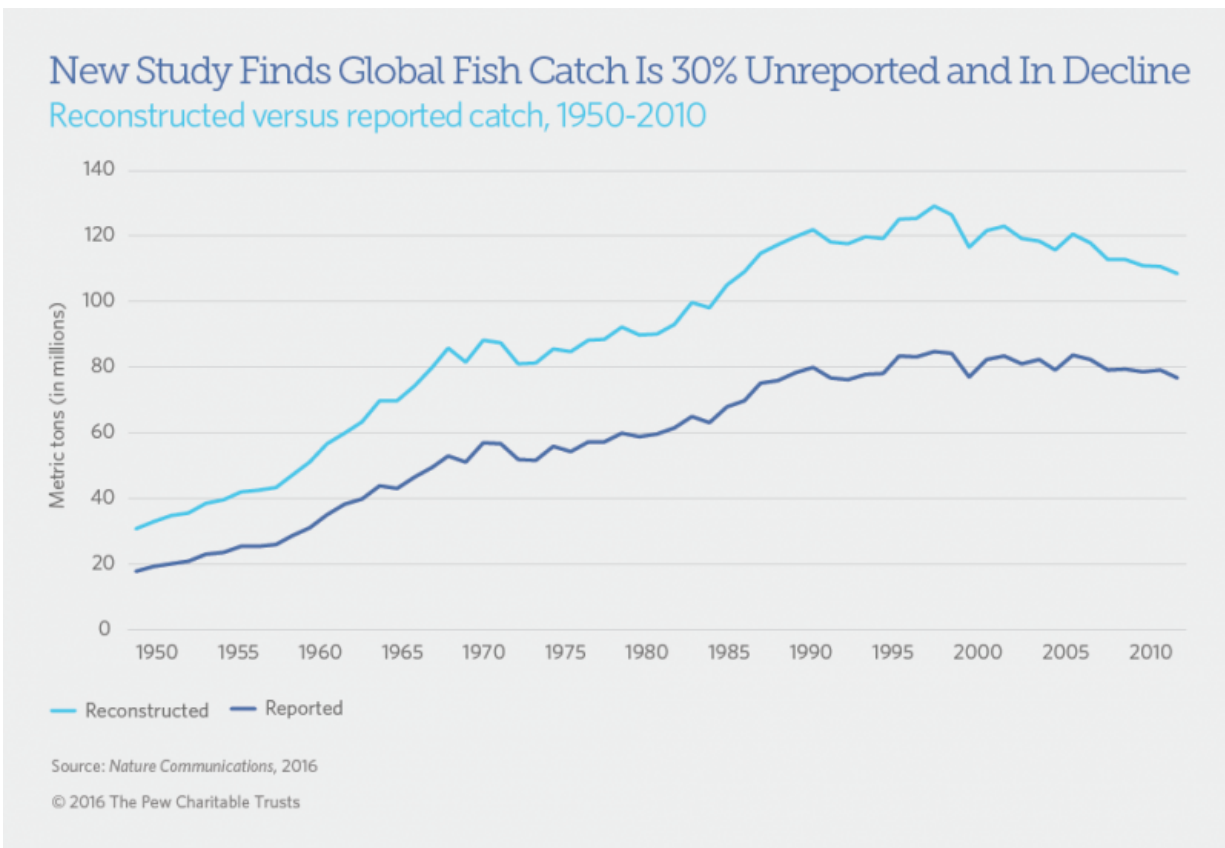


Study finds 30 percent of global fish catch is unreported

January 19 2016



This graph shows reconstructed versus reported catch, 1950-2010 Credit: The Pew Charitable Trusts

Countries drastically underreport the number of fish caught worldwide, according to a new study, and the numbers obscure a significant decline

in the total catch .

The new estimate, released today in *Nature Communications*, puts the annual global catch at roughly 109 million metric tons, about 30 per cent higher than the 77 million officially reported in 2010 by more than 200 countries and territories. This means that 32 million metric tons of [fish](#) goes unreported every year, more than the weight of the entire population of the United States.

