

**Remarks by Nelson Beideman, Executive Director
Blue Water Fishermen's Association, and
Captain Gail Johnson, fishing vessel Seneca
Sea Turtle Press Conference
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NELSON BEIDEMAN: Thank you, Bill. We're here today to announce to the fishing world that we have successfully documented practical ways for hook and line fisheries to avoid interactions with sea turtles and also to substantially reduce harm to any remaining sea turtle interactions.

During three years of extremely vigorous research, 13 Bluewater vessels conducted more than 1,200 longline sets, fishing nearly 1.2 million hooks. Our program engineered and tested specific treatment hooks, hooking time recorders, time/depth recorders, and numerous careful handling and release tools and protocols. Among several important secondary projects, as you see in the video, the first successful leatherback lift was designed and tested to bring larger turtles on board to remove entangled gear and to facilitate satellite tagging.

Because our domestic fisheries are a mere fraction of global sea turtle interactions, it was critical that our research concentrate on practical and transferable solutions that can hopefully be accepted by foreign fleets. The successful combination of large circle-style hooks, baited with finfish for directed swordfish fishing as demonstrated, a 90 percent reduction in loggerhead sea turtle interactions as compared to the control. This is huge.

This was the J-style control hook that was standard in the swordfish fishery in the past, this hook [holds up hook]. This hook proved to be more harmful because turtles deeply ingest the hook, and once ingested, it is difficult to remove.

This is a Japanese tuna hook [holds up hook]. This hook is the most universally used hook for directed tuna fishing worldwide. A study in the Azores showed this hook to be readily ingested and much more difficult to remove from loggerhead turtles.

The large circle-style hooks avoid and reduce harm to loggerhead turtles because they are too big to fit down the throats of the juvenile loggerhead turtles that the pelagic longline fishery encounters. To verify this, our research team also conducted tank tests on turtle feeding behaviors. Circle hooks tend to hook in the corner of the mouth or jaw where they can be easily removed. Circle-style hooks, due to their shape and protective point, also reduce interactions with leatherback turtles by 65 percent compared to the control. Leatherbacks are snagged and/or entangled by J-style and Japanese tuna hooks and rarely ingest the bait.

Overall, our analysis of the preliminary 2003 research data documents an 88 percent reduction in loggerhead interaction and an 86 percent reduction in leatherback interactions as compared to 1999 sea turtle interaction rates by the U.S. Atlantic pelagic longline fisheries. Again, this is truly amazing.

Of equal importance for the exportability of these new technologies is that the combination of large circle hooks with whole finfish bait increase the size and quantity of the targeted swordfish catch by up to 30 percent. And the large circle hook, when baited with whole squid, increased directed tuna fish catches by 26 percent. Also, because the circle-style hook lodges in the corner

of a fish's mouth, our catches remain alive and result in a higher quality product. This is an important incentive for all commercial fleets. An additional incentive is that the benefits of bycatch avoidance and the potential to reduce harm extend to all bycatch species while using these new circle-style hooks.

In addition to the reductions in interactions, we have successfully developed and tested practical tools that allow fishermen to quickly and efficiently remove all entangled gear and hooks from any remaining sea turtles in order to dramatically increase post-release survivability. These tools include turtle-holding tethers for turtles that are too large to be boated, a variety of long and short dehookers and line cutters, different tools for different hooking circumstances, devices to hold a turtle's mouth open while a hook is removed, and our tested guidelines for the careful handling and release of turtles from hook-and-line fisheries. We'd be happy to demonstrate this equipment to interested persons following our presentations.

Also, I'd like to add that Bluewater's fishermen are the same longliners who spearheaded the international rebuilding of North Atlantic swordfish. And I'd like to add that we are very pleased to have the World Wildlife Fund recognize the importance of this bycatch reduction research and its dramatic results. We have successfully worked with WWF in the past, including on the rebuilding of North Atlantic swordfish, and we look forward to continuing what has become a rewarding relationship in the future.

And now I'd like to introduce Gail Johnson of the fishing vessel, Seneca, who is one of the 13 participants in the research program.

GAIL JOHNSON: Well, I don't know if you can see it: this is the fishing vessel Seneca. My husband and I own and operate the Seneca. It's a pelagic longliner and it fishes in Atlantic waters from the Grand Banks, where the NED is, to Brazil. Though I make the voyages to and from Brazil, I'm mostly a shore captain. That is, I'm the one who pays the bills, I get the supplies, I deal with the paperwork, I make the trip settlements for the crew and things like that.

Grand Banks longliners make long trips. It takes seven days for most of them to get there. They fish for about two weeks and then they have to return to the homeports to sell a catch. While the "Perfect Storm" went overboard, so to speak, in what happens out there, fishing conditions really are difficult. Having observers and researchers aboard for this experiment wasn't really easy because of space limitations. There's barely enough room for the captain and crew. And we contended with a lot more paperwork in addition to the stuff we already do.

Captains and crews had to operate with government people, nice as they are, looking over their shoulders and watching virtually every move they made. Despite this, we are really grateful and very proud to have been a part of this crucial experiment to reduce sea turtle interactions and to reduce harm to all the bycatch species. And heartfelt thanks to all of the dedicated people, and the ones who aren't here also, who supported this research. As other countries adopt our new techniques, it will make a big difference in longline fishing worldwide.

Now here is Scott Burns, director of the marine conservation program, the World Wildlife Fund. Thank you.