

Failure to report on fishery undermines Canada's claim to Arctic

Canada's claim to sovereignty over the Arctic is being undermined by the federal government's failure to track Northern fisheries and to report catch data to the United Nations, say researchers from the University of British Columbia.

"Canada makes a point about the Arctic, asserting sovereignty over the Arctic . . . [but] you have the impression of neglect," said Prof. Daniel Pauly of UBC's Fisheries Centre.

The UN's Food and Agricultural Organization has no records of any Canadian catches in the Arctic from 1950 to 2006, Prof. Pauly said. Even though there are numerous commercial fishing operations in the North and fishing nets can be found hanging in every village, Canada has never reported any catch data to the FAO for the Arctic.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has catch statistics in the form of annual summaries of fish and mammal harvests, but the records are scattered and comprehensive data for the Arctic region as a whole has never been compiled.

Prof. Pauly and senior research fellow Dirk Zeller pulled together the Arctic data for Canada, the United States and Russia – and were surprised to find a massive underreporting of the catch.

Although Canada and the United States have failed to report any Arctic catches, Prof. Pauly calculated that Canadian fishermen took 94,000 tonnes, while an estimated 89,000 tonnes were taken in Arctic waters off Alaska. Russia's catch was 770,000 tonnes – not the 12,700 tonnes reported.

Altogether, Prof. Pauly said, about 950,000 tonnes of fish were taken out of Arctic waters between 1950 and 2006 by the three countries – 75 times the amount reported to the FAO.

Prof. Pauly said he was surprised Canada has failed to report its catch to the FAO, because a record of fishing over the 56-year period would strengthen Canada's claim to the Arctic. He said there are many examples around the world where data from small, scattered fisheries are not collected. But it is rare to find such neglect in a developed country.

"Canada, U.S., Russia, behave vis-à-vis the Arctic border, the Arctic waters, as if they were developing countries," Prof. Pauly said.

Mr. Zeller said he was surprised when he went to the FAO database and found almost no catches reported from the Arctic.

"We stumbled across it," he said. "We noticed that FAO 18, which is the Arctic, had zero catch reported by Canada and by the U.S. And that surprised us because everyone knows there are Inuit living up there and they harvest fish. So that's how the whole work started."

He said Canada's failure to keep a comprehensive data set has both political and environmental implications.

"There's a big international debate about who owns the North ... the Arctic archipelago. ... Is it truly Canadian?" Mr. Zeller said

"One of the issues of course that the international community would be looking at is, has Canada ever used these areas? Has it regularly used it? And while we all know that Canadian Inuit have been living there for centuries, and catching fish and marine mammals and living there, as their native home, as far as the official statistics for fisheries at least, Canada says, 'Well, there's no one up there eating fish,' because they are reporting zero catch."

No DFO official was available for comment Friday.



Source: [The Globe and Mail](#)