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Ecosystem effects of marine fisheries: an overview

R Goñi et al.*

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Abstract

Most fisheries literature avoids speaking about ecosystem impacts of fishing, either because impacts are not demonstrated or because a causal relationship between impacts and fishing cannot be formally established with the available information. However, there is mounting evidence that fishing has undesired effects in the marine ecosystems. This overview examines the wide ecosystem effects of fishing, describing and illustrating the potential unintended effects of the main fisheries of the world. An operational framework for classifying the effects of fishing in terms of the mechanisms generating the effects is provided. The focus and, to a large extent, the recourse to examples is on those fisheries for which the impacts of fishing have been best studied such as those in the North Atlantic and the Northeast Pacific. Ecosystem effects are divided into direct and indirect: direct effects include the fishing mortality exerted on target populations (overfishing), the fishing mortality sustained by non-target populations (bycatch), and the physical impacts caused by towed gears on benthic organisms and on the seabed. Indirect effects include impacts mediated by biological interactions, the environmental

indirect effects include impacts mediated by biological interactions, the environmental effects of dumping discards and organic detritus (offal), and the mortality caused by lost gear (ghost fishing).



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* E-mail: raquel.goni@ba.ieo.es

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