Researchers led by the [Sea Around Us](#), a research initiative at the University of British Columbia supported by The Pew Charitable Trusts, and Vulcan Inc., attribute the discrepancy to the fact that most countries focus their data collection efforts on industrial fishing and largely exclude difficult-to-track categories such as artisanal, subsistence, and illegal fishing, as well as discarded fish.

"The world is withdrawing from a joint bank account of fish without knowing what has been withdrawn or the remaining balance," said UBC professor Daniel Pauly, a lead author of the study and principal investigator of the Sea Around Us. "Better estimating the amount we're taking out can help ensure there is enough fish to sustain us in the future."

How much fish are we really catching?

Accounting for the world's unreported catch

Thirty percent of global fish catch may be unreported, according to new research. Activities such as artisanal, subsistence, and illegal fishing are often not included in official statistics—obscuring the true extent of fishing worldwide. Scientists now estimate global catch is **109 million metric tons (mt) annually**.



Wild numbers

Not knowing how much fish we take from the oceans makes sustainable management more difficult. **From 1950-2010**, landings of economically important fish such as tuna and sharks were underreported, according to the study, led by the Sea Around Us and published Jan. 19, 2016 in the journal *Nature Communications*.

Global tuna landings were **9% higher** than reported.



Global shark catch was **60% higher**.

9% The share of fish estimated to be discarded each year.

Annually, **25%** of global fish catch comes from small-scale fishing, mostly for food.

The scale of unreported catch

Every year, the official data underestimate global fish catch by about **32 million mt**—that's more than the weight of the **population of the United States**.



Catchall

In the new study, scientists gathered data using an array of sources and methods to piece together a more complete picture of the world's fisheries. Called "catch reconstruction," this approach allows countries to gain a better understanding of catch and provides an important tool for building more profitable and sustainable fisheries.

For further information, please visit:
pewtrusts.org/globalcatch



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The Pew Charitable Trusts is driven by the power of knowledge to solve today's most challenging problems. Pew applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public, and invigorate civic life.

The Sea Around Us is a research initiative at The University of British Columbia that assesses the impact of fisheries on the marine ecosystems of the world, and offers mitigating solutions to a range of stakeholders.

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Credit: The Pew Charitable Trusts

Accurate catch information is critical for helping fisheries officials and managers understand the health of fish populations and inform fishing policies such as catch quotas and seasonal or area restrictions.

For the *Nature Communications* study, Pauly, his co-author Dirk Zeller, and hundreds of their colleagues around the world reviewed catch and related data from more than 200 countries and territories. Using a method called catch reconstruction, they compared official data submitted to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) with estimates obtained from a broad range of sources, including academic literature, industrial fishing statistics, local fisheries experts, fisheries law enforcement, human population, and other records such as documentation of fish catch by tourists.

"This groundbreaking study confirms that we are taking far more fish from our oceans than the official data suggest," said Joshua S. Reichert, executive vice president and head of environment initiatives for Pew. "It's no longer acceptable to mark down artisanal, subsistence, or bycatch catch data as a zero in the official record books.

"These new estimates provide countries with more accurate assessments of catch levels than we have ever had," said Reichert, "along with a far more nuanced portrait of the amount of fish that are being removed from the world's oceans each year."

"Data are integral to maintaining global fisheries," said Raechel Waters, senior program officer for ocean health for Vulcan Inc. "Without an accurate understanding of fish catch, we risk underreporting or misreporting, which can handicap countries in their efforts to implement effective fisheries policy and management measures.

"This is particularly important for countries that do not have the resources to conduct comprehensive fishery assessments," said Waters.

More information: *Nature Communications*,
[dx.doi.org/10.1038/ncomms10244](https://doi.org/10.1038/ncomms10244)

Provided by University of British Columbia

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