

Pauly, D. 2013. Time to end secrecy about Chinese overseas fishing. China Dialogue <http://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/5958-Time-to-end-secrecy-over-Chinese-overseas-fishing>. [also available in Chinese]

## Time to end secrecy over Chinese overseas fishing

[Daniel Pauly](#)

30.04.2013

As an active member of the international community, China has a responsibility to be transparent about the impact of its overseas fishing fleets, particularly in West Africa.



China operates in over 90 countries, and all oceans and regions of the world, except in the Caribbean, the North Atlantic and the Arctic. (Image by [Greenpeace / Paul Hilton](#))

It is well-known that overseas fishing fleets are more cavalier in terms of respect for laws and regulations than their domestic counterparts. There are innumerable examples from all over the world of fishing with gears that are not part of agreements, or catching amounts of fish above agreed quotas.

China's fleets are no exception to this and, as the largest of any country in the world, could be having a particularly acute impact on the resources of host countries.

Overseas fleets, also known as “distant-water fishing fleets”, are a country’s fishing vessels which operate inside the 200 mile Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of other countries, and less commonly further offshore, in the High Seas.

For a small fee, some countries – Panama, Liberia, Belize, for example – will provide so-called “flags of convenience” to the vessels of distant-water fishing countries, disguising the vessels' true country of origin.

Most distant-water fishing takes place in the context of a paragraph of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) which states that the “surplus” of fish not caught by a given country in its EEZ must be made available to the distant-water fleets of other countries against a fee that is part of a negotiated “access agreement”. Most of these agreements are international public documents, and are published by the United Nations, or the European Union.

A lack of respect for law in overseas fishing fleets is compounded by problems with the regulations themselves. Negotiated access agreements, when they do exist, tend to award very small sums to the host country, well below any reasonable value of the fish that are caught. They generally are, to use a famous term, “unequal treaties”.

China’s distant-water fleets share all of these characteristics, but also have additional noteworthy features:

- 1) China’s own, official publications show that its distant water fleet is huge, much larger than those of other countries;
- 2) They operate largely without access agreements, or under access agreements that are secret, in which case one cannot establish whether they are as unfair as those offered by other distant-water fishing countries, or not; and
- 3) The Chinese authorities and scientists are not publishing catch statistics or stock evaluations for any of these fisheries.

Thus, many knowledgeable people assume that China’s distant-water fleets – legally or illegally – catch well above the surplus in the countries where they operate and hence deprive the host countries of fish they could have caught.

This is particularly acute in Africa where Chinese distant-water fleets are massively deployed, again on the basis of secret agreements, or even in the absence of any agreements. There, they may directly compete with local artisanal fisheries, which in several countries fail to provide fish for consumption to the local population, leading to unemployment and endangering long-term, local food security.

It is, therefore, important to assess the impacts of such distant-water fisheries, including China’s, on the host countries' fisheries resources.

To investigate the extent of the catches by China’s distant-water fleets in the absence of any detailed catch statistics provided by China, we have undertaken a study consisting of four steps:

- *Step 1: assessing the presence of Chinese vessels during the period 2000-2011 from both Chinese government and fishing company websites and the press of all maritime countries in the world, including reports in 16 languages;*
- *Step 2: assigning a number of Chinese fishing vessels to each country where we had evidence of Chinese vessel presence. We did this for five different types of fishing vessels (trawlers, purse seiners, etc.). We also assigned a range to the number of vessels, thus reflecting their uncertainty;*
- *Step 3: multiplying the number of vessels in each country from Step 2 by the annual catch typical of fishing vessels of this type, which we knew from earlier work on the economics of fishing. We then summed this catch across all countries, by continents;*
- *Step 4: repeating Step 3 for 10,000 times to account for the uncertainty in steps 2 and 3, and assess the uncertainty in the total catch estimate.*

We found in Step 1 that China operates in over 90 countries, and all oceans and regions of the world, except in the Caribbean, the North Atlantic and the Arctic. Steps 2-4 did not provide an exact value for the catch of distant-water fleets by China, but rather estimates ranging from 3.4 to 6.1 million tonnes per year between 2000 and 2011, with a most likely value of 4.6 million tonnes per year.

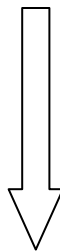
We do not think that our estimate is definitive, only that it is a possible estimate, and one that is more likely than the official estimates of China's distant-water fishing catch as submitted by China to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

We hope that our publication will generate a debate in China and in the countries in which China operates, notably in West Africa, where it takes the bulk of its catch, about three million tonnes per year.

Now that China is a fully participating member of the international community, it will have to adhere to its rules. In fisheries, this means an adequate level of transparency and the provision of reasonable catch data to national, regional and international fisheries management organisations, and which scientists of various countries can use to make inferences on the state of the stocks.

We personally believe that this will happen and we look forward to working with Chinese colleagues on this.

