



Defending our oceans

"Greenpeace is committed to defending the health of the world's oceans and the plants, animals and people that depend upon them."

Pirate Fishing – Stolen Fish, Stolen Futures





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Armed and masked, scouring the oceans, stealing food from hungry families – modern day pirates are a far cry from the glamour of Hollywood movies. But they are a multi billion-dollar reality for many communities that can least afford to be robbed.

From the islands of the South Pacific, to the coastal communities of West Africa, the pirate fishermen, who then claim their profits in European and Asian ports, are netting millions of dollars in much needed income. The United Nations estimates that Somalia loses US\$300 million a year to the pirates; Guinea loses US\$100 million. Globally more than US\$4 billion is lost each year.

Pirate fishing – known by its more technical and less colourful name: illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing – is the scourge of the oceans. It leaves communities without much needed food and income and the marine environment smashed and empty. It is disturbingly easy to become a fishing pirate and even easier to evade capture.

The skull and cross bones pennant they proudly fly easily identifies fictitious pirates. In contrast, real life pirates hide their identity and origin, ignore or break the rules and often – sail the flags of countries that ask no questions about the manner and scale of their fishing. Just with the click of a computer mouse, for as little as US\$500 and sometimes in just 24 hours, flags can be bought over the internet from countries like Malta, Panama, Belize, Honduras and St Vincent and the Grenadines. In 2001 Greenpeace estimated there were at least 1,300 industrial scale pirate fishing ships at sea.

Far from policing the rogue traders, governments around the world do little to check their activities or what is landed in their own ports. The pirate booty is often illegally transferred to factory ships – known as reefers – mixed with legally caught stocks and then knowingly landed and sold in “legitimate” ports like Las Palmas and Suva. There is barely any scrutiny and pirate fishing fleets use these ports without restrictions to maintain their destructive activities.

The countries that are the victims of this wholesale robbery are usually those that are least able to enforce the laws in their own waters – frequently they can barely afford to keep their few policing boats afloat – they simply cannot compete with the big industry thieves.

While they may operate in a murky world of corruption, pirate vessels, their owners and operators are not impossible to track down. Around 80 different countries play host to them – including the European Union and Taiwan, Panama, Belize and Honduras. International enforcement could shut down this trade, giving income and food back to those who have earned it. But little is done. Repeated demands by environmental and justice groups to effectively outlaw pirate fishing have fallen on deaf ears. Despite the various international commitments and plans of action approved in the last few years to fight pirate fishing, the activity of these illegal ships has not decreased but even increased in the region.

And it is not only an issue of theft. Environmental destruction goes hand in hand with pirate fishing. Because they operate, quite literally, off the radar of any enforcement, the fishing techniques they use are destroying ocean life.

Tuna stocks around Tanzania, Somalia, Papua New Guinea and Tuvalu are targeted each year with giant nets that scoop up entire shoals, including the young fish vital for breeding and future stock growth. Those that won't make a cash killing in the market, but could still provide food and income for others, are thrown back dead. The pirates fishing activities compound the global environmental damage from destructive fisheries. Worldwide, legal and illegal vessels kill hundreds of thousands of other species as they fish. Ships using ‘long-lines’ - fishing lines over 100 km long, baited with thousands of hooks lined up in a row and pulled behind the boat. Anything that sees the bait as food is caught – other fish, whales, dolphins, turtles, sharks and the albatrosses that dive for it and are drowned, caught on the hooks. 40,000 turtles die every year in this manner and hundreds of thousands of seabirds. Many of these species are being pushed to the brink of extinction simply because of this needlessly reckless practice.

Another lucrative catch is shrimp. But the true cost of shrimp trawling goes well beyond its market value. Fine mesh nets are dragged along the bottom of the sea, leaving nothing behind. One film of shrimp trawling shows fishermen filling a few small boxes with the target catch and shoveling tonnes of unwanted fish and sea life – known as by-catch – back over the side. For every kilo of shrimp landed, over 3 kilos of tropical marine life is caught and dies. Shrimp fishing is a tiny percentage of the worldwide fishing industry, accounting for between 3 and 4% of the total. However, it is responsible for over 27% of the unnecessary

destruction of marine life.

Pirate fishing can be stopped. Governments can outlaw flags of convenience and refuse entry to fishing and supply vessels. It is a matter of political will to deliver the kind of enforcement that is needed to protect the environment and the communities that depend upon them.

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"Greenpeace and the Environmental Justice Foundation are working together to expose the pirate fishing fleets that operate without sanction across the globe. Together the international environment and human rights organisations are demanding that governments close ports to ban pirates, deny them access to markets and prosecute companies supporting them."





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Greenpeace is an independent, campaigning organisation, which uses non-violent, creative confrontation to expose global environmental problems, and to force solutions essential to a green and peaceful future

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