

Translation of Edwin Font's Letter

Historic Background

The origin of this fishing gear goes back to the 60's and 70's. It was created by a fisher called Pablo Valentín Santos, nicknamed "Palin". He already passed away. There is not much more to add in this respect.

It consisted of a weights and lead weight, in different forms and weights. Pieces of steel, like the ones used for the tracks of the trains, lead, car's axles, and any object that weighted 9 pounds approximately, were used in order to make this gear touch the sea bottom. It had a *sutillo* with 40 number 8 J open hooks, and a $\frac{1}{4}$ diameter cotton cord with a resistance up to 150 pounds that was subsequently substituted by monofilaments with the same strength (see Illustration 1). It was thrown or dropped into the sea from the boat (see Illustration 2). The vessel consisted of a wooden boat, made by the fishermen themselves, propelled by rowing and sailing in sites with depths that fluctuated between 70 to 200 fathoms. Once the gear touched the bottom, the gear was tied to three empty oil containers, each one with a capacity of 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ gallons. One of the containers was used to tie the remaining cord. The cotton cord was *enmanglado* in order to give it rigidity and avoid entanglement. *Enmanglar* is a process consisting of rubbing a part of the red mangrove against the cord. Whether because the containers became filled of water and sank, or because the cotton cord or microfilaments broke, this gear became lost frequently due to the way it was built.

During that same time, 30-40 feet fishing vessels of Puerto Real, Cabo Rojo, used to fish deep water snappers by anchoring in the site. Anchor weighted 70 pounds approximately. To take it out, they used vessels with great power. Sometimes, this procedure was repeated several times during the same fishing day.

Description of the Gear Used Currently

By 2000, deep water snapper gear had been significantly modified (see Illustration 3). The use of this fishing gear has been disappearing to the extent that nowadays is almost non-existent. This has an explanation. The weights is attached to a thin cotton cord that resists up to 100 pounds. The *madrina* (braided line) is a 300 lb. monofilament; it is very light because it does not absorb water. Hooks—made out of round tin-plated stainless steel—are not adhered to the bottom, and are attached to a 100 lb. monofilament. And finally, the line that goes out to the surface is made out of Spectrum; it is thin as a line of a pen or a 50 lb. monofilament. This is a 300 lb. line and it is extremely strong and abrasive. The remaining cord is tied to an orange or red buoy that has a diameter of 20 inches and is used as a defense. Also, the *carrete* is attached to a foam bullet buoy, commonly used by fish trap fishermen.

Once the gear touches the sea bottom, it remains there until it is pulled by an electric winch. This is done in this way because the current way of constructing the gear makes it not very resistant to the currents. Also, deep water snappers stop eating during strong currents. When this happens, the fisherman moves to other site or goes back to the port.

When the gear touches the bottom, it remains perpendicular at 90 or 45 degrees in relation to the marine bottom, during 30 to 45 minutes approximately. If the fisher feels the fish eating, he pulls out the gear. It is important to highlight that the weight and the hook of the *sutillo* are the only parts that touch the sea bottom. The other 19 hooks remain suspended in the water column.

Additional Considerations

Traps are a well-known fishing gear, even for deep water snappers and groupers fishing. The trap's size fluctuates between 3'x3' and 4'x4' versus the deep water snapper fishing gear that is 12-inch long cylinder with a ½" diameter. Keep in mind that the trap remains 3 days in the sea bottom while the deep water snapper fishing gear stays there for 45 minutes. In my effort of looking for new fishing sites and using new technologies, I have been all around Puerto Rico using the deep water snapper fishing gear and for my surprise, I discovered innovative ways of deep water snappers fishing, which I will present here below:

- a) Anchoring using a steel block with a *falso* (false) tied to the block. Fisher has to strongly pull the rope, the *falso* breaks, and the steel block remains on the sea bottom.
- b) Filling an onion sac with round rocks obtained at the beach. Sac is tied with a rope and used as an anchor. Then, the sac is dragged over the sea floor in order to break it and take out the rope easily.
- c) Throwing the deep water snapper fishing gear from the vessel and, as the vessel moves, the fishing gear moves on the bottom.
- d) Anchoring with a *sacho* or *grampire* to fish while moving (see Illustration 4).

