

Fishery Basics — Fishing Vessels

Fishing Vessel Types

Fishing vessels are typically designed with a specific purpose. That purpose is to locate, **catch**, and preserve fish while out at sea. The planned operations of a vessel determine the overall size of the vessel, the arrangement of the deck, **carrying capacity**, as well as the machinery and types of equipment that will be supported by the vessel. Due to the inherent differences in **fishing communities** around the world, there is a wide range of types and styles of fishing vessels. Vessel sizes can range from the 2 m (6 ft) dug out canoes used in **subsistence** and **artisanal** fisheries, to factory ships that exceed 130 m (427 ft) in length. Commercial fishing vessels can also be characterized by a variety of criteria: **types of fish** (See Biology & Ecology) they catch, **fishing gear and methods used** (See Fishing Gear), capacity and **processing** capabilities, and the geographical origin of the vessel. In 2002, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated the **world fishing fleet** had approximately four million vessels, with an average vessel size ranging from 10-15 m (33-49 ft). Based on a **quarterly catch statistics report**, published by the **Pacific Fisheries Information Network (PacFIN)**, approximately 1,950 vessels landed their catches in California ports.

Due to the technological innovations that began in the 1950s, many fishing vessels are now classified as **multi-purpose vessels**, because of the ability to switch out gear types depending on the targeted species. However, single use vessels still exist in the world fishing fleet today. The **United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** has identified eight general vessel classifications by fishing method, which we have provided detailed information on. Most, if not all, modern **commercial** vessels are also equipped with advanced technological equipment for navigation and fish finding.

Gillnetters

There are two basic types of gillnetters: a traditional **gillnetter** and a **set netter**. Both types of vessels fish with **gillnets** (See Fishing Gear), however traditional gillnetter vessels remain attached to the net during fishing operations, while set netter vessels are not attached to the net (i.e., deploy drift gillnets).

The size of both types of vessels can range from small open boats and canoes (2 m, 6.5 ft) that operate within inshore and coastal waters to large specialized vessels that operate in the open-ocean (15 m, 49 ft). The smaller vessels generally deploy and **haul** the nets by hand, while larger vessels use hydraulic or mechanical net haulers.

Historically, many gillnetters fished in the state and federal waters off of California. These vessels targeted various species of Rockfish and **Chinook Salmon** (See California Fisheries), as

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well as larger **pelagic** species. Beginning in the 1980s, increased regulations, like depth limitations, gear restrictions, and species restrictions, caused a steady decline in the number of gillnetters operating along the west coast. Today the **major gillnet fishery** operating along the Pacific coast is a drift gillnet fishery that targets **Swordfish** and the **Common Thresher Shark**. This fishery primarily operates offshore from California, but does spend some time in the waters off of Oregon. Vessels operating in this fishery range in size from 10.5 to 20 m (35-65 ft), with trips typically lasting from 6 to 20 days.

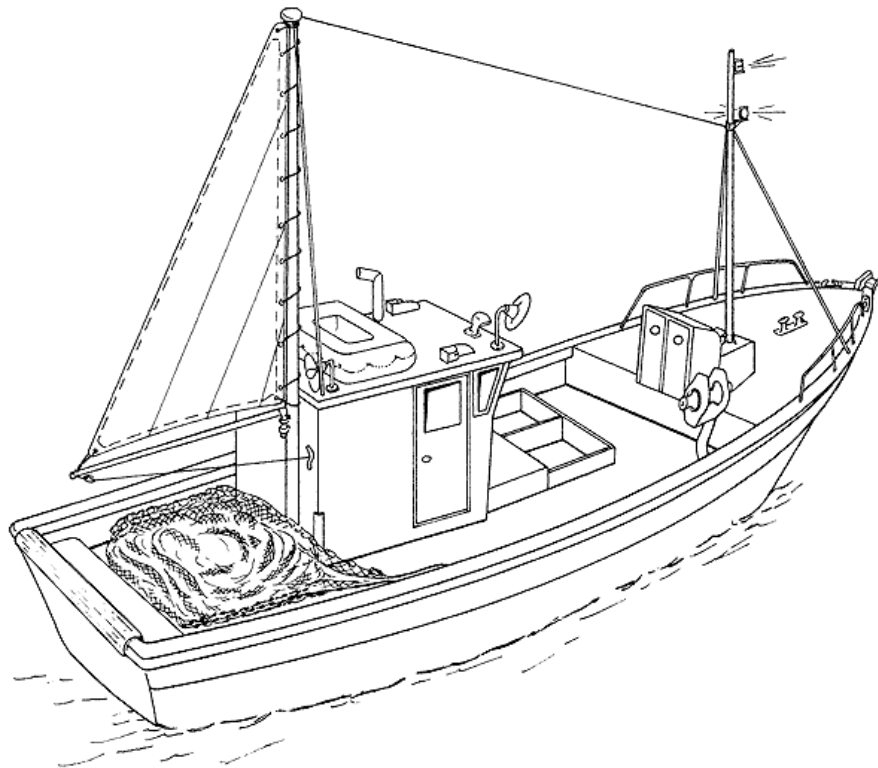


Illustration of a gillnetter. (Credit: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations)

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Additional Resources

National Marine Fisheries Services: Fisheries Gear

(link to: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/fishwatch/fishinggears.htm>)

National Marine Fisheries Services: Interactive Illustration with Vessels, Gears and Species

(link to: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/speciesid/Sustainability.html>)