
FISHING GEAR MATERIALS & IDENTIFICATION

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Netting materials for fabrication of fishing gear are either of textile or non-textile origin. The raw material for fish netting consists of fibres which can be distinguished into two groups: natural fibres and man-made fibres. Different kinds of fibres originating from plant and animal body parts have been used for production of textiles and other products are termed as natural fibres. Traditional fishing gears used earlier, till 1950s were mainly with natural fibres such as cotton, manila, sisal, jute and coir. Natural polymers and synthetic polymers constitute man-made fibres. Natural polymers are manufactured by the alteration of natural polymers like cellulose and protein while synthetic polymers are obtained by synthesis or chemical process. Man-made fibres derived from cellulose eg: rayon, are susceptible to microbial deterioration while synthetic fibres are very resistant to biodeterioration. In the late 1950s, with the introduction of man-made synthetic fibres, natural fibres used for the fishing gears have been substituted by these synthetic materials. This transition was mainly due to the highly positive properties of these fibres such as highly non-biodegradable nature, high breaking strength, better uniformity in characteristics, high abrasion resistance, low maintenance cost and long service life.

Synthetic fibres

Synthetic fibres are produced entirely by chemical process or synthesis from simple basic substances such as phenol, benzene, acetylene etc. The chemical process involves the production of macromolecular compounds by polycondensation or polymerization of simple molecules of a monomer. The raw materials are petroleum, coal, coke and hydrocarbon. Depending on the type of polymer, synthetic fibres are classified into different groups and are known by different names in different countries. Altogether seven groups of polymers are developed; most important polymer/synthetic fibres used in fishing gears are polyamide (PA), polyester (PES), polyethylene (PE) and polypropylene (PP). Other synthetic fibres, which are less widely used and generally restricted to Japanese fisheries, are polyvinyl alcohol (PVA), polyvinyl chloride (PVC) and polyvinylidene chloride (PVD). Aramid fibres, Ultra high molecular weight polyethylene (UHMWPE) and liquid crystal polymer are later additions to this group.

Polyamide (PA): Polyamide, a synthetic polymer, popularly known as nylon, invented in 1935 refers to a family of polymers called linear polyamides. Nylon consists of repeating units of

amide with peptide linkages between them. Depending on the raw material and method of making two types of nylon viz., PA 6 and PA 66 are available for fibre applications. PA 66, widely used for fibres is made from adipic acid and hexamethylene diamine while PA 6 is built with caprolactam. With regard to the fisheries, there is no difference between PA 66 and PA 6, while in India, for fishing purposes PA 6 is used. The softness, lightness, elastic recovery, stretchability and high abrasion and temperature resistance are superior properties inherent to nylon. However, high moisture absorption along with dimensional instability and requirement of UV stabilization are its disadvantages. On wetting, nylon loses up to 30% of tensile strength and 50% of tensile modulus.

Polyolefines: Polypropylene (PP) and Polyethylene (PE) are often collectively called "polyolefines". Polyolefin fibres are long-chain polymers composed (at least 85% by weight) of ethylene, propylene or other olefin units. Polyolefin fibres are made by melt spinning. They do not absorb moisture and have a high resistance to UV degradation.

Polyethylene (PE): PE fibre is defined as: "fibres composed of linear macromolecules made up of saturated aliphatic hydrocarbons". PE fibres, used for fishing gear, are produced by a method developed by Ziegler, in the early 1950s. The monomer ethylene, the basic substance of polyethylene, is normally obtained by cracking petroleum. Linear polyethylene or high-density polyethylene has high crystallinity, melting temperature, hardness and tensile strength. In India, PE is used for manufacture of netting and ropes.

Polypropylene (PP): PP fibre is defined as: "fibres composed of linear macromolecules made up of saturated aliphatic carbon units in which one carbon atom in two carries a methyl side group". This is an additive polymer of propylene. PP was commercialized in 1956 by polymerizing propylene using catalysis. Though PP netting and ropes are available, in India, PP is mainly used for ropes.

Polyester (PES): The principal PES fibres are made from polymerization of terephthalic acid and ethylene alcohol. It was first synthesized by Whinfield and Dickson of Great Britain in 1940-41 and named the fibre "Terylene".