The question to be asked is: which of these fishing gears causes a greater impact to the habitat?

In order to share my knowledge and use the best information available, I requested to the DNER Fisheries Research Laboratory, through Mr. Daniel Matos Caraballo, the deep water snapper landings data by fishing gear. Hereunder, I quote his answer:

"Between 2016 and 2019, we estimate that 3% of landings of Silk Snapper were done with traps and 97% with hook and deep water reel."

"Between 2016 and 2019, we estimate that 100% of the landings of Queen Snapper were done with hook and deep water reel."

Definitely, when he mentioned hook and deep water fishing gear, he was referring to deep water snapper fishing gear.

Fishers that use this fishing gear in Bajo de Sico, fish over 100 fathoms. Indeed, interventions were done to fishers that were fishing between 100 and 160 fathoms.

Species that justify the closure of Bajo de Sico were the Red Hind and the Nassau Grouper. According to my experience in fishing, 20 years diving and 20 years using deep water snapper fishing gear, any of these two species exceed a depth of 70 fathoms, even giving some space for doubts.

Beyond the Issue

There are depths of 260 fathoms in the quadrant of Bajo de Sico. What we are seeking to protect? The two aforementioned species. Your prompt and diligent answer to this issue will strengthened my faith in the Council's components, which I know and respect.

Kind regards,

Edwin "Paúco" Font

With authors:

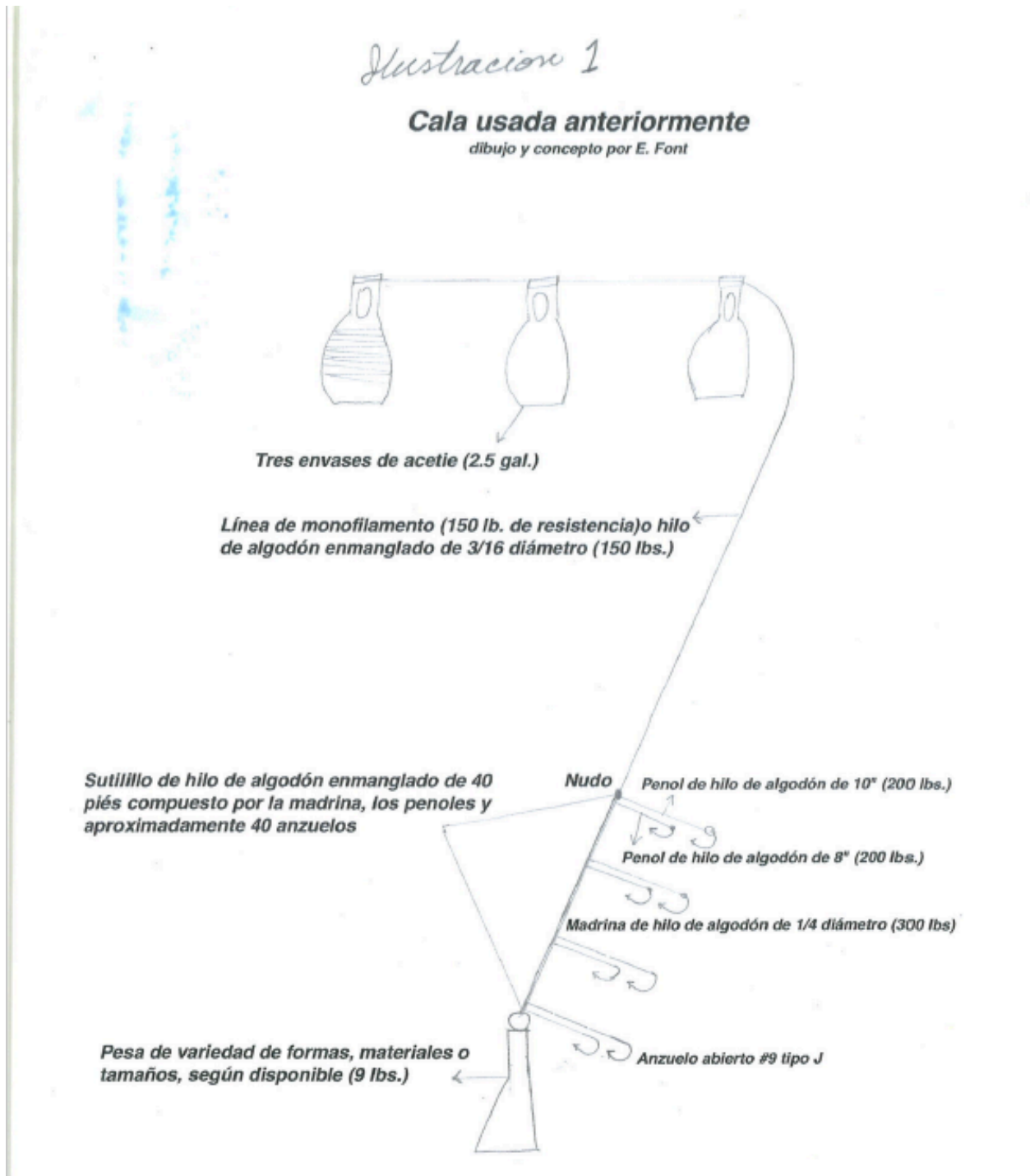
Mr. Nelson Crespo, Deep Water Snapper Fisherman

