

# Viet Nam Yellowfin FIP Makes Steady Progress in Mainstreaming Use of Circle Hooks to Reduce Sea Turtle Bycatch

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A recent project for expanding the use of Circle Hooks (or “C Hooks”) - an alternative to traditional “J” hooks that may reduce sea turtle interactions by 80% or more - in the Viet Nam Yellowfin Tuna Fisheries Improvement Project (FIP) has made significant progress in mainstreaming their use on the water and increasing buy-in among fishers for the protection of endangered sea turtles.

Supported by WWF Hong Kong (under an innovative [Crowdfunding initiative](#)) and through core support from FIP industry partners, the project aimed to expand the onboard use of C-hooks in a representative sample of tuna handline fishing vessels, raise stakeholder and public awareness and support, monitor hook performance, document fisher attitudes, and develop key communications products.

The project commenced in early 2019, and by December of the same year yielded some notable achievements, including:

1. Expanded use of Circle Hooks in local tuna fishers in Binh Dinh, Phu Yen & Khanh Hoa provinces, with 25,000 hooks transferred to 165 vessels;
2. Implemented onboard Monitoring Program in 15 vessels, including training of skippers in species ID, bycatch best practices and logbook documentation (a full technical report of the onboard monitoring activities can be found [here](#));
3. Completed a series of C-hook and turtle/shark bycatch awareness workshops and trainings in Binh Dinh, Phu Yen and Khanh Hoa provinces;
4. Filmed and broadcasted a series of videos highlighting the need for and benefits of C-hooks, including a [general awareness video](#), as well as shorter videos focussed on the perspectives of [fishers](#), [industry](#), and [NGOs and government managers](#);
5. Designed, printed and delivered 600 posters highlighting the legal status and need for protection of sea turtles and sharks, as well as Best Practices for reducing bycatch, distributed in several ports and displayed on nearly 100 vessels.

A total of 15 fishing trips (204 fishing nights) were monitored for detailed data on target, secondary and ETP catch using both J and C hooks. Based on the information collected:

- C-hooks accounted for 48.8% of total catch, compared to 52.8% with J-hooks
- However, in terms of the primary species yellowfin tuna and its proportion of total catch, 77.9% by weight of C-hook's total catch was yellowfin, compared to 66.4% with J hooks
- The average weight of individual yellowfin tuna was slightly higher for yellowfin tuna
- There were no sea turtles encountered on monitored fishing trips. However, both types of hooks caught blue sharks: J-hooks caught 315kg compared to 90kg of sharks caught by C-hooks

Although the at-sea monitoring was of a small sample size and therefore inadequate to draw full conclusions, the results mirrored similar studies in 2017 and were also consistent with general findings of more comprehensive ([Observer Program](#)) studies on ETP interactions

## Key Recommendations and Next Steps

Several key findings/recommendations were identified in the course of the project to date, including:

1. A majority of the over 100 handline fishers engaged in the project - including through questionnaire surveys, workshops or informal interviews - expressed generally positive views on C-hooks. With the steady rise in awareness, support and use of C-hooks, there is a timely opportunity to continue expanding C-hook adoption in the near term;
2. Awareness programs on ETP (sea turtles and sharks), particularly fisher workshops and informal meetings, have proven an effective way to raise understanding and support. Fisher surveys also highlighted the need to continue awareness raising activities - with 17 out of 20 fishermen indicating little or no awareness on ETP issues (including protection status of sea turtles and sharks) prior to the project's outreach and training;
3. A transition to C-hooks in Viet Nam will require the increased availability of affordable, quality hooks in the country. Opportunities should be explored collaboratively with MARD and other relevant sectors;
4. There is a need for further studies on the species compositions of C-hooks, including their relative performance and impacts on secondary species, particularly sharks. Although the surveys and studies conducted to date in Viet Nam suggest no significant impacts on sharks compared to J hooks (and noting that the Fisheries Law now legally prohibits all harvest of red-listed species by any gear type), mitigation of sea turtle bycatch should wherever possible be integrated with adoption of best practices for mitigating interactions with red-list and CITES shark species;
5. Expanded adoption, including further at-sea testing, of C-hooks would be ideally framed under a national turtle by-catch mitigation program led by MARD;

Through these continued joint efforts in the FIP, it is hoped that a “tipping point” of ground support will be reached, and Circle Hooks will become the standard hook type for the entire fleet.

More information about the Circle Hook program, including how to get involved as a FIP Participant.



Distributing Circle Hooks to tuna handline fishers in Binh Dinh

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Sea Turtle hooked by J hook

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