**The issue of Overfishing in International Waters.**

International waters, also known as high seas, are areas of the ocean not under jurisdiction of any one country due to the fact it is outside of nation’s exclusive economic zone, which extends 200 nautical miles from a nation’s coastline. Overfishing is the depletion of the stock of fish in a body of water by excessive fishing.

Overfishing, generally, disrupts the balance of marine food web, effecting the overall health of the ocean ecosystem. However, there are higher demands for certain species of fish, such as tuna, shark, cod etc., this has led to unsustainable fishing practices such as bottom trawling or drift net fisheries. Since these species typically have a slow reproduction rate, which makes it especially challenging for the population to recover once overfished. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, overfished stocks has tripled in 50 years, globally.

Not only so, these unsustainable or even illegal methods of fishing can often damage the ocean in ways which can cause lasting impacts that are still present decades afterwards. Bottom drawling involves dragging large nets along the seabed, destroying coral reefs and deep-sea ecosystems. Overfishing is also closely linked to bycatching, the capture of unwanted sea life while fishing for different species. This is posing as a serious marine threat, leading to the needless loss of billions of fish, hundreds of thousands of sea turtles and cetaceans.

Due to the fact that these parts of the ocean are not governed by a single country’s laws, they are often extremely vulnerable to overexploitation. The lack of unified global authority to regulate fish in international waters meant it is extremely difficult to manage and as a result, leaves these areas prone to overfishing. Despite the creation and agreement on United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), enforcement is fragmented, there is not a clear mandate for managing international waters as a whole and as no single global body is responsible, overfishing persists.

While there are regional fisheries management organizations (RMFOs) which are working to enforce quotas, surveillance and control activities, their enforcement powers can often be weak, resulting in inconsistent compliances. Furthermore, many of them operate under different regional agreements and some are underfunded resulting in failure to take adequate measures.

Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is rampant in international waters, vessels may avoid penalties and punishments for using unsustainable practices which greatly exacerbates overfishing and damages the marine habitat. IUU fishing undermines efforts to conserve and manage fish stocks, consequently, inhibits progress towards achieving the goals of long-term sustainability and responsibility. According to the FAO, 30% of global catch is IUU fishing, resulting in significant economic losses and environmental degradation.

Overfishing does not only impact the environment negatively, with it, comes socioeconomic consequences. Small-scales, artisan fishermen are particularly vulnerable to the decline in fish population since they lack resources to compete with large scale industrial fleets on international waters. Additionally, the overall value of the fishing industry is reduced since depleted fisheries face lower yields and therefore profitability. Namely, the Pacific Ocean have been significantly impacted by overfishing, leading to economic loses for countries in the region.

Nevertheless, the Pacific Ocean is not the only place affected, so many areas of our globe face the risk of overfishing due to a lack of authority monitoring international waters. We have already witnessed the repercussions of overfishing in high seas, and we need take measures.

Points to consider:

How can we avoid unsustainable fishing practices which may lead to overfishing?

How can we make sure that illegal practices do not go unpunished?

What can we do to protect the vulnerable species and those at risk of extinction due to overfishing?

What can we do to ensure international waters are monitored?

How can we ensure that people are aware of the dangers of overfishing and respond accordingly?

Useful websites:

<https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/fisheries/international-agreements/regional-fisheries-management-organisations-rfmos_en>

<https://opsociety.org/stop-unsustainable-fishing/#:~:text=Destructive%20fishing%20methods%2C%20such%20as,%2C%20seagrass%2C%20and%20seabed%20communities.&text=Destructive%20industrial%20fishing%20practices%20are%20a%20primary%20threat%20to%20marine%20life%20worldwide>.

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/end-illegal-fishing-day>

<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/goal-14/>

More about IUU fishing <https://www.fao.org/iuu-fishing/background/what-is-iuu-fishing/en/>

UNCLOS- <https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf>

### [**UK Government guilty of overfishing, says UK Government**](https://www.bluemarinefoundation.com/2024/04/11/uk-government-guilty-of-overfishing-says-uk-government/)



[Blue Marine Foundation](https://www.bluemarinefoundation.com/2024/04/11/uk-government-guilty-of-overfishing-says-uk-government/)

[*https://www.bluemarinefou*](https://www.bluemarinefoundation.com/2024/04/11/uk-government-guilty-of-overfishing-says-uk-government/)

### [**Conservation news on Overfishing**](https://news.mongabay.com/list/overfishing/)



[Mongabay - Conservation News](https://news.mongabay.com/list/overfishing/)

[*https://news.mongabay.com › list › overfishing*](https://news.mongabay.com/list/overfishing/)