Mr. Juan Acosta Acosta, President, Añasco Fishing Village

Illustration 1

Deep Water Snapper Fishing Gear Previously Used

Drawing and concept by E. Font



Information at the left of the illustration

Three oil containers (2.5 gallons)

150 lb. monofilament or 3/16 diameter cotton cord (previously *enmanglado*) (150 lb.)

Cotton thread (*enmanglado*) *sutillo* composed by the *madrina* (200 lb. line), the *penoles*, and, approximately, 40 hooks.

Knot

Weight of different forms, materials, or sizes, according to availability (9 lb.)

Information at the right of the illustration

10" 200 lb. cotton thread (*penol*)

8" 200 lb. cotton thread (*penol*)

¼ diameter 300 lb. cotton thread (*madrina*)

Open J hook #9

Illustration 2

Picture of boats

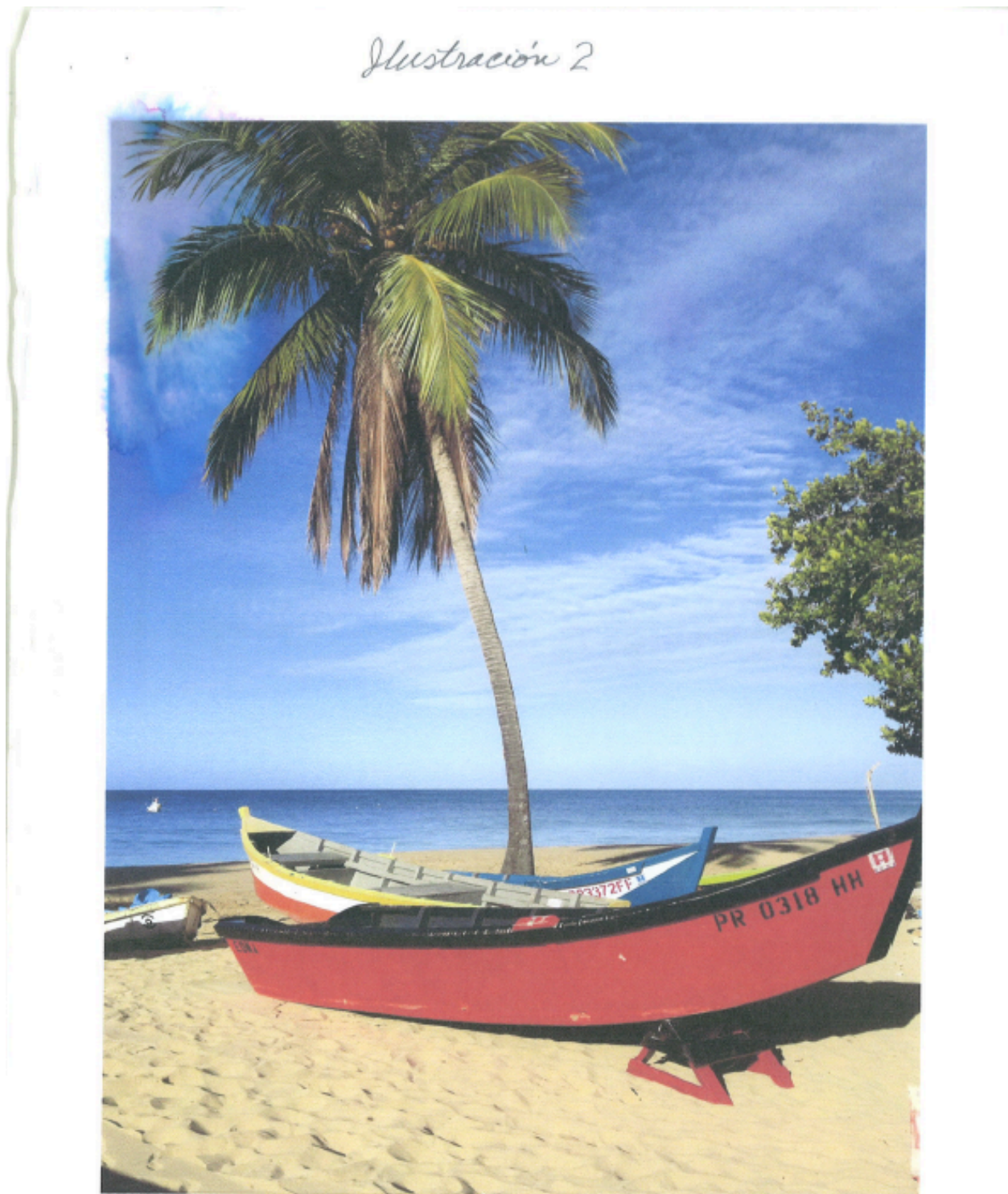
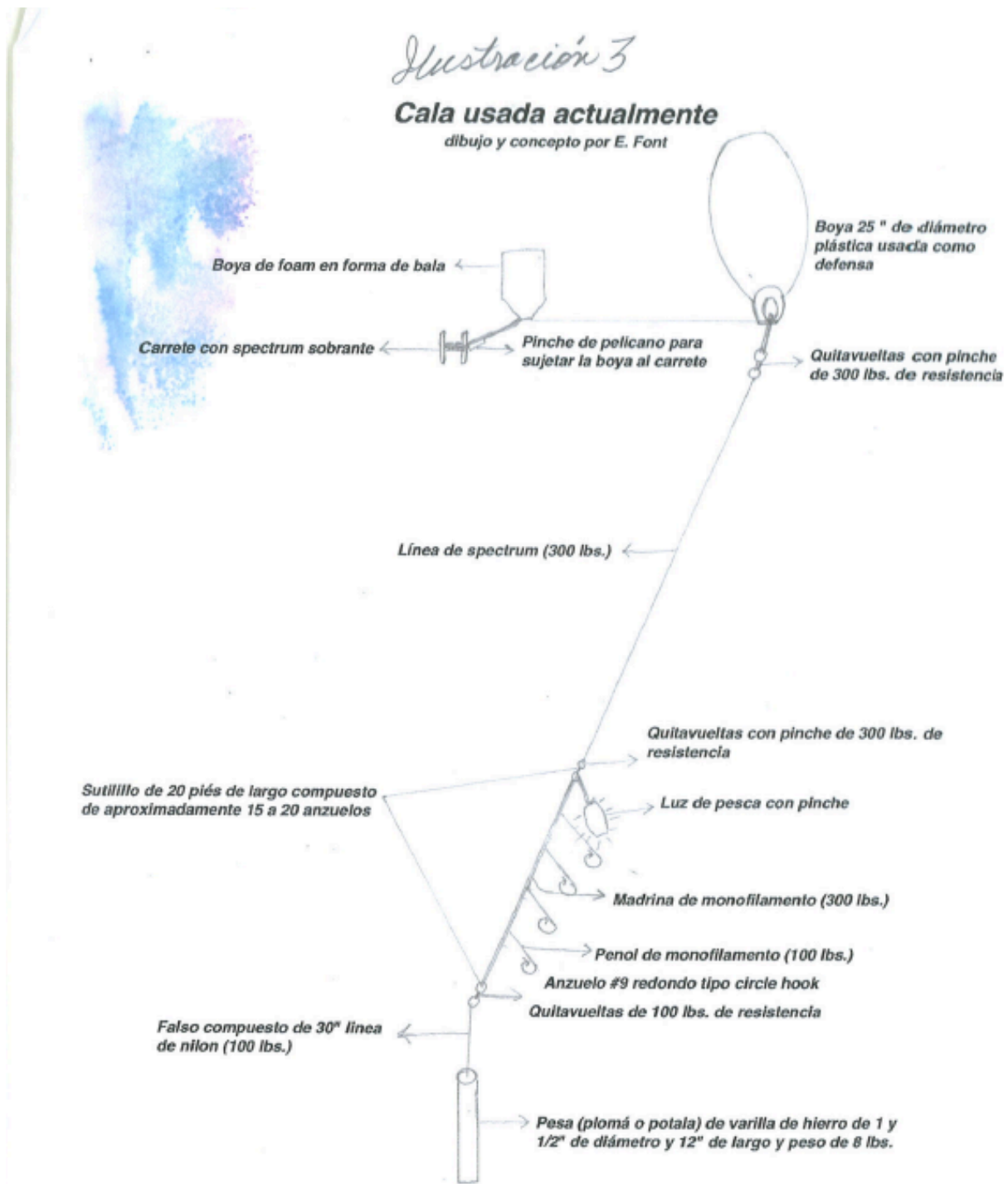


