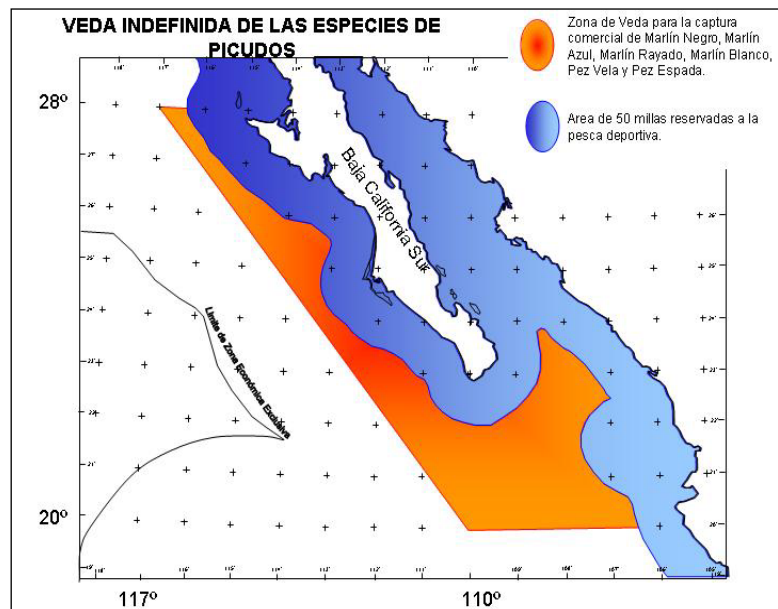


## The effects of allowing longliners into the Sea of Cortez would be catastrophic to already severely depleted dorado, shark, billfish and turtle stocks.

Mexico set up a 50 mile conservation zone and core management area protected zone in 1984 to protect sportsfish. Since then billfish, dorado and shark populations have plummeted with the declines so drastic that Mexico's striped marlin (favorite target of longliners) are now being harvested at twice their sustainable yield rate and some shark species are so over exploited that they may never recover. In May of 1990 Mexico banned the harvest of all Sea turtles. This ban has also been totally ineffective with sea turtle populations continuing to decline. Leatherback turtles are now almost extinct. **With the current level of conservation measures not working how can decreasing the strength of those conservation measures help solve the continuing fisheries declines? If anything the conservation measures need to be strengthened.**

In 1984 Mexico set an internationally acclaimed precedent by establishing conservation zones which protected sailfish, marlins, swordfish, roosterfish, tarpon and dorado from commercial harvest within 50 nautical miles of the coast and an additional expanded core area of striped marlin winter breeding grounds. Limits were placed on recreational fishers allowing only a single marlin, sailfish or swordfish to be taken per day. These protections are the only marine fisheries conservation measures in place to protect these resources in Mexico.



**Current protected areas have been unable to stop continuing declines in billfish, sharks and sea turtles. How can reducing those protected areas and allowing up to 200 longliners into the already depleted Sea of Cortez help stop the declines?**

Billfish and shark populations have been devastated by longlines in Mexico and throughout the world. Recent studies show a 90% decline in the abundance of these oceanic predators since the inception of high seas longlining<sup>i</sup>. Past research has proved the devastating effect of longline fishing on striped marlin populations and the economically valuable sport fishing industry specifically off Baja California<sup>ii</sup>. In the Sea of Cortez hammerhead shark populations have been all but eliminated by excessive harvest<sup>iii</sup>.

Despite Mexico's 1984 action to keep longlines outside of 50 miles and out of the core management area, landings of marlin from the high seas of the eastern Pacific have continued to dramatically decline (Figures 1, 2 & 3 below). Longline fishing inside of the 50 mile conservation zone continues to devastate these already troubled populations.

- In an experimental 9 month yellowfin tuna and swordfish longline fishery authorized by the INP from September 1997- May 1998, two longliners, the “Ivana 21” and the “Yuqui I” fishing out of Magdalena Bay with a fishing effort of 471,952 hooks caught **11,743 striped marlin as bycatch (78% of the total catch)**<sup>iv</sup>
- About that same time about 100 small longliners (3-5 kilometer longlines) with **shark permits** were working off Manzanillo and caught over 80% Sailfish (Pez Vela) instead of sharks<sup>v</sup>. Profepa estimated the illegal bycatch of Pez Vela taken into the Manzanillo market was about 150 to 200 tons each month<sup>vi</sup>

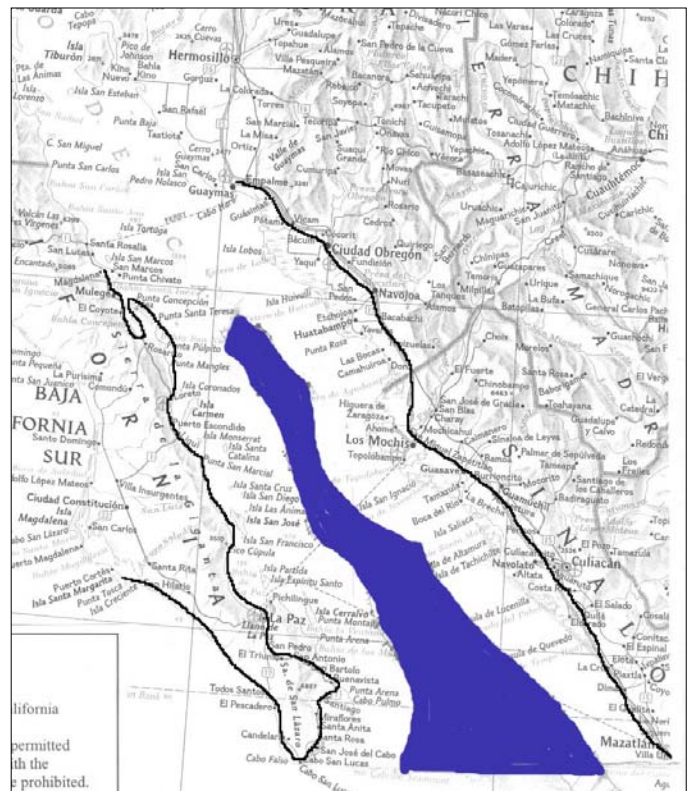
Similarly with sea turtles, Mexico’s ban on all harvest since the 28<sup>th</sup> of May, 1990 has not been effective in rebuilding populations due to continued incidental take primarily by longlines.<sup>vii</sup>