Recent advances in synthetic fibres

Introduction of synthetic materials with high tensile strength properties has made it possible to bring out changes in the design and size of fishing nets. As the fishing industry became highly competitive, the search and research for new generation materials which give better strength for less thickness resulted in invention of new materials. Aramid fibres, Kevlar, UHMWPE, biodegradable plastic etc are recent introductions to the fishing gear material sector. These materials have advantages, especially less drag which results in fuel efficiency. The performance of UHMWPE webbing and rope in the Indian context is being studied by ICAR-CIFT. Among the new fibre types, only Sapphire and UHMWPE are used on a commercial basis for fishing gear viz., trawls and purse seines in Australia and Alaskan waters. Sapphire is

also used on a limited scale in large mesh gillnets targeting large pelagics in Maharashtra region of India.

Ultra high molecular weight polyethylene (UHMWPE): UHMWPE is a type of polyolefin synthesized from monomer of ethylene processed by different methods such as compression molding, ram extrusion, gel spinning, and sintering. Polyethylene with an ultra high molecular weight (UHMWPE) is used as the starting material. In normal polyethylene, the molecules are not orientated and are easily torn apart. The fibres made by gel spinning have a high degree of molecular orientation with very high tensile strength. The fibre is made up of extremely long chains of polyethylene, which attains a parallel orientation > 95% and a level of crystallinity of up to 85%. The extremely long chains have molecular weight usually between 3.1 and 5.67 million while HDPE molecule has only 700 to 1,800 monomer units per molecule.

UHMWPE, also known as high modulus polyethylene (HMPE) or high performance polyethylene (HPPE) is a thermoplastic. It has extremely low moisture absorption, very low coefficient of friction, is self-lubricating and is highly resistant to abrasion (10 times more resistant to abrasion than carbon steel). This is available as Dyneema and Spectra produced by two different companies. Commercial grades of dyneema fibres SK 60 and SK 75 are specially designed for ropes, cordage, fisheries and textile applications

UHMWPE is 15 times stronger than steel and up to 40% stronger than Kevlar. UHMWPE netting is 3 times stronger than nylon with the same dimension, and increases the net's strength while the abrasion resistance increases the net's life. Netting can be used for trawl nets, purse seine nets and aquaculture nets. Nylon purse seines last for about 2-3 years while UHMWPE netting ensures 2-3 times more life for the net. The netting twines made with dyneema fibre can be reduced by upto a factor of 2 on thickness (diameter basis) and on weight basis by a factor of 4. This allows fishing vessels to increase their catch potentially by as much as 80% by trawling faster or using larger nets, or to reduce fuel consumption. Besides, less deck space is required due to lower bulk volume of the net. Purse seines made of dyneema would facilitate 40% increase in sinking speed due to better filtering and reduced drag. Larger net for the same weight can be made. The net has better durability with negligible wear & tear.

Ropes made from UHMWPE have a higher breaking strength than that of steel wire ropes of the same thickness, but have only one-tenth the weight. Fishing uses for these high-strength polyethylene ropes include warp lines, bridles and headlines. By using UHMWPE ropes, the frequent oiling & greasing required for wire ropes can be avoided which would facilitate a clean and safe deck and free the crew from greasing the rope frequently. It also helps in a clean catch devoid of oil and grease contamination.

Sapphire: Sapphire PE netting manufactured from specialized polymers available in twisted and braided form is suitable for trawl nets and for cage culture. It has the highest knot breaking

strength, knot stability and dimensional uniformity. Braided twine having compact construction restricts mud penetration and provides lesser drag. Sapphire is used on a limited scale for fabrication of large mesh gillnets targeting large pelagics in Maharashtra region of India. Sapphire ultracore is a knotless HDPE star netting with an outer layer of heavier sapphire ultracore which features strands of marine grade stainless steel as an integral part of the netting twine. The stiffness and cut resistance enable it to be used as a predator protection net cum cage bag net where the predation problem is very high.

Aramid fibres: Aramid fibres are fibres in which the base material is a long-chain synthetic polyamide in which at least 85% of the amide linkages are attached directly to two aromatic rings. Two types of aramid fibres are produced by the DuPont Company: Kevlar (para-aramid) and Nomex (meta-aramid), which differ primarily in the substitution positions on the aromatic ring. Generally, aramid fibres have medium to very high tensile strength, medium to low elongation-to-break, and moderate to very high modulus.

