Problem of Ghost Gear - Fishing

What is the issue?

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- The problem of ghost gear in Indian oceans is getting to be a serious concern.
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- India should emulate innovative solutions from across the world to tackle this.
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What are the recent happenings?

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- Ghost gear is any fishing equipment that has been lost, discarded or abandoned in water bodies.
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- The problem of ghost gear has grown from a fishing outcome that people had not heard of to one that is now difficult to ignore.
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- In March 2018, fishermen hauled 400 kg of fishing nets out of the sea in a few locations off Kerala’s south coast.
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- Reportedly, many divers regularly make underwater trips just to extract nets that have sunk to the ocean floor.
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- It covers the regions off India’s coasts, ranging from Tamil Nadu to Maharashtra.
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What is the impact?

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- Ghost nets are often ‘ghost fishers’ as ocean currents carry them for thousands of km across the ocean floor.
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- E.g. discarded Indian and Thai fishing nets have been fished out of Maldivian coasts
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- They entangle, injure and drown marine life and damage live corals along the way.
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- The Olive Ridley Project is a U.K. registered charity that removes ghost nets and protects sea turtles.
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- The project, between 2011 and 2018 alone, recorded around 600 sea turtles being entangled in ghost gear near the Maldives.
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- Of this, 528 were Olive Ridleys, the same species that come in thousands to Odisha’s coasts to nest.
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- Other casualties worldwide include whales, dolphins, sharks and even pelagic birds.
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- In 2016, another study found over 5,400 marine animals belonging to 40 different species entangled in ghost gear, or associated with it.
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What are the concerns?

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- The analysis showed a huge gap in data from the Indian, Southern and Arctic Oceans, and thus prompted on future studies to focus on these areas.
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- But even after two years, there are still no data pertaining to the extent of prevalence of ghost gear off India’s coast.
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- Data is crucial because the detrimental effects of these nets also spillover into other countries and oceans.
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- The government is currently preparing a national ghost net management policy.
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- But besides ghost nets, the larger concern is the bigger violations wherein large vessels do fishing where they are not supposed to.

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- Unless this is checked, implementing a policy on the management of ghost nets is hard.
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- The consequences of overfishing, using nets of the smallest mesh size, and illegal fishing are far less visible, but are more worrying.
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- Entire fishing communities are affected by these actions.
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- Especially in developing countries like India where the demand for fish keeps rising, the impact is serious.
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What should be done?

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- There are numerous innovative solutions to tackle the problem of ghost nets, which India should consider.
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- E.g. in countries like Canada and Thailand, fishermen retain their used nets.
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- These are recycled into yarn to craft socks and even carpet tiles.
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- For the first time in a developing country, a gear-marking programme is being tested in Indonesia.
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- By this, the trajectory of fishing gear, if it drifts away, can be studied better.
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- Outreach and education among fishing communities would also be crucial along with policy-level changes.
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Source: The Hindu

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