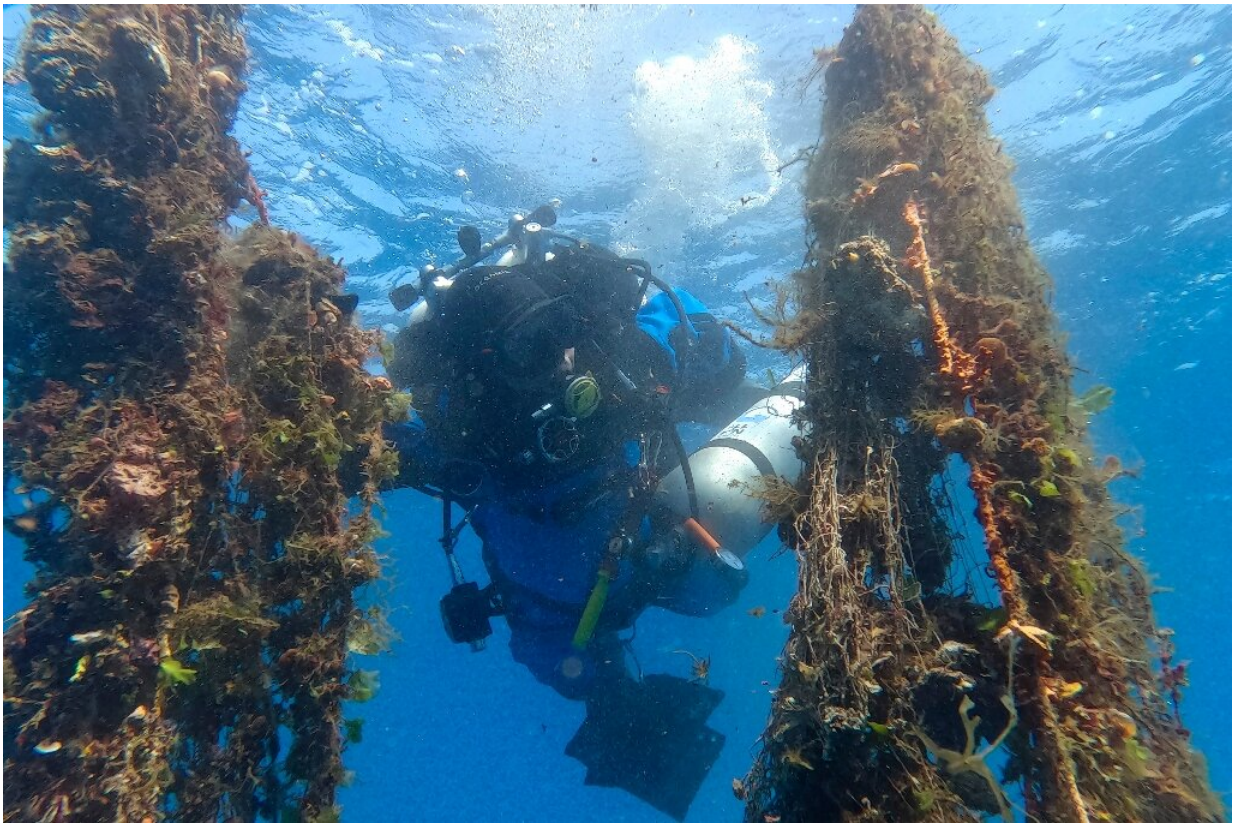


Divers fish deadly 'ghost nets' from Santorini's depths

June 5 2023, by Will VASSILOPOULOS



A diver retrieves a 'ghost net' from the seabed off the Greek island of Santorini.

Off the spectacular Greek tourist island of Santorini, divers drag deadly "ghost nets" from the depths of the Aegean Sea which have claimed the lives of thousands of fish.

"These abandoned [nets](#) are like [fish](#) traps," said diver Mika Panagiotopoulou, one of a group of volunteers who have been descending up to 45 meters to fish out discarded nets, tires and plastic bags from the crystalline blue waters.

"For half a century the build-up of these abandoned nets has swept up thousands of fish and caused incalculable damage to the flora and fauna of our seas," said Santorini's mayor Antonis Sigalas, as the rubbish was gathered up at the little port of Vlychada before being recycled.

"For World Environment Day we want to highlight the dangers of abandoned fishing nets for our seas," said George Sarelakos, co-founder of Aegean Rebreath, the Greek NGO behind the clean-up.

"Discarded fishing nets account for about a tenth of the world's marine pollution and it's a real challenge because up to now it has been invisible—because most people have no idea of what is hidden in the depths," he added.

Over the last five years, Aegean Rebreath's 300 volunteer divers have removed more than 28 tons of nets and hundreds of thousands of plastic bags—one of the greatest scourges of the aquatic world—from Greek waters.



Some of the nets and plastic fished from the sea off Santorini.

Despite a tax being levied on [plastic bags](#) in Greece since 2018, shops still hand them out with abandon.

However, Sarelakos said there has been some progress. "There has been a change of mentality among fisherman and now they are handing (nets) over to be recycled."

Veteran fisherman Kyriakos Prekas, 71, said there was a growing awareness that "the riches of the sea were being exhausted".

"It is hard for a [fisherman](#) to survive so they put down more and more

nets, which leads to fewer fish. It's a vicious circle," he said.

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