoing communication campaigns throughout the project. Project partners include Clean Annapolis River Project (CARP), Coldwater Lobster Association, Brazil Rock Lobster Association, Dalhousie University, among others. Mulock affirmed that, “As a solutions-based association, we are excited to be a collaborator on this project. It’s the start of something that can be much larger in allowing fishers to be a part of the solution.”

While most fishers try their best to retrieve lost gear, some gear inevitably remains at-sea due to several challenges. For example, gear can be hard to relocate once it is lost and existing license conditions prescribed by DFO limit retrieval of ALDFG. Mulock explained that, “Existing

licencing conditions present challenges for harvesters to bring ghost gear to shore, so projects like this are a great start to easing retrieval efforts.” Another factor contributing to the problem is that waste management of end-of life-gear is disjointed with limited options for low-impact disposal methods. Cost and convenience are known barriers that hinder effective disposal which perpetuates high-impact disposal methods such as illegal dumping. Dr. Tony Walker, an expert in plastic research and policy, remarked after a recent study estimating 1.8 billion pieces of marine debris on the Bay of Fundy seafloor that, "This project will help ground truth and effectively work to address some of the issues we discovered in our previous work using underwater video to identify and locate ALDFG".

Coastal Action’s project intends to divert approximately 2,000 lobster traps and 22 tonnes of rope from high-impact disposal methods. Across Southwest Nova Scotia, 10 harbours will be equipped with rope disposal bins and fishers will complete 159 retrieval days in Lobster Fishing Areas 33 through 35. This project will engage approximately 40 partners and will apply new technologies to help manage ALDFG. Sustane Technologies Inc., located in the Chester area, will be recycling collected rope into diesel fuel and innovative mapping technologies will be used in partnership with Dalhousie’s Oceanography Department and the Ocean Tracking Network to improve the retrieval process by using side scan sonar technology to clearly identify where lost gear resides on the seafloor.

This is one of many projects announced through DFO’s SFSRSCP and is the first of its kind in Southwest Nova Scotia. This project will lay the groundwork for improving ALDFG management and gives industry the opportunity to be a part of the solution.

About Alexa Goodman: Alexa Goodman, Project Coordinator for Coastal Action’s Coastal and Marine Team, is an established regional ALDFG expert in Atlantic Canada with publications on the subject in *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (Goodman et al., 2020) and in *Ocean and Coastal Management* (Goodman et al., 2019). They completed a Master of Marine Management at Dalhousie University in 2019, where their research focused on managing abandoned, lost, and discarded lobster fishing gear in the Bay of Fundy. Alexa is the Co-Chair and Coordinator for the Fishing Gear Coalition of Atlantic Canada and has completed a Comprehensive Report for the Coalition overviewing the State of ALDFG in the Canadian Maritimes. Alexa’s background is in marine biology and environmental sustainability, receiving a BSc. from Dalhousie University in 2017. They have worked with Fundy North Fishermen’s Association on their Ghost Gear Retrieval Project (2018) and on George’s Bank with Atlantic Catch Data as a fisheries observer (2017). Alexa has also worked as a research assistant with the Marine Affairs Program and School for Resource and Environmental Studies at Dalhousie University as well as with the Nova Scotia Community College on aquaculture and marine debris related projects.

- 30 -