

Reports

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Whale Safe Gillnets

David C. Walker

FV Nelson Seafood

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Final Report

David C. Walker
3477 Ridge Road
Chincoteague, Va.
23336

The document that you have just read, is pretty much what I've told all fisherman about the weaklink project. There are mixed opinions about the need for these weaklinks, My best guess would be that if a fisherman has never entangled a whale, he my think he will not catch one in the future. Another opinion would be to do as much as possible to reduce any entanglements, this is the message which I have tried to impress upon people , not just fisherman. I have and will continue to promote the act of conservation, with its own rewards , instead of relying on the fear of prosecution brought on by the act of non-compliance.

There were questions about how many times did I use these nets. My answer was simply this, I'm a full time coastal gillnetter, North Carolina, Virginia and Maryland I do not have any other means of income. I produce seafood for a growing nation whenever the weather is fit to go to sea. These experimental nets were used on an average of at least twenty days out of a month, maybe more, considering the weather. I feel that this was ample time to test durability as well as the performance.

Some people feel as though I'm accepting handouts from the government , and I'll say whatever it takes to keep these handouts coming . My opinion is this was no handout . I built these nets with the frame of mind that I could make a difference, and possibly serve as a good example to everyone, not just to the fisherman. We can only hope that this is the message carried.

I will be sending copies of page one to several fisherman related newspapers, as well as to the general public. There are still more fisherman to be reached through the local waterman meetings, and will be according to schedule.

If there are any questions about my work on this project, please contact me at 4walkers1@verizon.net .

Thank you, David C. Walker

David C. Walker
3477 Ridge Road
Chincoteague, Va..
23336

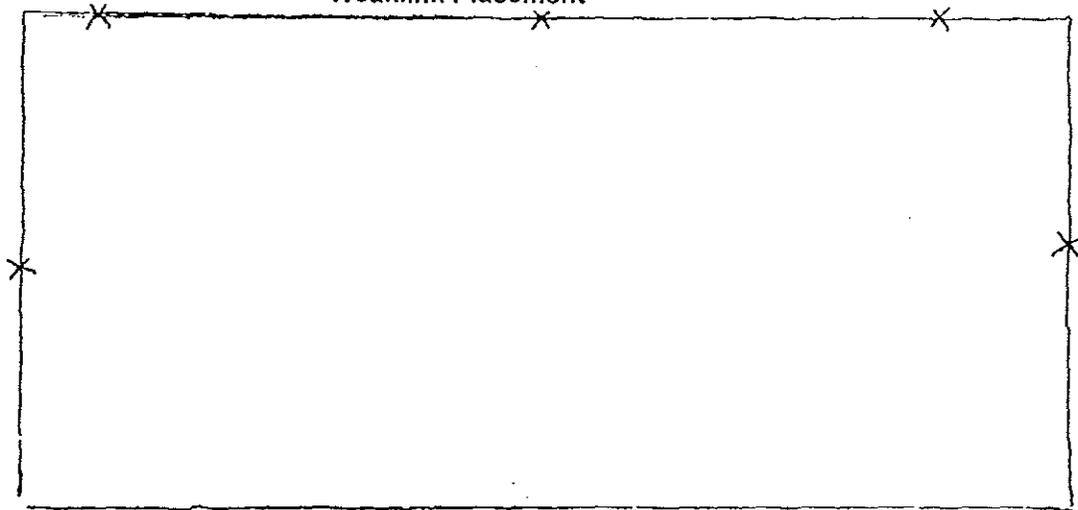
Hello, my name is David C. Walker, I am a full time commercial fisherman from Chincoteague, Virginia . About a year ago I received a grant from the Virginia Sea Grant program to test some modified gillnets to find ways of fishing that would allow whales to break free from our fishing gear. Under the supervision of Glenn Salvador from the National Marine Fisheries Service, I built the nets, the modifications included using three weaklinks are short pieces of rope spliced in the floatline that are of reduced breaking strength (eleven hundred pounds). This would allow whales to break free before serious entanglement could occur. My main interest in the grant, was would this modified gear work for the industry? There were four different sizes of net that would be tested. Seven inch would be used for Striped Bass, four inch would be used for Croaker, six inch would be used for smooth dogfish, and three inch for pan trout. All of the fisheries take place at a different time of year, different weather conditions, different fishing methods, such as the using of anchors to leave gear overnight. My concern was before I invested my own money into this experimental gear would it stay together under harsh fishing conditions, such as the weight of the boat pulling back against wind, rough seas, strong tides, deep water and gear that is anchored. After a year of testing of all the sizes of nets, day in day out I see no problem with the gear. There wasn't any breaking or stretching of the weaklinks that would cause the nets to be ineffective. The only problem that was evident with the weaklink was the opportunity to backlash do to the use of knots in the floatline to install them.(a backlash is when the webbing gets caught on a knot, other webbing ,or pinched between the reel and the floatline, causing the webbing to rip out.) My suggestion would to use splices instead of knots and a reduced breaking strength line.(1100 lb. Example provided) This would provide a much smoother surface where no "hangs" would be exposed , which eliminate this possibility of a backlash.

Now that the facts have been established, fisherman can feel more at ease about using a weaklink in their own fishing gear, making it possible for more conservation minded fishing gear to be used now and in the future. I would like to thank the Virginia Sea Grant program for the making this experiment possible, also I would like to thank Glenn Salvador for his advice and guidance.

The Pictures provided are examples of how weaklinks are placed in the fishing gear. Picture 1 is of the end panel weaklink, when the net is "fishing" this line would be vertical to the bottom. Picture 2 is of the weaklink in the floatline, this line would be horizontal to the bottom when the net is fishing. Picture 3 is of two ways of making gear safer, top of picture 5/16" weaklink, Bottom of picture, reduced breaking strength line used for entire floatline. Picture 4 is of weaklink used in a seven inch Stripped Bass Gillnet.

EXPERIMENTAL GILLNETS

Weaklink Placement



100 yards

WEAKLINK

24" PIECE OF 5/16" POLY WITH OVERHAND KNOT SPLICED INTO 3/8" FLOATLINE
AND TAPED OVER KNOT.