

The EU underpays Madagascar for access to fish: research

July 3 2012

Unfair and exploitative political agreements allow Europeans to eat fish from the plates of developing countries, according to a study led by University of British Columbia researchers.

In the case of [Madagascar](#), the [European Union](#) pays less than it did two decades ago while catching more [fish](#). Since 1986, the EU's quotas for catching fish in Madagascar's waters have increased by 30 per cent while its access fees have decreased by 20 per cent. As a result, the total annual income for Madagascar decreased by almost 90 per cent between 1986 and 2010.

An international team of researchers from Madagascar, the EU, [Canada](#) and the [World Bank](#) offers suggestions for fixing the problem in a new paper published online this week in the journal *Marine Policy*.

"Access fees should be based on the market value of what they fish, not on a fixed rate," says Frédéric Le Manach, the study's lead author from the Sea Around Us Project at UBC's Fisheries Centre.

Currently, EU countries pay fees equivalent to less than three per cent of the landed value of the catch to access Madagascar's resources with highly subsidized fishing fleets, creating high profit margins for privately held companies, despite the EU's previous commitment to channel such profits back to developing countries.

"The EU is unfairly profiting from the resources of one of the world's

poorest countries," says co-author Rashid Sumaila, a fisheries economist and director of the UBC Fisheries Centre. "And they are breaking their own laws to do it."

Based on a previous study, which suggested that an access fee at 50 per cent of the gross revenue would be implementable, the authors estimated that Madagascar could get 8.7 million Euro per year for access to its [fish stocks](#) – more than five times the amount the country currently receives.

"These findings raise profound ethical questions that the EU must address," says marine ecologist and study co-author Alasdair Harris from conservation NGO Blue Ventures. "The EU must take steps to ensure that all EU vessels, wherever they operate in the world, fish sustainably and in line with the its own commitments to protecting the interests of developing countries."

Fisheries partnership agreements with [developing countries](#) allow EU vessels to access fish stocks in these countries' exclusive economic zone for a fee. With three quarters of the EU's domestic fish stocks now overfished, these agreements are increasingly important to EU fishing businesses. Currently, more than half of EU catches come from outside EU waters.

Madagascar's agreement with the EU was recently renewed for a further two-year period beginning in January 2013. This latest agreement was reached in a negotiation closed to independent observers.

One of the poorest [countries](#) in the world, two-thirds of Madagascar's population of 25 million faces chronic food insecurity, and more than 85 per cent live in poverty.

Provided by University of British Columbia

Citation: The EU underpays Madagascar for access to fish: research (2012, July 3) retrieved 6 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-07-eu-underpays-madagascar-access-fish.html>

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