ESTIMATING TOTAL FISH EXTRACTIONS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: 1950-2010¹

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Abstract

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is an Arab country located along the southwestern coast of the Persian Gulf, and with a small coastline along the Gulf of Oman. Its fisheries are all small-scale in nature, with catches increasing steadily until 1999, after which they started to decline. Due to reliance on a market-sampling program for their estimation, which does not differentiate between locally caught and imported catch, the UAE is thought to systematically over-report its catches. Following the reconstruction approach, the UAE's domestic catches in the Persian Gulf were re-estimated using all available peer-reviewed and grey literature sources for quantitative and/or qualitative information on sectors missing from or misreported to statistics presented by the FAO on behalf of the UAE. Overall, the figures reported to the FAO from 1950-2010 over-estimate actual domestic catches by an average of 51% annually (47% overall) when compared to reconstructed totals, despite the reconstruction accounting for subsistence and recreational catches that are entirely missed by market-sampling. On the resource side, introduced fisheries management measures are encouraging, but not sufficient given the scale of the country's overfishing problem.

INTRODUCTION

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has coasts on both the southern Persian Gulf and the northern Gulf of Oman (Figure 1). The country is a federation of 7 Emirates with shared administrative and political power between the federal government and the various Emirates. One of the Emirates (Fujairah) has its coastline only in the Gulf of Oman, where substantial catches may be taken (Pearson *et al.* 1998), but which are not considered here. Another Emirate (Sarjah) has a coastline both in the Persian Gulf and along the Gulf of Oman, but the latter is very small and is also not considered here. In 1962, Abu Dhabi became the first of the emirates to export oil, transforming the country's economy and infrastructure. Today, its oil reserves are ranked the 6th largest in the world (OPEC 2012).

Prior to the discovery of oil in the 1950s, pearl diving was the basis of the country's economy. The First World War, the economic depression in the late 1920s, and the development of cultured pearls in Japan led to the sector's demise.

The fisheries of UAE are all small-scale in nature, with the vast majority taking place in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, which is reported to comprise over 60% of the country's marine area (Morgan 2004). Fishers employ two distinct fishing vessel types: fibreglass tarads and traditional wooden dhows. The tarads are typically 6-8m in length and equipped with 1-2 outboard engines, allowing a crew of 1-4 people to fish for 6-8 hours at a time (Grandcourt et al. 2002). Dhows, on the other hand, range from 12-22 m and are equipped with inboard diesel engines and insulated cool boxes, allowing the crew of 4-6 people to fish for 3-5 days at a time. Like other Gulf countries, vessels are owned by UAE nationals, while the majority of workers on the vessels are migrant labourers from India, Bangladesh and Iran.

The UAE's fisheries are multi-gear and multispecies, with over 100 species occurring in the catch (Grandcourt *et al.* 2010). The majority of fish species caught belong to the families Serranidae, Lethrinidae, Lujanidae, Haemulidae, Sparidae, Carangidae and



Figure 1. Map of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), showing the extent of its EEZ in grey (including the area contested with Iran; stripped area). The three capital cities of the major Emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah are also shown.

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Mugilidae. The main fishing gear is a dome-shaped wire trap called a *gargoor*, but hand-lines, intertidal weirs (*hadrah*), trolling, gillnets, and encircling nets are also used (Grandcourt *et al.* 2002). Though fisheries are of minor importance to the UAE's economy, they are valued for the recreational opportunities they provide, for their contributions to food security, and as a part of the country's cultural heritage.

Fish are landed at one of over 30 designated landing sites along the Gulf coast, principally in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah. Most landing sites also have facilities for storing, auctioning, wholesale and retailing the catch. Some of the larger sites also have processing facilities for wholesale and retail markets. Imported fish (from Oman) is sold in the markets alongside locally caught fish, which does not allow for differentiation of domestic form imported seafood through market-only surveys .