Illustration 3

Deep Water Snapper Fishing Currently Used

Drawing and concept by E. Font



Text at the left of the illustration

Foam bullet buoy

Reel with remaining spectrum

Pelican-style clamps to attach the buoy to the reel

300 lb. spectrum line

15-20 feet long SUTILLO consisting of 15-20 hooks, approximately

False consisting of 30" 100 lb. nylon line

Text at the right of the illustration

Swivel with 300 lb. clamp

Fishing light with clamp

300 lb. monofilament (*madrina*)

100 lb. monofilament (*penol*)

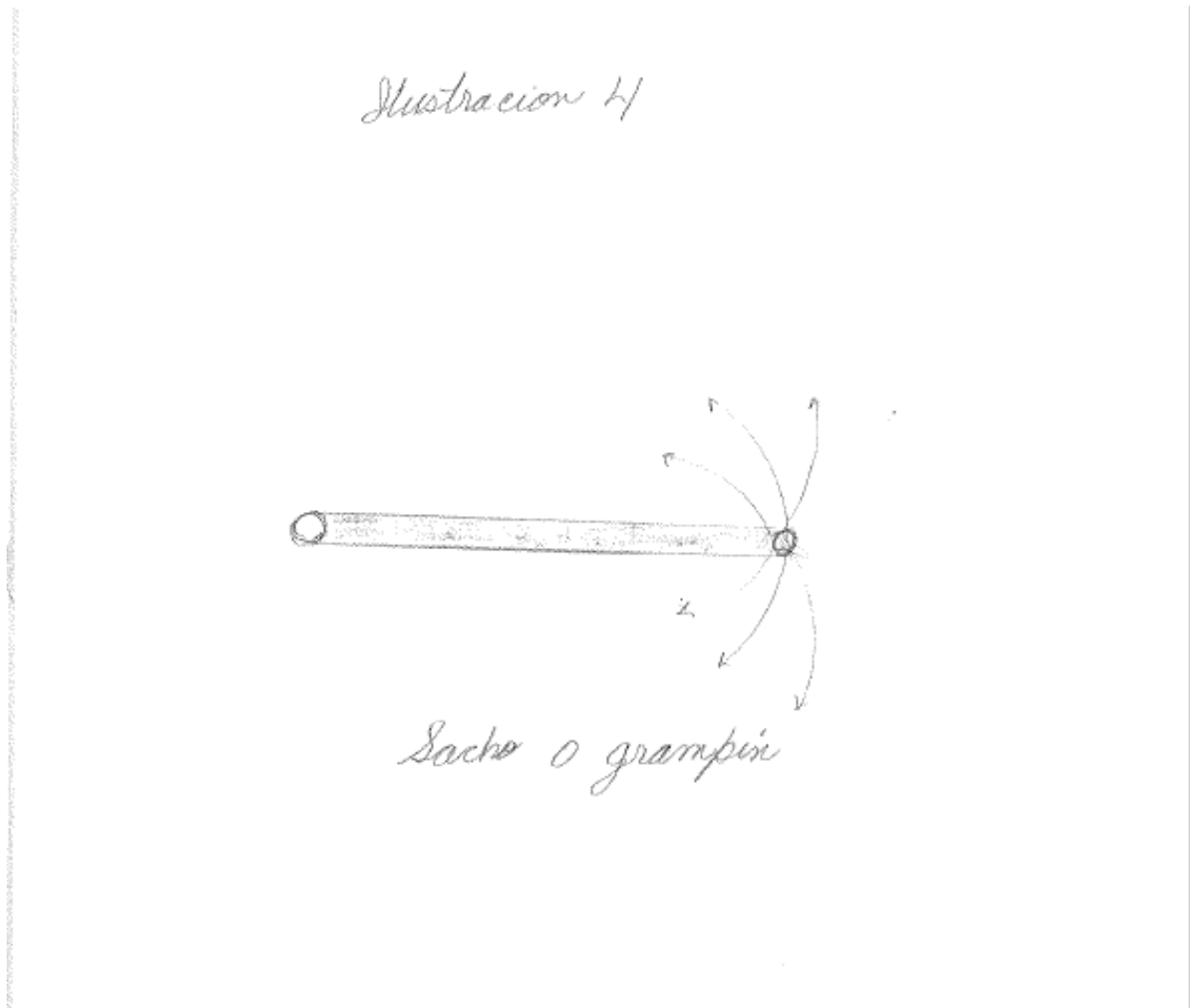
#9 circle hook

100 lb. swivel

1 and ½" diameter, 12" long and 8 lb. steel rod weight (*plomá o potala*)

Illustration 4

Drawing of a *sacho* or *grampín* (anchor)



Due to my lack of experience drawing and drafting, I forgot to illustrate that the weight also has to be tied with a string called *falso* (false). Likewise, this string is tied at the end with kitchen twine or the paper tape used by tinsmiths. In case the lead weight gets stuck on the sea bottom, this will make easier to pull it out.

Although the fishers that use the deep water snapper fishing gear prefer not to fish with strong currents, the technique of the *falso* with paper tape or kitchen twine is widely used.

ILLUSTRATION

Text at the left side of the illustration

30" long *falso* made with a 10 lb. nylon or cotton cord

Paper tape or kitchen twine

Text at the right side of the illustration

Weight

Sacho o grampín falso

This technique consists of tying a rope to the rods that become attached to the bottom. When pulling the rope, the *falso* breaks and the *sacho* or *grampín* comes out inverted, which avoids damaging the habitat.

This is what exactly happens with the weight in this gear, except that the weight is significantly smaller and lighter.