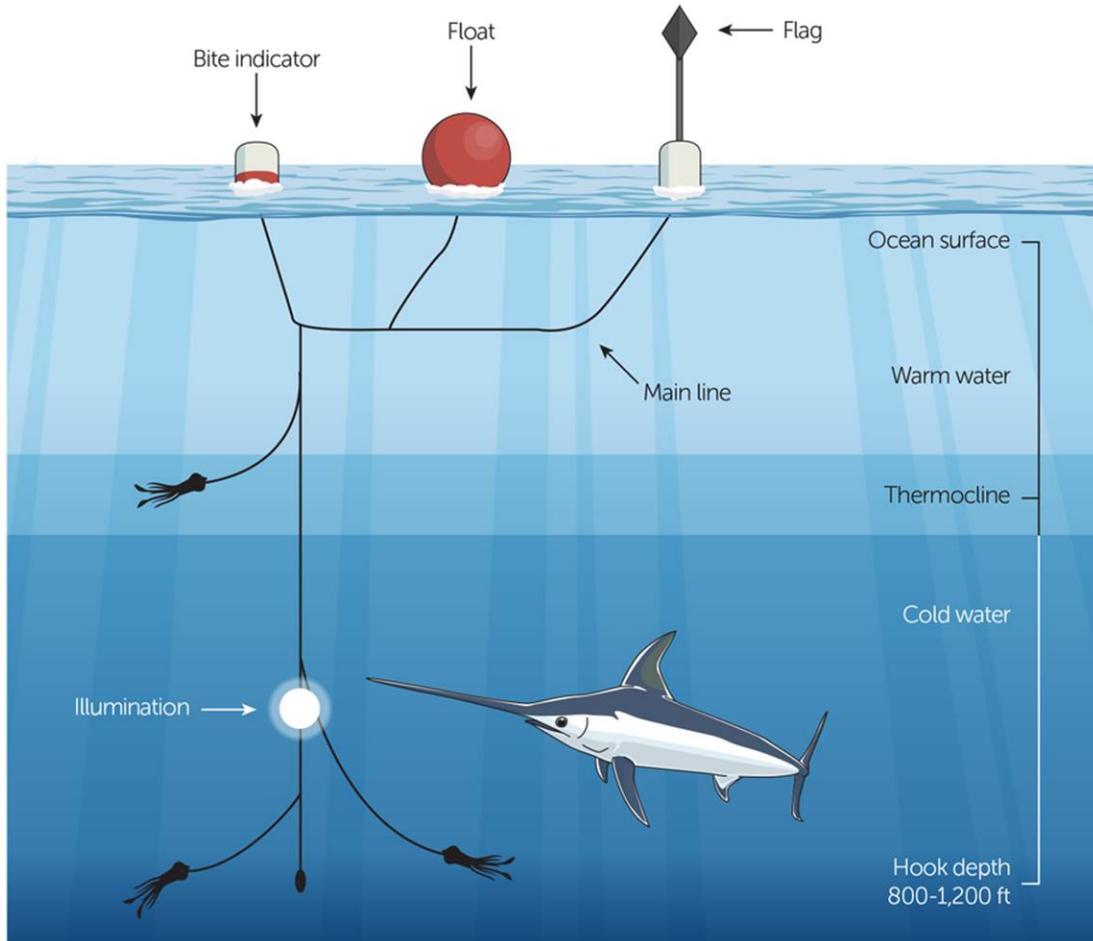


Background Information on Buoy Gear



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Buoy gear is categorized as “allowable gear” in the snapper grouper fishery. Below is an excerpt of current regulations. The figure above depicts a similar rig used to catch swordfish.

§622.188 Required gear, authorized gear, and unauthorized gear.

(b) *Authorized gear.* Subject to the gear restrictions specified in §622.180, the following are the only gear types authorized in a directed fishery for snapper-grouper in the South Atlantic EEZ: Bandit gear, bottom longline, buoy gear, handline, rod and reel, sea bass pot, and spearfishing gear.

§622.2 Definitions and acronyms.

Buoy gear means fishing gear that fishes vertically in the water column that consists of a single drop line suspended from a float, from which no more than 10 hooks can be connected between the buoy and the terminal end, and the terminal end contains a weight

that is no more than 10 lb (4.5 kg). The drop line can be rope (hemp, manila, cotton or other natural fibers; nylon, polypropylene, spectra or other synthetic material) or monofilament, but must not be cable or wire. The gear is free-floating and not connected to other gear or the vessel. The drop line must be no greater than 2 times the depth of the water being fished. All hooks must be attached to the drop line no more than 30 ft (9.1 m) from the weighted terminal end. These hooks may be attached directly to the drop line; attached as snoods (defined as an offshoot line that is directly spliced, tied or otherwise connected to the drop line), where each snood has a single terminal hook; or as gangions (defined as an offshoot line connected to the drop line with some type of detachable clip), where each gangion has a single terminal hook.

Hook-and-line gear means automatic reel, bandit gear, buoy gear, handline, longline, and rod and reel.

What we have heard:

- Buoy gear is being used to catch golden tilefish and blueline tilefish off South Carolina.
- Has been reported off North Carolina to catch mackerel and red grouper.
- Discards appear associated with vessels targeting blueline tilefish (300-pound trip limit) found in relative proximity to snowy grouper (200-pound trip limit).
- There are some discards associated with this type of gear.
- “Poly ball longlining” has been developed to skirt the longline tilefish rules. Small longlines are being run from bandit reels, many at a time and used like “trot lines” with poly balls as topline marker.

What we’d like to know:

- What species are being targeted and where?
- Could this type of gear pose a threat to habitat (e.g., deep-water coral)?
- Is this gear being used in areas of likely interaction with protected species (i.e., right whale calving grounds or sea turtles)?
- Is this type of gear being used in areas that are closed to bottom longlines (inside of 50 fathoms or south of Port St. Lucie Inlet, FL)?
- What is the potential for lost gear? Could ghost fishing be a problem?