- Even the INP data saying .25 to .50 turtles are caught/1000 hooks would still equate to between 45 and 90 turtles taken daily under the new proposal and with the current black-market price about \$200/ turtle, very few will ever be released alive. PROFEPA has documented the illegal take of 69 turtles on a single longline vessel during a 12 day trip.<sup>viii</sup>
- It is naive to say that turtles need only be protected with in 10 miles of their nesting sites. That would be true if turtles stayed within 10 miles of where they were born. Longliners catch turtles 1000s of miles from nesting sites. It was recently estimated in a National Geographic article that Mexico’s illegal turtle catch exceeds 35,000 per year just in the NW Pacific.



The map on the right shows approximately where longliners can operate under the proposed plan backed by Defenders of Wildlife.

- Enforcement of laws has been the biggest problem in the Sea of Cortes and past catch data shows the majority of sharks, billfish and dorado (the target species for large and small longliners) are not caught in the proposed fishing zone, but closer to shore.
- It seems obvious that 35 nautical mile longlines will be set among the fish concentrations closer to shore while the boats sit during the soak time in the legal zone. This is what has been done in the Revillagigedo Island reserve to allow longliners to set inside the 12 mile no fishing zone,



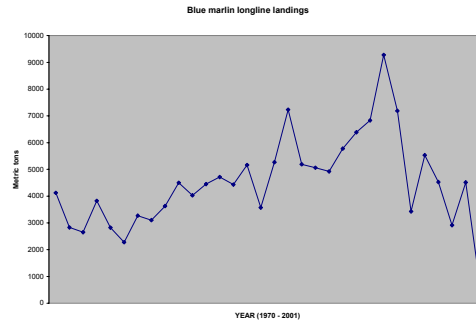
- while leaving their boats 20 miles from the Islands.
- Even if the up to 200 longliners with up to 6000 miles of longline and 180,000 hooks could be kept within the blue “open” area above, the already depleted billfish and dorado stocks that are the target species migrate back and forth across the Sea of Cortes and would be decimated as soon as they came within the blue open area..

**Conclusions:**

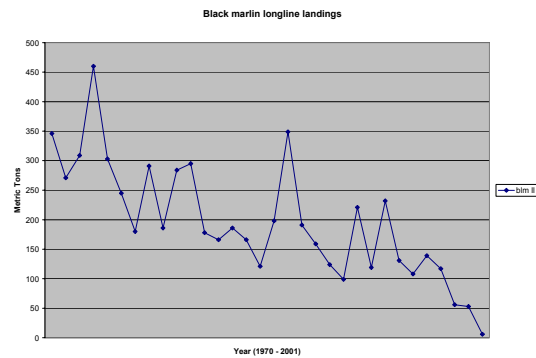
**In light of continuing rapid declines in the important sports fishing species, turtles and sharks, weakening the existing protection zones and making virtually non existent enforcement even more complicated makes no sense.**

**Figure 1. Blue, striped and black marlin landings in Eastern Tropical Pacific; 1970-2001; (FAO).**

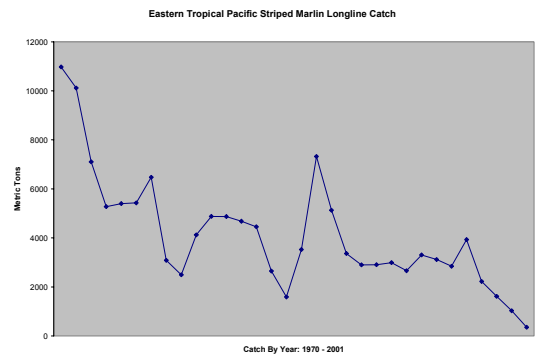
**Blue marlin**



**Black marlin**



**Striped marlin**




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<sup>i</sup> Myers and Worm. 2003. Rapid depletion of predatory fish communities. NATURE, May 15, 2003.  
<sup>ii</sup> Squire and Au. 1990. Striped marlin in the northeast Pacific – a case for local depletion and core area management. Pp 199-214. Proceedings of the Second International Billfish Symposium. Marine Recreational fisheries Volume 13. NCMC, Savannah, Georgia.  
<sup>iii</sup> IEmanya Oceanica. 2002. <http://www.iemanyaoceanica.org/Newsletter%20summer%202002.htm>  
<sup>iv</sup> INP National Report of Mexico, January 1999  
<sup>v</sup> Senate hearings 29 septiembre 1999  
<sup>vi</sup> La Jornada Feb/4/02  
<sup>vii</sup>  
<sup>viii</sup> Profepa document