Until 2004, a market survey program (which includes imports) was used to estimate catches, inevitably yielding inflated figures for truly domestic catches. Surveys performed by the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency (ERDWA) compared reported and estimated catches for 2000, and found that, while estimated domestic landings were 20,000 tonnes, reported landings (as estimated from the market survey) were 110,000 tonnes (Grandcourt *et al.* 2003).

Morgan (2004) reports that both commercial and non-commercial fish stocks have declined significantly over the past 25 years (some by as much as 90%) as a result of overfishing and extensive coastal development. As a result, the number of registered fishing vessels has decreased, from 7,700 in 1998 to 5,191 in 2002 (Morgan 2004). A law requiring a UAE national to be physically present on the vessels during fishing operations has also contributed to the reduction in registered vessels (Morgan 2004).

Illegal fishing is common and likely encouraged by low enforcement of management rules. In particular, the use of driftnets for pelagic fishes such as Spanish mackerel (Morgan 2004; Barakat 2012), as well as shark fishing during the closed season (Moore 2012; Simpson 2012) are widespread.

The UAE was revealed to be the fifth largest exporter of shark fins to the Hong Kong market (Fowler *et al.* 2005; Moore 2012), despite a shark-finning ban. However, it is thought that the majority of these fins are re-exported from shark catches made in Oman (Moore *et al.* 2012). Catch statistics reported by the FAO on behalf of the UAE show steadily increasing shark catches from 1989-2008, followed by a drastic decline in 2009 (presumably due to the finning ban). This, however, is likely to be an underestimate because enforcement is weak, and sharks that are finned at sea and/or fished during the January-April closed season remain unreported.

Methods

This contribution follows catch reconstruction methods as previously outlined by other studies (e.g., Zeller *et al.* 2006; Zeller *et al.* 2007; Le Manach *et al.* 2012).

Although issues with over-reporting are acknowledged by the FAO (Morgan 2004), no efforts appear to have been made by the relevant reporting agency in the UAE to improve data reporting. Morgan (2004) estimates that catches for 2000 were over-reported by 90,000 t, while Luca Garibalidi (FAO, pers. comm.) thinks that this over-reporting figure is "too high". Therefore, in the absence of better data, reported catches were adjusted using the median of 20,000 t (Morgan's estimate of domestic catches) and 110,000 t (FAO data) as an anchor point for domestic reported catches, and all reported catches were decreased by 40%. These adjusted catches were used as the new baseline of reported landings for the analysis.

Using Google Earth, Al-Abdulrazzak & Pauly (2013) estimate 95 ± 1 hadrah were operating in the UAE in 2005, generating an annual catch of $1,292 \pm 381$ t. The UAE reports half that amount (i.e., 600 t) for the same year. Since the number of *hadrah* is not known to have substantially fluctuated in the last five decades, the reported *hadrah* catch for 2005 (600 t) was adjusted to the estimated catch ($1,292 \pm ...$) for all years. Species composition was estimated from data supplied by the Abu Dhabi Environmental Agency (S. Hartmann, pers. comm.).

To estimate illegal driftnet catches, an approach developed for Qatar was followed (see Qatar, Al-Abdulrazzak, this volume). To estimate annual total catch per vessel, the number of registered fishing vessels from 1998 (start of records) to 2010 was obtained from the UAE's Ministry of Environment and Water database. For the years without these records, the average number of registered vessels was used. It was assumed that 10% take part in illegal driftnetting (Table 1). As in the case of Qatar, it was estimated that vessels deploying driftnets were catching 20% more than they would legally (i.e., when deploying *gargoor* traps from their boats instead of illegal driftnets). The annual total catch per illegal fishing vessel (Table 1) was multiplied by the estimated number of participating vessels, to create a time series of illegal catch from 1989 (the start of the driftnet ban) to 2010.

