



I ain't afraid of no net...

Ghost Busting to Protect Our Marine Life

In October 2019 a large net was reported by a concerned member of the public to the AIG Conservation and Fisheries Directorate. This had washed up in a small cove up the coast from North East Bay. This is an example of **ghost gear**, which is the term for lost or discarded fishing gear in our oceans.



Once in the sea, fishing gear can persist for years, wastefully killing fish and other marine life. Often made of plastic, 640,000 tonnes of ghost gear enter the ocean every year! It makes up 10% of all plastic pollution in our oceans worldwide but forms an even higher proportion of the plastic floating at the surface. This is where it is the biggest threat to entangle marine life like whales, dolphins, turtles and sharks. It can wreck habitats while competing with fishermen for their catch and can also be a hazard for ship navigation.

Fortunately, this net did not have any wildlife entangled in it - just a fine haul of rocks. The net itself was also very clean of algae and not degraded by sun and weather, which could indicate that it had not been in the ocean for very long. Holes that had been patched up with different rope would indicate that it had been used, though we cannot know whether it was lost or deliberately discarded, or from how far it has travelled.

Throughout many visits, AIG staff brought in the net, with the invaluable help of the RAF and local volunteers.

In total, the net weighed over half a ton –



**10% of all ocean plastic
pollution is ghost gear**

592kg to be exact! First, there was the strenuous task of dragging it out of the surf and as far up the cove as possible to minimise the risk of it washing back out to sea. Then it had to be untwisted and detangled and unloaded of rocks. Before finally cutting the net into manageable sized pieces that were laboriously carried back along the coast.

AIG would like to thank everyone who came out to help shift and carry net and Peter Williams and his waste management team who are working to dispose of it.

When faced with the sheer magnitude of the issues that threaten our oceans, it can be overwhelming to see depressingly huge numbers. 592kg is a lot, but it may seem like a drop in the 12 million tonnes of plastic that enters our oceans every year. We must not become apathetic in

response, or let that dishearten us. Think about how many turtles, dolphins, and other marine life were saved by removing this single net. In 2018 a single ghost net killed 300 turtles off the coast of Mexico. Every action can have an impact; picking up one piece of litter can make a difference, especially when we work together.

“No matter what you do it will never amount to anything but a single drop in a limitless ocean..

- What is an ocean but a multitude of drops?”

- David Mitchell, Cloud Atlas



Using the net, we created this aerial image of a whale and calf - hopefully all our marine life is a little bit safer now that this threat has been removed from our shore.

If you are interested in more information about ghost gear, consider reading the 2019 greenpeace report on ghost fishing available free online

<https://www.greenpeace.org/international/publication/25438/ghost-gear/>

If you have any questions please contact the AIG Conservation and Fisheries Directorate on 66359 or email us at conservationenquiries@ascension.gov.ac