

Killer Whale Depredation

Makah Fisheries Management
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Introduction

Fishing is and has always been an important part of the Makah culture¹. Killer whales greatly affect longlining including blackcod and halibut which are very important fisheries to the Makah. These killer whales are very intelligent and can steal these fish directly from the sets of longlining fishermen². Killer and sperm whale depredation has been reported by Makah fishermen since around 2008. The objective of this research was to identify the magnitude of killer whale depredation and at what time of year this problem is most extreme. Documentation of the impact of depredation will allow Makah Fisheries to take steps towards finding a solution to this growing problem.

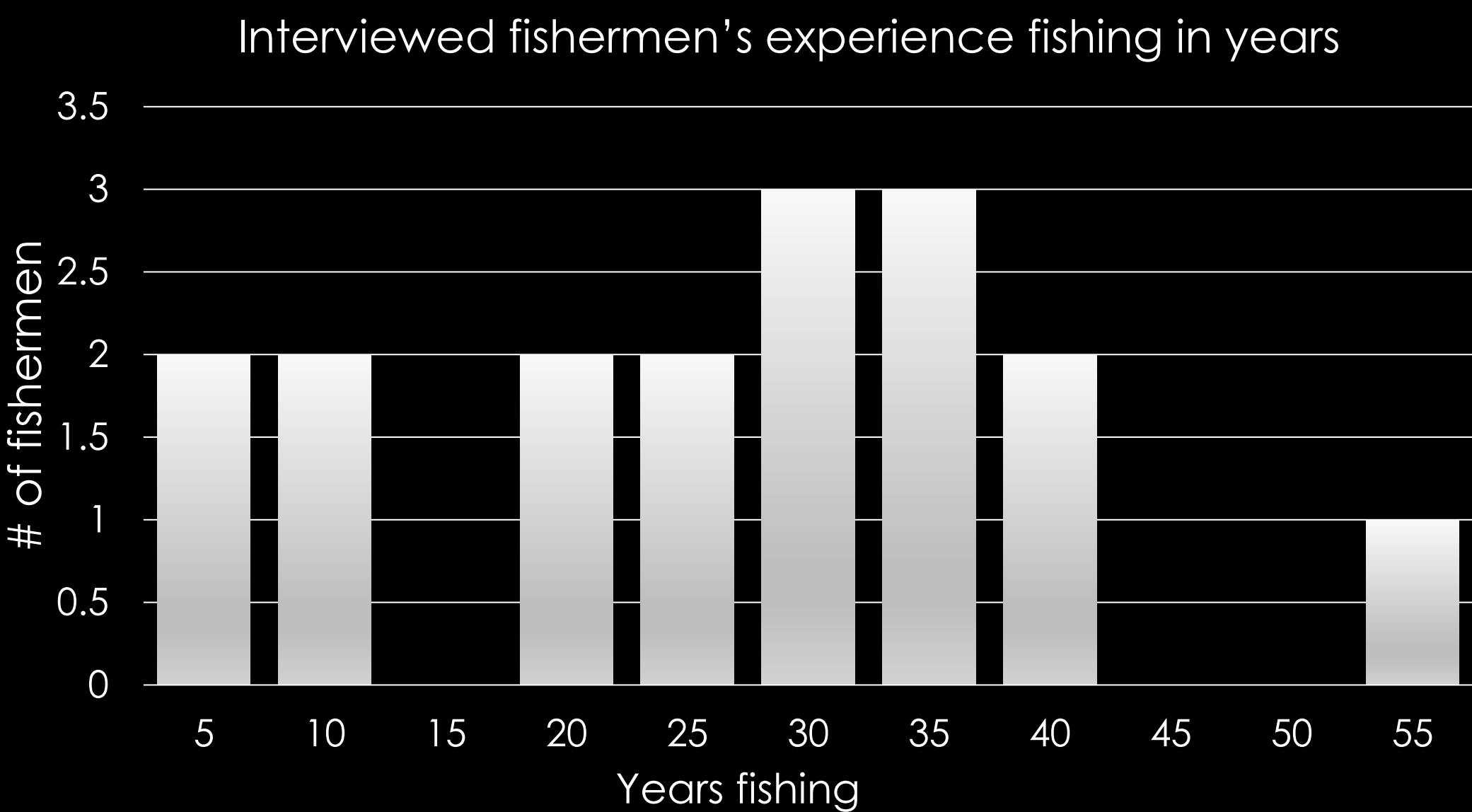
Methods

I interviewed Makah fishermen who participate in the longline blackcod and halibut fishery and analyzed their responses. Questions included in the interview were:

- How long have you been fishing commercially?
- Do you participate in the longline fishery?
- Did you see killer whales while out on this last halibut opener? How many? How big of a group were they in?
- Did you lose catch to killer whales during this last halibut opener? How did you know?
- How small was the catch on that set compared to the other sets? Was the set like half the size of catch compared to a normal set?
- What percent of all your trips do you have interactions with killer whales?
- Do you feel that killer whales picking sets has gotten worse as of late?
- How much has killer whale depredation cost you this past year? (Ex. Fuel to move, damaged gear, lost fish and unsellable fish)
- What time of year is the killer whale problem the worst?
- Do you also have problems with killer whales in other fisheries besides longlining?