The UAE has a growing recreational fishery, and although (free) recreational fishing licenses are required in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, no data on the number of participants or quantity of catches exist (Morgan 2004). Therefore, to estimate this sector, methods originally developed for Kuwait were used: it was assumed that recreational fishing began in 1960, a 0.12% participation rate was applied to the total population from 1960-2010 to obtain a time series of recreational fishers, and a conservative catch rate estimate of 1 kg·trip⁻¹, along with 104 fishing trips per

person per year was used to calculate total recreational catch (see Kuwait, Al-Abdulrazzak, this volume). UAE's recreational fishers target Spanish mackerel, tuna, sailfish and demersal species (Bishop 2002; Morgan 2004) and this species composition was applied in equal ratios to disaggregate the recreational catch.

The telosts *Lethrinus borbonicus*, *Lethrinus microdon*, *Pomacanthus maculosus*, and *Scolopsis taeniata* are caught as incidental and generally discarded bycatch by *gargoors* targeting emperors, groupers, jacks, and sweetlips (Morgan 2004; Grandcourt *et al.* 2010). Weizhong *et al.* (2012) estimate *gargoor* discard rates to be 2.56%, and this figure was used to extrapolate total discards for the fishery. The species composition was applied in equal ratios among the above species.

Despite the UAE's high GDP, subsistence fishing occurs by the industry's foreign labourers. Foreign fishers make up 0.0046% of the country's total population, and it was assumed

Table 1. Parameter	s used for est	timating illegal	driftnet fishery.
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Year	Number of participating vessels	Annual illegal catch per vessel (t)	Annual catch (t)
1989	564	20	11,280
1990	564	20	11,280
1991	564	20	11,280
1992	564	20	11,280
1993	564	20	11,280
1994	564	20	11,280
1995	564	20	11,280
1996	564	20	11,280
1997	564	20	11,178
1998	770	18	13,762
1999	619	23	14,106
2000	469	27	12,648
2001	459	29	13,500
2002	519	23	11,701
2003	505	23	11,411
2004	556	19	10,793
2005	557	19	10,401
2006	557	18	9,892
2007	557	17	9,388
2008	557	16	8,880
2009	605	15	9,294
2010	605	16	9,538

that fishers take home an average of 5 kg of fish per week, starting with the oil boom in 1960 until 2010. Because these take home catches are made up of less desirable species (which lack a targeted fishery), the ratios from species discarded from the *gargoor* fishery was applied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fisheries landings as reported by FAO show steady increases from 12,000 t-year⁻¹ in 1950 to 43,001 t-year⁻¹ in 1973, followed by a dramatic increase to 67,800 t-year⁻¹ in 1974. Catches continue to increase steadily until their peak of 117,607 t-year⁻¹ in 1999, before declining to 79,610 t-year⁻¹ by 2010 (Figure 2a; Appendix Table A1). However, adjusted reported landings (i.e., domestic) increased from 7,200 t-year⁻¹ in 1950 to a peak of 70,600 t-year⁻¹ in 1999 before declining to 47,800 t-year⁻¹ by 2010 (Figure 2a).

Total reconstructed catches are annually, on average, 34% less than landings reported by FAO on behalf of the UAE (32% overall), but are 11% higher (annual average) than the adjusted reported domestic landings (14% overall; Figure 2a). Reconstructed total catches increase gradually from 7,920 t-year⁻¹ in 1950 to a peak of 86,200 t-year⁻¹ in 1999, followed by a decline to 55,400 t-year⁻¹ in 2008. Catches in 2010 have increased again to 59,500 t-year⁻¹.

For the 1950-2010 time period, artisanal catches accounted for 99.5% of the total reconstructed catch, while the subsistence and recreational sectors contributed 0.05% and 0.45%, respectively (Figure 2a). Estimated discards were low and accounted for 0.6% of the total catch.

