



A Scientific Summary

European Union Subsidies Favor Industry, Promote Overfishing Abroad

Study says taxpayers fund fishing in waters of developing countries

The European Union, or EU, is paying 75 percent of the access fees for European vessels to fish in the waters of developing countries in Africa and the South Pacific, according to a new study by researchers at the University of British Columbia.

Industry pays the remaining 25 percent, but that represents only about 2 percent of the revenue it receives from selling the catch. The EU subsidies provide strong incentives for overfishing, according to the study, published in the journal *PLOS ONE*.

“Frequently, subsidies cover the cost of fuel or equipment, but in this case, the government covers a large part of the access fees as well,” says Frédéric Le Manach, lead author of the study and a fisheries expert with the Sea Around Us Project at the UBC Fisheries Centre in Vancouver. “Since the fishing fleets don’t pay the full cost of access, greater profit allows for spending on bigger and better vessels. This may lead to overexploitation of the developing countries’ tuna populations and other already vulnerable marine resources.”

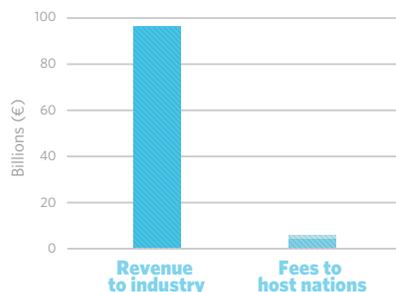
Subsidized foreign fishing by the EU

Fees paid by EU government subsidies and by the European fishing industry for access to the waters of developing nations from 1980 to 2012, along with the estimated revenue the industry received from fishing.

€96 billion
Revenue to the fishing industry

€5 billion
EU subsidies for access fees

€1.7 billion
Access fees paid by fishing industry



Source: UBC Fisheries Centre

In the study, supported by The Pew Charitable Trusts, the UBC researchers analyzed agreements the EU made with developing countries to access their waters between 1980 and 2012. These agreements include fees that range from roughly €400,000 to €230 million per year per country (about US\$470,000 to US\$305 million at today's exchange rates). The text of the agreements shows that the EU government paid a total of about €5 billion toward the access fees during this period. To calculate the industry's fees and its revenues from fishing, the researchers used data from the agreements and a database of global fish prices. Such calculations were possible only for agreements relating to tuna, because other agreements did not consistently include the catch level available to EU vessels.

The study found that the fishing industry paid about one-fourth of the cost of access. Assuming that ratio holds for all agreements, this equates to about €1.7 billion over the 33-year period. Furthermore, the fees paid by the industry amounted to only 1.5 percent of its revenue from fishing for tuna and 3.2 percent of its revenue from other species in these waters, for a total of about €96 billion.

"The EU has the potential to lead the world in sustainable fisheries," says Daniel Pauly, principal investigator with the Sea Around Us Project and a study co-author. "But as they stand now, these access agreements are being subsidized in ways that disadvantage developing countries and contradict the EU's own development goals by forcing their citizens to essentially pay twice for the fish they're taking off of the plates of developing countries."

The authors recommend that host countries learn from Pacific nations that recently began to charge higher fees for access to their waters—up to 50 percent more than the world average in the case of the island nation of Kiribati. They also note that a senior representative of the French tuna fleet recently acknowledged that the fee paid by the industry is low and that it would be reasonable to set it at up to 7 percent of the value of fish landed.

Citations

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