

Ships flagged for illegal fishing still able to get insurance, study finds

June 6 2016

New research from the University of British Columbia finds that rogue fishing vessels are able to secure insurance including those that have been flagged by international watchdogs for unlawful activity.

"Restricting access to [insurance](#) could play a major role in ending illegal fishing, and right now, it's a largely overlooked method," said lead author Dana Miller, who studied illegal fishing and insurance while she was a postdoctoral fellow at UBC.

Illegal fishing is a major problem that siphons an estimated \$10 to 20 billion annually from the global economy, and causes millions of tonnes of fish to disappear from the oceans. It damages habitats and makes fishing harder for law-abiding fishers. Insurance can be financially beneficial for [fishing vessels](#) because it eliminates the risk of large financial loss should an accident occur.

So how could illegal vessels be prevented from obtaining insurance? The answer is relatively simple. Researchers recommend insurance companies check lists of known illegal vessels before issuing insurance. These lists include regional fisheries management organizations' Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) vessel lists, and the list of vessels that INTERPOL has issued Purple Notices for, seeking information on their activities, associations, and whereabouts.

"This approach is a much less expensive way to prevent illegal fishing than traditional methods," said co-author Rashid Sumaila, the project

director of OceanCanada and a professor in the UBC Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries.

Efforts to combat illegal fishing often focus on monitoring and surveillance, through the use of satellite tracking and inspections. However, the insurance industry has largely been left out of the discussion, even though they may have the ability to make a significant impact on the number of illegal vessels by refusing insurance.

Miller and her colleagues at the Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries investigated insurance information for 94 IUU fishing vessels and 837 legal vessels that were required, by international law, to have insurance because of their size. They identified the insurers of 48 per cent of the illegal vessels and 58 per cent of the legal vessels and often the same companies provided insurance to both illegal and legal fishing vessels.

Some of the most notorious [illegal fishing](#) vessels were found to have insurance coverage including the Bandit 6, a fleet of six Spanish fishing vessels wanted for illegally taking Patagonian tooth [fish](#) from southern waters. The Bandit 6 vessels were recently caught in different regions of the world after being on internationally recognized lists like the European Union's IUU vessel list for years.

"It was shocking when we found that out," said Miller. "Insurers should take the simple step of consulting IUU fishing vessel lists to make sure that these notorious and well-known ships are refused insurance."

The authors also recommend that insurers mandate that all [vessels](#) over a certain size be assigned an International Maritime Organization ship identification number, and operate satellite automatic identification vessel tracking technology. These measures would tighten regulation and increase transparency.

This study was published today in *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*.

Provided by University of British Columbia

Citation: Ships flagged for illegal fishing still able to get insurance, study finds (2016, June 6) retrieved 3 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-06-ships-flagged-illegal-fishing.html>

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