The main taxa caught in the UAE are *Scomberomorus commerson* (15%) and Lethrinidae (11%), followed by *Sardinella* spp. (8%), *Stolephorus* spp. (7%), Serranidae (7%), and Carangidae (7%; Figure 2b; Appendix Table A2).

Overfishing is of particular concern for the *Scomberomorus commerson* fishery, as recruitment failure has been associated with increased fishing pressure (Grandcourt *et al.* 2005). In the neighbouring Gulf of Oman, there has been a 10-fold decrease in the yields of this species in recent years (Grandcourt *et al.* 2005).

Despite declining landings, fisheries management in the UAE remains rudimentary. At the national level, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) regulates fisheries management, but some legislative authority for policy development exists on a regional scale within component Emirates. Fisheries Regulation Committees (which comprise the MAF), fisher cooperatives, municipalities, and the Coast Guard exist in each Emirate, and address regional fisheries policy and enforcement. However, due to a lack of consensus on overarching national fisheries planning goals, differing and inconsistent decisions (or no decisions at all) are often the outcome. The coordination of the various federal and regional managing bodies into a single comprehensive and consistent national fisheries policy may prove to be the greatest challenge (Morgan 2004).

The UAE has only recently introduced fisheries management legislation and therefore, there remain significant gaps, both legislatively and managerially. Like Qatar (Qatar, Al-Abdulrazzak, this volume), UAE management practices rely on input rather than output controls. Marine protected areas, closed seasons for some migratory pelagic fish, and escape gaps in *gargoor* are the most important fisheries management measures. Until recently, the only restrictions on commercial fishing were bans on trawling and driftnets. However, in 2003, Abu Dhabi began to set limits on

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protocol, and the traditional right of appeal for misdemeanours to ministers and sheikhs. As a result, many fisheries prosecutions are never pursued and regulations are often ignored. participation Stakeholder in fisheries policy development takes place in the form of traditional discussions, often directly with senior government figures. While these often result in

in compromised solutions, stakeholder participation is limited to UAE nationals only, who are the vessel owners, but are not necessarily actively engaged in fishing activities (Morgan 2004).

Compounding the fisheries crisis is the rapid development and urbanization of coastal areas in the UAE, which is expected to have pervasive and lasting effects on Gulf ecosystems. For example, in 2002, Dubai commenced construction on a series of large artificial scale island-lagoon complexes along the entire coast of the Emirate (Sale et al. 2011). Because of the construction's proximity to coral reefs, the sedimentation buried coral reefs (Sheppard et al. 2010; Sale et al. 2011), thus affecting fish habitat.



Figure 2. Total reconstructed catch for the United Arab Emirates by a) sector (with the solid line representing the landings data transmitted to FAO and the dashed line the 'adjusted FAO data'); and b) major taxa, 1950-2010. Note that subsistence catches were included in the sector graph (a) but are not visible (too small). Recreational catches are the light coloured area and discards the darker line on top.

The re-estimated catches account for missing sectors including recreational and subsistence catches, as well as discards, illegal catches, and over-reporting errors. Thus, the reconstructed time series may better reflect the catches extracted from the Persian Gulf by the UAE's fisheries from 1950-2010 than the officially reported statistics. While the reconstructed catches are entirely dependent on the assumptions made by this study and despite the considerable data uncertainties associated with the estimates, they seem preferable to the alternative of assuming 'zero' catch for sectors lacking quantitative data.

Finally, it may be noted that it would be appropriate, in subsequent analyses, to reconstruct the UAE's catches along the Gulf of Oman coast, and in the process, to revisit the assumption that these catches did not enter the fisheries statistics considered here.

