

WHY ARE CABLES VULNERABLE TO DAMAGE?

Cables do not always lay flat and straight on the seabed. Despite the extensive precautions taken by cable owners during the laying of submarine cables, unavoidable cable suspensions may occur due to seabed or installation conditions. Where the cable is suspended, the chances of damage are greater.

During installation and repair work, when a new section is spliced in, it is necessary for the repair ship to install an amount of cable approximately equal to twice the water depth. Once a cable has been repaired, the location becomes vulnerable to further damage, as the excess cable may, despite all proper precautions being observed, form loops and stand proud of the seabed.

Cable burial may be employed for installation or repair work. As noted above, the use of burial techniques does not necessarily mean that cables are entirely buried. In addition, technology limitations also mean that burial is not always practical in water depths greater than 1000 meters.

Even when cable is buried below the seabed for its protection, it can still be damaged when trawling equipment or dredges penetrate the seabed on each drag, or where dredges have made successive passes over the same area.

If a buried cable has been previously fouled and pulled up out of the seabed, it becomes even more vulnerable even if it wasn't damaged.

Despite care in route selection, protective sheathing of cables, and laying procedures for cables, fishing activities may vary over time in areas where cables are present for many reasons, such as nature of the fishing fleet and equipment and fish management plans and regulations, Cables may potentially become vulnerable as a result.

What do I do if my fishing gear fouls on a cable?

When a cable gets accidentally entangled, great care needs to be taken when attempting to free the fouled gear. Comparatively little pressure is required to penetrate the insulation of a cable. When this happens, water will reach the centre conductor and render the cable unusable - even though it may not be broken.

If you believe gear cannot be freed without risk or damage to the cable, the gear should be abandoned. Cable owners will normally pay compensation for any gear sacrificed under these circumstances, provided such a loss can be proven and that all reasonable precautions were taken to prevent damaging the cable.

Claims for gear lost or damaged through entanglement with a submarine cable should be lodged in writing within 24 hours of arrival at the next port of call. Particulars of the incident should be given and full details recorded in the official vessel log. The report must include:

- The vessel's name, registered license number and captain's name and contact details.
- Name and address of vessel owner/s.
- Vessel's position and heading at the time of the incident (indicate land bearings and readings of electronic navigation system used).
- Water depth.
- Charts used at the time of the incident.
- A description of the gear deployed at the time of the incident
- A description of the cable if sighted.
- Copies of the relevant page from the vessel log in which the incident was recorded.
- Action taken to free gear and/or avoid damage to the cable.

This information is required for proper processing of claims and is used for identifying any possible cable position charting errors.

IF YOU SUSPECT THAT YOU HAVE COME FOUL OF A SUBMARINE CABLE THE FOLLOWING ACTION SHOULD BE TAKEN:

- If weights are excessive and you suspect you are fast to a cable, DO NOT endanger your vessel and crew by attempting to recover your gear.
- Carefully plot your ship's position as accurately as possible, checking for any cables that may be close to your position. Advise your coastguard station of your situation OR if your coastguard is not obtainable call the emergency number of the cable maintenance company concerned and state that an incident is occurring concerning an underwater or Submarine Telecommunications cable.



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