



## FISHING'S IMPRINT ON OCEANS REVEALED

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UNITED NATIONS: Humans are now fishing at least 55 per cent of the world's oceans - an area four times larger than the area occupied by humanity's onshore agriculture.

That startling statistic is among the findings of a unique, high-tech collaboration that is providing a massive amount of new data about global fishing operations.

The results, published yesterday in the journal *Science*, offer a powerful glimpse of the problem of overfishing on the hard-to-regulate high seas. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, 31.4 per cent of global fish stocks were overfished or fished unsustainably as of 2013, while another 58.1 per cent were "fully fished."

Yesterday's findings relied on data from Global Fishing Watch, a collaboration encompassing Oceana, SkyTruth and Google. Researchers compiled billions of data points from tracking systems that the International Maritime Organisation requires for roughly 70,000 fishing vessels.

The result is a picture of fishing that the study, led by David Kroodsma of Global Fishing Watch, claims "has never been directly quantified". Due to data limitations, the percentage of the oceans fished could actually be as high as 73 per cent, the study said.

"Fishing is happening almost everywhere and all the time," said Jackie Savitz, chief policy officer for the advocacy group Oceana. "I think people don't really have a sense of how heavily fished our oceans are."

She said the intensity of global fishing documented by the study was far greater than researchers had been able to track in the past.

"That means we're putting more pressure on fish populations," Savitz said, noting that increased fishing also meant more inadvertent catching of other species, such as sea turtles. "That means there's more pressure on our oceans than we thought."

There was particularly intense fishing off the southeastern coast of South America, the eastern coast of China, western Africa, and all around Europe and the Mediterranean, the research found. The North Atlantic, far northeastern Pacific, Indian Ocean and Southern Ocean were far more devoid of fishing.

While yesterday's study doesn't delve into what areas are being overfished around the world, Savitz said experts had long documented overfishing in many places. But she said the latest data helped to illustrate that "the tragedy of the commons is very much at place in the oceans", and underscored the need for a more thoughtful global approach to regulating fisheries.

The study found that ships from just five nations - Spain, Taiwan, Japan, North Korea and China - accounted for more than 85 per cent of global fishing. China's fishing footprint was by far the largest, however, based on data for 2016. (The study used data from 2012 through 2016.)

Daniel Pauly, a prominent expert on global fisheries and a professor at the University of British Columbia, added that the study "adds a new dimension to the scientists' and fisheries manager's tool kit". - Washington Post

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