Results

We interviewed 17 fishermen during July 2024. The fishermen ranged from 3 years of fishing experience all the way to 55 years of fishing experience.

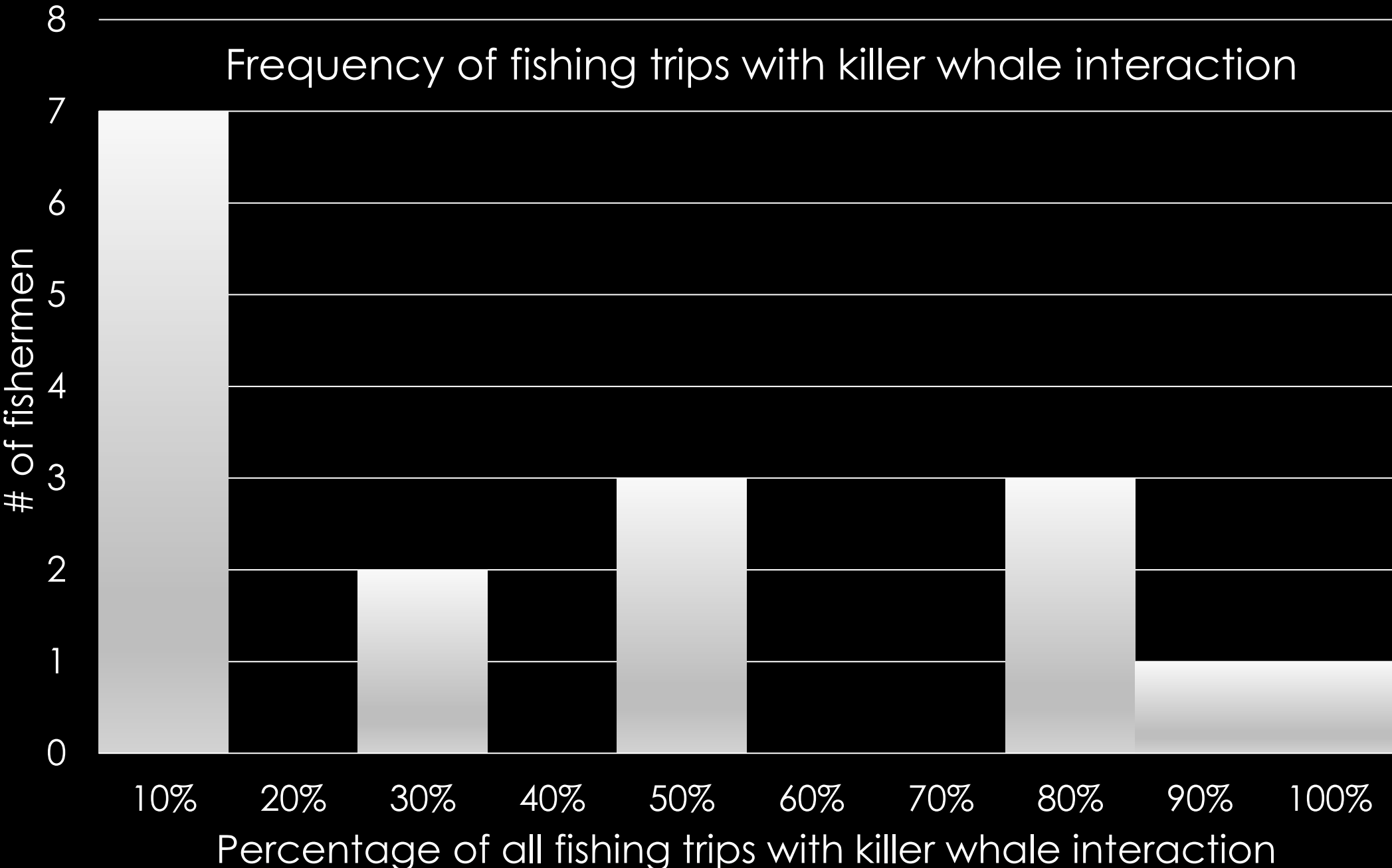


Of all the interviewed fishermen 88% of them have reported that the killer whale depredation problem has been getting worse as of late. More than 50% of the interviewed fishermen recognized spring as the season when killer whale depredation is the most prolific. It's so bad to the point where some fishermen are losing money and others are not even going out fishing.

Makah fishermen have started really noticing these killer whales and their depredation in about 2017 and it has just been getting worse since then.

Fishermen were asked how much money was lost due to killer whale depredation in the past year. Of the answers given with a dollar amount, the average money lost by fishermen was \$41,050!

The average percentage of trips where interviewed fishermen had interactions with killer whales was 39%.



Conclusions

Killer whale depredation has been recognized as a big problem by the Makah fishermen especially in the spring time, making the longline fishery financially unsustainable. There is a lot at risk with killer whales present, if you see one it might be better to just turn around and go home³. Some fishermen are even just staying home and not even making trips because it is simply just not worth it. Without having as much fishermen fishing as possible our treaty rights are not being fully utilized¹. This is just the first research step towards finding new ways to work around this problem so we can get more boats out catching fish and making money.



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References

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