Research Shows World's Fisheries Management System Failing Miserably | ecopolitology
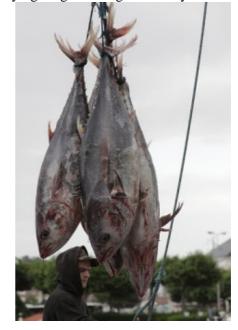

Two new studies show fisheries management organizations having trouble managing fisheries

It is estimated that 11 to 26 million tons of fish or one-fifth of the global reported catch annually fall under the category of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. There are only a handful ways of combating the act of illegal fishing. One of which involves a pirate flag and a hit TV show and the other is with the institutional structures with norms, rules and sanctions that come with fisheries management. But two new studies show that inadequate international fisheries management is threatening the future sustainability of high seas fisheries, fish populations and the health and stability of marine ecosystems.

As the United Nations meets this week to discuss the management of global fisheries at the UN Fish Stocks Agreement Review Conference, two new studies, one published online in the journal *Science* and the other in the journal *Marine Policy* (in press), found that governments and regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) have been unable to stop a large amount of illegal fishing in their fisheries via traditional institutional mechanisms.

The study in the journal *Science* focused on the role that "Port States" can play in combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. The study assessed how well Port States complied with measures adopted by eight RFMOs and directed against vessels found to carry out or support IUU fishing over the last six years.

"Our research shows that the current system leaves significant loopholes for those engaging in IUU fishing to exploit," said Kristín von Kistowski, a senior advisor to the Pew Environment Group and one of the study's principal authors. The study found that because of bad data Port States had trouble identifying illegal fishing when they saw it and even

when they did see it, they didn't always implement corrective measures.

"[W]e need a system with much more transparency, accountability and global coordination," said Kistowski who also manages the Port State Performance research project for Pew.

In another study, this one by University of British Columbia researchers Sarika Cullis-Suzuki and Dr. Daniel Pauly (in press), two-thirds of the commercial fish stocks under RFMO management were found to be either severely depleted or overfished.

"We found that many RFMOs lack a general commitment to set and implement conservation measures to keep fish populations at sustainable levels," said Cullis-Suzuki.

Looking at performance on paper versus performance in practice Cullis-Suzuki and Pauly found that even if the mandate of a fisheries management organization was to conserve a particular fish species, the conservation goals were vastly underachieved.

"The people of the world, particularly in developing countries, need the United Nations and member governments of the U.N. Fish Stocks Agreement to take bold action to end illegal fishing and properly manage fisheries," said Dr. Susan Lieberman, International Policy director for the Pew Environment Group.

This week's meeting at the UN is the first meeting related to high seas fisheries since the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) rejected measures to limit or halt trade of depleted shark and bluefin tuna populations, a move which earlier this month triggered the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society to launch Operation Blue Rage, a bluefin tuna protection campaign in the Mediterranean.

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