KEVLAR® polyphenylene terephthalamide (PPTA): A polymer containing aromatic and amide molecular groups is one of the most important man-made organic fibre ever developed. Because of its unique combination of properties, KEVLAR® is used in the fishing sector as netting, fishing rod and fishing line. Fibres of KEVLAR® consist of long molecular chains produced from poly (p-phenylene terephthalamide). The chains are highly oriented with strong interchain bonding, which result in a unique combination of properties. The strength to weight ratio of Kevlar is high; on a weight basis, it is five times as strong as steel and ten times as strong as aluminum. It has high tensile strength at low weight, low elongation to break, high toughness (work-to-break), and excellent dimensional stability. In sea water, ropes with KEVLAR® are upto 95% lighter than steel ropes of comparable strength.

Liquid Crystal Polymer Fibre: Vectran®, a high-performance thermoplastic multifilament yarn spun from Vectra® liquid crystal polymer (LCP), is the only commercially available melt-spun LCP Fibre in the world. Vectran fibre is five times stronger than steel and 10 times stronger than aluminum. Vectran fibre is 4 times stronger than polyethylene fibre or nylon fibre. The unique properties that characterize Vectran fibre include: high strength and modulus; high abrasion resistance; minimal moisture absorption; and high impact resistance. Although Vectran is lacking UV resistance, this limitation can be overcome by using polyester as a protective covering. It is very suitable for trawl nets and ropes.

Fluorocarbon fibre: Fluorocarbon fibre is a new material that can be used in angling and high-speed jigging lines. It has very high knot strength, almost invisible in water, has high breaking strength and abrasion resistance.

Identification of synthetic fibres

Identification of synthetic fibres by appearance alone is not easy and correct. Different groups of synthetic fibres can be identified by various methods.

Water test: Identification of synthetic fibres can be started with this test. In a short piece of netting yarn, tie a simple overhand knot and put the piece into a vessel filled with water. Air bubbles in the material must be squeezed out by hand underwater. Based on water test, netting materials can be classified into two groups; (1) synthetic fibres which float in water (PE & PP) (2) fibres which sink (all other synthetic fibres).

Burning test: In the burning test, the nature of burning and smoke in the flame as well as after leaving the flame are observed. The netting material can be brought near to the flame and after removal from the flame, observe the smell of smoke and the residue. Synthetic fibres shrink and melt in the flame, the melting substance drips from the flame mostly forming a bead or a hard irregular residue. The changes in different synthetic fibres during burning test is given in table 1

Table 1. Burning characteristics of synthetic fibres

Material	PA	PES	PE	PP
In flame	Melts, burns with light flame, white smoke, melting drops fall down.	Melts, burns with light flame, sooty black smoke, melting drops fall down.	Shrinks, curls, melts and burns with light flame, drops of melting fall down.	Shrinks, melts and burns with light flame melting drops fall down.
After leaving the flame	Stops burning, melting drops can be stretched into fine thread.	Stops burning, melting bead may be stretch into fine thread.	Continues to burn rapidly, hot melting substance cannot be stretched.	Continues to burn slowly, hot melting substance can be stretched.

(Source: Klust, 1982)

Solubility test: Solubility test is a relatively simple chemical test. Fibres of the sample to be tested should be in a loose form. The netting yarn must be untwisted and the fibres can be cut into small

Reagent	Type of fibre			
	PA 6	PES	PE	PP
Hydrochloric acid/HCL (37%) 30 minutes at room temperature	+	o	o	o
Sulphuric acid/H ₂ SO ₄ (97-98%) 30 minutes at room temperature	+	+	o	o
(1) Dimethylformamide/HCON (CH ₃) ₂ 5 minutes boiling	+	+	o (2)	o (2)

Formic acid/HCOOH (96-100%) 30 minutes at room temperature	+	o	o	o
Glacial acetic acid/CH ₃ -COOH 5 minutes boiling	+	o	o	o
Xylene/C ₆ H ₄ (CH ₃) ₂ 5 minutes boiling (inflammable)	o	o	+	+
Pyridine 30 minutes at room temperature	o	o	o	o

(Source: Klust, 1982)

+ = soluble, o = not soluble, (1) = Dimethylformamide is decomposed by exposure to light even when stored in a brown bottle, needs to be stored away from light preferably in a cool place, (2) Destroyed but not soluble

pieces of 1cm length. Coarse material like split fibres and especially monofilaments should be cut to very small pieces. Take 10-15ml of the solvent into the test tube and put the sample pieces into it. The results of the reactions are shown in table 2.

Table 2. Identification of synthetic fibres by solubility test

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