

Summary

AFS Policy Statement #26:

Bycatch Reduction Devices as a Conservation Measure
(Abbreviated)

Bycatch in marine fisheries consists of target fishes smaller than the legal size limit or nontarget fish species captured and killed by nonselective fishing gear, especially those gear with small mesh size (including both seines and gill nets). This results in considerable waste, because much of the bycatch is not marketed or used. Mortalities of nontargeted organisms may lead to reduced recruitment, biomass, yield, and other ecological impacts on fish stocks.

Bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) are physical modifications to fishing gear that reduce the catch of nontarget organisms. These devices can alleviate waste and reduce mortality in many fisheries, thus increasing yield and stability. Examples of BRDs include turtle excluder devices, which are designed to allow sea turtles and debris to escape from shrimp nets; they also have potential as a finfish conservation tool. Separator panels incorporated in shrimp nets also show promise as BRDs. Unfortunately, regulatory efforts to impose mandatory use of BRDs often meet with controversy and resistance within some segments of the commercial fishing industry.

Most U.S. fisheries are fully exploited and many are subjected to numerous adverse environmental stresses. Significant mortalities of juvenile finfish caused as a result of bycatch can decrease spawning stock potential and yields, and this population stress can also contribute to serious decreases in stock abundance. The AFS recognizes that further design and development of BRDs should lead to technological improvement that will aid management efforts in addressing mortality of juvenile finfish and nontarget species, increasing productivity and stability in many commercial and recreational finfisheries.

The AFS policy regarding bycatch reduction is to:

1. Encourage state and federal agencies to promote the development, use, and implementation of BRDs to conserve fish and wildlife.
2. Support continuation and expansion of conservation engineering programs to reduce bycatch of undersize or nontarget species.
3. Request states and other entities conducting research on turtle and other excluder devices to develop and support programs to extensively field test all BRD designs that allow for juvenile finfish escapement.
4. Encourage programs, through its membership, publications, and by other means, that demonstrate the usefulness of BRDs to the commercial fishing industry.
5. Support efforts to hold national and international conferences on conservation engineering in order to improve technology transfer between researchers and other groups developing BRDs and other fish separator devices.