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Year	FAO landings ^a	Total reconstructed catch	Artisanal	Subsistence	Recreational	Discards
1950	7,200	7,900	7,900	0	0	25
1951	7,200	7,900	7,900	0	0	25
1952	7,200	7,900	7,900	0	0	25
1953	7,200	7,900	7,900	0	0	25
1954	9,000	9,700	9,700	0	0	31
1955	9,000	9,700	9,700	0	0	31
1956	9,000	9,700	9,700	0	0	31
1957	12,000	12,700	12,700	0	0	40
1958	12,000	12,700	12,700	0	0	40
1959	18,000	18,800	18,700	0	0	60
1960	18,000	18,800	18,700	1	11	60
1961	18,000	18,800	18,700	1	12	60
1962	21,000	21,800	21,700	1	14	71
1963	21,000	21,800	21,700	1	15	71
1964	21,000	21,800	21,700	2	10	71
1905	22,800	23,000	23,500	2	18	75
1067	22,800	23,000	23,300	2	20	20 20
1968	24,000	24,800	24,700	2	21	80
1969	24,000	24,800	24,700	2	25	80
1970	24,000	24,800	24,700	3	29	40
1971	25 801	26,600	26 500	3	34	43
1972	25,801	26,600	26,500	4	40	43
1973	25.801	26.600	26,500	5	48	43
1974	40.680	41.500	41.400	5	57	68
1975	40,680	41,500	41,400	6	67	68
1976	38,760	39,600	39,500	7	78	65
1977	38,760	39,600	39,500	9	90	65
1978	38,760	39,600	39,500	10	103	65
1979	38,760	39,600	39,500	11	116	65
1980	38,760	39,700	39,500	12	127	65
1981	40,656	41,500	41,300	13	136	27
1982	41,853	42,900	42,500	14	144	158
1983	43,630	44,700	44,300	15	152	195
1984	43,630	44,700	44,300	15	160	195
1985	43,356	44,400	44,000	16	168	184
1986	47,593	48,700	48,300	10	1/8	205
1000	51,140	52,400	51,800	18	189	305
1000	54,606	67 100	54,400	20	201	320
1000	57 077	69 500	68 900	20	215	330
1990	55 402	67 900	67 300	22	220	374
1992	57 028	69 500	68,900	23	250	334
1993	59,760	72.300	71.600	25	265	348
1994	65.160	77.700	77.000	27	279	383
1995	63,530	76,100	75,400	28	293	409
1996	64,200	76,800	76,100	30	309	413
1997	68,615	81,300	80,500	31	326	442
1998	68,843	84,100	83,300	33	344	443
1999	70,564	86,200	85 <i>,</i> 400	35	362	454
2000	63,274	77,800	76 <i>,</i> 600	36	379	783
2001	67,537	83,000	81,700	38	393	889
2002	58,544	72,200	70,900	39	406	817
2003	57,090	70,300	69,200	41	424	683
2004	54,000	66,600	65,500	44	457	649
2005	52,041	64,300	63,100	49	508	614 F02
2000	49,500	D1,3UU E0 100	57 100	50 65	202 675	203 551
2007	40,980 11 115	55,400	57,100	74	0/5 775	531 531
2000	44,445	58,400	56 600	83	866	583
2010	47,766	59,500	58,000	90	937	522

Appendix Table A1. FAO landings vs. total reconstructed catch (t) for the UAE, 1950-2010, as well as catch by sector.

^a Adjusted FAO data that were used as a baseline.