*Chinese Version Follows Below*



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## 揭开中国远洋捕鱼的神秘面纱

[Daniel Pauly](#)

30.04.2013

作为国际社会的积极一员，中国有责任公开其在西非等地海外捕鱼作业的影响。



中国渔船在全世界超过90个国家都有捕捞作业，作业范围遍及除加勒比海、北大西洋和北极地区之外的所有海洋和地区。图片来源：[Greenpeace / Paul Hilton](#)

众所周知，海外捕鱼船队在遵纪守法方面比不上国内的渔船。世界各地都有外国渔船使用协议许可之外的工具，或者捕捞量超过协议规定的配额，这样的例子数不胜数。

中国的远洋捕鱼船队也不例外，远洋船队数量居全球之首的中国无疑给东道国带来了巨大的影响。

海外捕鱼船队，也称作“远洋捕鱼船队”，通常指一国渔船在他国200海里专属经济区之内捕鱼，也可指一国渔船在公海之内的捕鱼作业。

在

巴拿马、利比里亚和伯利兹等国，外国的远洋捕鱼船队花不了多少钱就可以买到所谓的“方便旗”，隐匿船只的原籍国。

《联合国海洋公约》中的一章适用于大多数远洋捕鱼作业。公约中提出，一国在其专属经济区内捕鱼之后的“盈余”必须允许其他国家的远洋捕鱼船队在协商签订“作业协议”并支付相应费用之后

进行捕鱼作业。上述“作业协议”均为国际公开文件，由联合国或者欧盟发布。

除海外捕鱼船队守法意识不强之外，现行监管体系也存在问题。协商达成的作业协议中对东道国的补偿金额通常低于捕获鱼类的实际价值。用一个在中国人尽皆知的词语来说就是，这些协议一般都是“不平等条约”。

中国的远洋捕鱼船队除了上述提到的问题外，但还存在其它值得一提的特征：

- 1) 中国官方公布的数据表明，其远洋捕鱼船队规模庞大，远远超过其他任何国家；
- 2) 中国的远洋捕鱼船队一般是在没有作业协议，或者与东道国达成秘密作业协议的情况下开展捕鱼作业的，因此无法确定这些协议的条款是否公平；
- 3) 中国政府和科研机构都未公布海外捕鱼作业的捕捞数据和捕获价值。

因此，很多有识之士认为中国的远洋捕鱼船队在其合法或非法作业中捕捞的鱼量超过东道国的捕捞盈余，因此损害了东道国的利益。

非洲尤其如此。有大量中国捕捞船队与非洲国家签订密约，或者干脆在根本没有获得作业许可的情况下在非洲进行捕鱼作业。中国渔船的捕捞可能与当地手工捕捞的渔民形成直接竞争，造成多个国家渔民捕捞量无法满足当地人口消费需求，进而导致失业并危及当地社区的远期食品安全。

因此，我们有必要对包括中国在内的各国海外捕鱼作业对东道国渔业资源的影响进行评估。在缺少中国方面详细捕捞数据的情况下，为调查中国远洋捕鱼船队的捕获情况，我们的研究采取了以下四个步骤：

- 第一步：依据中国政府和捕鱼公司网站发布的材料以及世界所有有领海国家、十六种语言的相关媒体报道评估中国渔船在2000年至2011年间的活动地区；
- 第二步：依据我们掌握的中国渔船活动情况判定在各国作业的中国渔船数量。我们的统计中包含五种渔船（拖网渔船、围网渔船等）。我们还确定了渔船数量可能出现变化的幅度，以反映数据的不确定性；
- 第三步：将第二步中得出的各国作业中国渔船数量与早先渔业经济学研究所得出的各类渔船年度捕获通常量相乘，然后将各国计算结果相加，得出以洲计算的中国渔船捕获情况。
- 第四步：将第三步的计算重复进行一万次，以反映第二步和第三步中的不确定性，之后评估总捕获量的大致变化范围。

在第一个步骤中我们发现，中国渔船在全世界超过90个国家都有捕捞作业，作业范围遍及除加勒比海、北大西洋和北极地区之外的所有海洋和地区。第二步

到第四步虽然未能得出中国远海捕鱼捕获量的准确数值，但得出了2000至2011年间每年3.4至6.1吨的大致范围，可能的数值是每年4.6吨。

我们所得出的结果并非绝对准确，而只是一个可能的估值，但应该比中国向联合国粮农组织提交的远洋渔业捕获总量数据更贴近真实情况。

我们希望这项研究能在中国以及那些有中国远洋捕鱼船只作业的国家展开讨论。其中我们尤其关注的是西非地区的国家，因为中国每年渔业产量的大部分（大约每年三百万吨）都来自那里。

既然中国已经成为国际社会的正式一员，就应该遵守国际社会的规则。在渔业领域，遵守规则就意味着充分的透明度，并向国家、地区及国际渔业管理组织提供合理的捕获数据，供各国研究者研究参考。

我们相信这些都是中国可以做到的，并期待着与各位中国同仁在这方面展开进一步的合作。