

Oversight of fishing vessels lacking, new analysis shows

February 18 2020



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Policies regulating fishing in international waters do not sufficiently protect officials who monitor illegal fishing, the prohibited dumping of equipment, or human trafficking or other human rights abuses, finds a

new analysis by a team of environmental researchers.

"These fisheries observers risk their lives to watch over industrial fishing activities, and yet they are often not afforded sufficient legal safeguards," says Jennifer Jacquet, an associate professor in New York University's Department of Environmental Studies and a co-author of the study. "If we are serious about protecting ocean life, we must first put policies in place to protect fisheries observers."

The analysis, co-authored with the nonprofit Greenpeace and the Association of Professional Observers, appears in the journal *Marine Policy*.

There are an estimated 2,500 observers globally, and in recent years many have been subject to [human rights](#) and [safety violations](#), including intimidation, assault, and even murder or disappearance under suspicious circumstances. The researchers add that since 2010, at least seven fisheries observers have disappeared while monitoring fisheries under the authority of Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs). Notably, very little information is available regarding the circumstances.

This first-ever examination of observer-related policies for the 17 RFMOs, which are the main institutions in charge of high seas fisheries, uncovered several important gaps and shortcomings:

- No RFMOs include regulations to sufficiently protect fisheries observer rights and safety.
- Only four of 17 RFMOs, which manage high seas fisheries, have a policy in place on what to do if a human observer disappears or dies.
- Only three RFMOs mandate 100-percent observer coverage on fishing vessels under their authority.

To address these shortcomings, the authors advocate for 100-percent observer coverage achieved using a complementary approach of remote electronic monitoring and human observers. They also call for RFMOs to be publicly transparent about what the monitoring reveals, including violations, and, especially, if observers are harmed or disappear.

"Requiring full observer coverage and protecting the safety and rights of human observers will lead to stronger environmental and animal protection on the high seas," says Jacquet.

More information: Christopher Ewell et al, An evaluation of Regional Fisheries Management Organization at-sea compliance monitoring and observer programs, *Marine Policy* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.marpol.2020.103842](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2020.103842)

Provided by New York University

Citation: Oversight of fishing vessels lacking, new analysis shows (2020, February 18) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-02-oversight-fishing-vessels-lacking-analysis.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.