Year	Scomberomorus commerson	Lethrinidae	Sardinella spp.	Stolephorus spp.	Serranidae	Carangidae	Other ^a
1950	420	600	780	720	360	420	4.620
1951	420	600	780	720	360	420	4.620
1952	420	600	780	720	360	420	4.620
1953	420	600	780	720	360	420	4.620
1954	540	720	1.020	900	480	540	5.520
1955	540	720	1.020	900	480	540	5.520
1956	540	720	1.020	900	480	540	5.520
1957	720	960	1.320	1.200	600	720	7.210
1958	720	960	1,320	1,200	600	720	7,210
1959	1,080	1,440	1,980	1,800	900	1,080	10,470
1960	1,080	1,440	1,980	1,800	900	1,080	10,480
1961	1,080	1,440	1,980	1,800	900	1,080	10,480
1962	1,260	1,680	2,340	2,100	1,080	1,260	12,050
1963	1,260	1,680	2,340	2,100	1,080	1,260	12,060
1964	1,260	1,680	2,340	2,100	1,080	1,260	12,060
1965	1,380	1,800	2,520	2,280	1,140	1,380	13,080
1966	1,380	1,800	2,520	2,280	1,140	1,380	13,080
1967	1,450	1,920	2,640	2,400	1,200	1,440	13,750
1968	1,450	1,920	2,640	2,400	1,200	1,440	13,750
1969	1,450	1,920	2,640	2,400	1,200	1,440	13,750
1970	1,210	840	3,900	3,120	600	720	14,380
1971	1,330	900	4,140	3,360	660	780	15,400
1972	1,330	900	4,140	3,360	660	780	15,410
1973	1,330	900	4,140	3,360	660	780	15,420
1974	2,050	1,440	6,600	5,280	1,020	1,140	23,970
1975	2,060	1,440	6,600	5,280	1,020	1,140	23,980
1976	2,000	1,380	6,240	5,040	960	1,080	22,900
1977	2,000	1,380	6,240	5,040	960	1,080	22,910
1978	2,010	1,380	6,240	5,040	960	1,080	22,920
1979	2,010	1,380	6,240	5,040	960	1,080	22,930
1980	2,010	1,380	6,240	5,040	960	1,080	22,940
1981	1,870	380	7,800	6,000	400	380	24,690
1982	1,970	2,540	3,540	5,400	2,230	3,110	24,060
1983	3,040	3,760	3,900	4,920	2,470	3,620	22,970
1984	3,040	3,760	3,900	4,920	2,470	3,620	22,980
1985	2,440	3,550	4,270	6,410	2,330	3,420	21,990
1986	3,750	4,440	5,040	4,300	2,910	3,080	25,170
1987	3,350	4,770	4,020	3,980	3,130	6,370	20,140
1900	3,030	5,000 E 100	4,040 E 090	4,160	3,260	7,000	27,520
1909	14,790	5,100	5,060	4,560	2,260	7,000	27,420
1001	14,750	5 220	5,540	4,000	3,300	6,800	28,300
1991	14,010	5 380	5 330	4,540	3,240	7 000	20,200
1993	14,720	5 560	4 540	5 380	3,600	7,000	31 440
1994	15 130	6 310	6 070	5 280	3,800	7,820	33 300
1995	15,200	6.800	5.300	5.720	4.020	7,580	31,510
1996	15.250	6.870	5.360	5,780	4.060	7,660	31.840
1997	15.530	7.350	5.520	6.180	4.340	8.150	34.230
1998	18.130	7.370	5.540	6.200	4.350	8.530	34.000
1999	18.580	7.550	5.710	6.350	4.460	8,760	34,790
2000	16,730	11,790	3,680	1,640	14,430	4,000	25,540
2001	18,190	13,570	2,520	2,420	16,610	4,120	25,620
2002	14,100	12,630	2,100	3,840	13,700	3,550	22,280
2003	14,910	12,190	2,480	2,070	11,290	2,930	24,470
2004	13,960	12,120	2,820	2,460	10,020	2,580	22,670
2005	13,290	12,070	3,110	2,890	8,710	2,260	21,990
2006	12,800	12,450	2,880	1,200	7,620	3,360	21,000
2007	11,960	12,840	2,700	300	6,480	4,560	19,510
2008	11,060	13,220	2,440	0	5,390	5 <i>,</i> 680	17,590
2009	12,430	14,880	500	0	5,490	6,290	18,550
2010	15.020	13.650	490	0	4.870	5.840	19.670

Appendix Table A2. Total reconstructed catch (t) for UAE by major taxa, 1950-2010.

^aOthers category includes 41 additional taxonomic groups.