

Greece: Divers pull out 2 tons of ghost nets from highly biodiverse area

On 18th – 20th May 2019, for the second year in succession, the Healthy Seas initiative returned to Stratoni, a small fishing town in Northern Greece, to finish cleaning up a spot inhabited by rich marine biodiversity and which, up to recently, was polluted with an estimated 3 tons of ghost nets. Last November, the diving team removed over 1 ton, and in the previous few days, 4 Dutch and 6 Greek divers pulled out two more tons of ghost nets from the seabed.

The recovery mission was carried out in collaboration with [Ghost Fishing Greece](#), [Ghost Fishing Netherlands](#), [AquaTec](#) and [UFR Team](#) diving teams as well as [Northern Greece Underwater Explorers](#), with valuable support from the local community. The education programme held on Saturday was perhaps the highlight of the 3-day event, attracting to the harbour children and their parents of the remote community, to meet and greet the divers and see for themselves just how massive ghost nets can be.

Elina Samara, a marine biologist of the newly established Hippocampus Marine Institute also joined the dives: *“We spotted an impressive list of species including the protected marine mammal *Delphinus delphis*, the rough skate *Raja radula*, the pillow coral *Cladocora caespitosa* and the gastropod *Tonna galea*. The removal of the nets will allow the marine life to recolonize its lost habitat and will not pose any future entangling threats to the marine species inhabiting the area.”*

The nearby, coastal area of Stratoni is the home of a unique colony of the two seahorse species found in the Mediterranean: *Hippocampus hippocampus* and *Hippocampus guttulatus*. These are characterized by the IUCN as “Near Threatened” and are vulnerable to entanglement in nets, and to habitat loss.

The recovered fishing nets will now begin their journey, from waste to wear. First, they will be transported to Diopas S.A, a partner of Healthy Seas in Northern Greece, on to Norwegian company Nofir A.S for cleaning and sorting and then to Aquafil’s plant in Slovenia where, together with other nylon waste, they will be regenerated into ECONYL® yarn, the infinitely recyclable material. This will provide the basis for beautiful new products such as socks, sportswear, swimwear, and carpets. **Healthy Seas** is an excellent example of the circular economy, where waste is a resource.

This was the first of 4 main events Healthy Seas will carry out during 2019, doing its part to protect the marine environment through ghost net cleanups and raising public awareness besides the regular activities organized throughout the year.

Coming up next for the Healthy Seas initiative is another main event at the Aeolian Islands in Italy, June 3th to 8th (World Oceans Day). Journalists who are interested to join should contact Jenny.ioannou@healthyseas.org



Photos: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/82yh9sjaizw8va0/AAD0OdsbZiB5bms47TD79G-ua?dl=0>

Press contact:

Jenny Ioannou, Communications Coordinator

Healthy Seas

Tel: +30 6974992349

Email: jenny.ioannou@healthyseas.org

Healthy Seas

The mission of 'Healthy Seas, a Journey from Waste to Wear' initiative, is to remove waste from the seas, in particular fishing nets, for the purpose of creating healthier seas and recycling marine litter into textile products. The recovered nylon fishing nets will be transformed and regenerated by Aquafil into ECONYL® yarn, a high-quality raw material used to create new products, such as socks, swimwear or carpets.

The discarded, lost, or abandoned fishing nets are sometimes called “ghost nets” because they appear invisible underwater and continue to catch fish and other marine animals without human involvement. They are plastic waste which remains in the seas for hundreds of years and does not biodegrade. Millions of marine animals, including sharks, dolphins, seals and turtles get entangled in these nets leading to suffering and eventual death. Every year, some 640,000 tons of fishing gear is lost in the seas and oceans.

<https://healthyseas.org>

<https://healthyseas.org/less-ghostnets-more-seahorses>

Ghost Fishing Foundation

Ghost Fishing is an international non-profit organization, executed by volunteer technical divers, which initiates, supports and promotes lost fishing gear removal initiatives in oceans, seas and local waters. Since 2012 they have run lost fishing gear survey and removal projects in the North Sea, Adriatic Sea, Aegean Sea, Mediterranean Sea, and Pacific Ocean in cooperation with various environmental organizations and with the support of a continuously growing group of volunteer technical divers.

<https://www.ghostfishing.org/>