Abstract

The Swordfish (Xiphias gladius) is a species of pelagic fish found in many different oceans. They are known to be found in the Gulf streams of western North Atlantic Oceans, extending north into the Grand Banks; the North Atlantic stock is also in eastern Atlantic along Africa/Europe. (http://www.vvproductupdate.com/Swordfish.html)

Characteristics

The Swordfish (Swordfish) (Xiphias gladius) is the only member of the Xiphiidae family. The swordfish can be found in many different oceans. They are found in the Gulf streams of western North Atlantic Oceans, extending north into the Grand Banks; the North Atlantic stock is also in eastern Atlantic along Africa/Europe. (http://www.vvproductupdate.com/Swordfish.html)

Methods of catch

People have been fishing for swordfish for thousands of years. The first swordfish fisherman used harpoons to catch female swordfish that would come to the surface. In the 1900’s, harpoon fishing became more developed with the introduction of motorized boats, long bowsprits, high crow’s nests, spotting planes and harpoons that give the fish a lethal electric shock. (ebcschoth.com/libraryaccess.sdmiramar.edu/Broadbill/swordfish: status of established fisheries and lessons for developing fisheries) Another method used in catching swordfish is the use of driftnets. The name pretty much describes this method of fishing. Large nets are placed into the ocean and are dragged to catch large amounts of fish. This method of fishing became available during the 1950’s. However, these driftnets were not used to catch swordfish until the 1980’s. The third and most common method of catching swordfish is long line fishing. The reason that long line fishing is the most efficient is because it is the most successful form of sword fishing. 98 percent of swordfish caught in the Atlantic are caught by long line fishing. (http://www.seaweb.org/initiatives/swordfish/swordfaq.html) What’s interesting about long line fishing is that in the year 2000, incidental long line fishing accounted for more than half of the world’s swordfish catch. (ebcschoth.com/libraryaccess.sdmiramar.edu/Broadbill/swordfish: status of established fisheries and lessons for developing fisheries) What else is interesting is that these fishermen were not targeting swordfish. They were targeting multiple species of tuna. However there is a huge problem with using driftnets and long lines. Many endangered species are caught by these two methods, due to the fact that these two methods are nondiscriminatory.

Human Impact

Swordfish have become a popular delicacy in the last 50 years. The demand for swordfish has also had its ups and downs. In the 1970’s the demand for swordfish dropped due to the discovered amounts of mercury in their flesh. However, with fishing strategies becoming more efficient, our impact on the swordfish population is getting larger. In 1963 the average weight of caught swordfish was 250 pounds. In 1995, the average weight of caught swordfish was only 90 pounds. (http://go.galegroup.com/libraryaccess.sdmiramar.edu/swordfish) More efficient fishing strategies are also leading to fishermen catching more juvenile swordfish. In 1996, 40,000 juvenile swordfish were thrown overboard, most of them dead, after being caught by long lines. (http://www.seaweb.org/initiatives/swordfish/swordfaq.html) These juveniles were too small to be profitable. It is estimated that the swordfish population in the North Atlantic might become extinct in the next decade (www.seaweb.org). The North Atlantic is more overfished than the Pacific because the percent of by catch of endangered species by long line fishing is much higher.

Conservation Actions

There is action being taken in every ocean to reduce the overfishing of swordfish. The organization that has done the most to stop the overfishing of swordfish is the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). They have raised the minimum weight requirement for commercial swordfish in order to reduce the amount of juvenile swordfish caught. The ICCAT has also put restrictions on the total allowable catch (TAC) in order to reduce the amount of overfishing. (www.opc.ca.gov) Drift gillnetting for swordfish in the Atlantic has been banned since 1996, due to fact that some endangered marine mammals were being caught. There have been some areas where long line fishing has been banned. However these policies and prohibitions are not proving to have a big impact on the swordfish population.

References


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(Here is a grilled steak of swordfish, one of the most popular ways to prepare it: http://thefoodebug.com/2009/06/23/)

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