

# Artisanal fishing on an industrial level

In the countries of the Global South, artisanal fishing is both a source of protein and of income. But, just like industrial fishing, it exerts significant pressure on fish stocks, particularly in Peru.



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Tropical fish caught by an artisanal flotilla off the coast of Paíta, Peru.

Artisanal fishing is reputed to be less harmful to marine ecosystems - or at least, it appears to be. However, the reality is sometimes more nuanced, particularly in Peru. In this country, industrial fishing is very tightly supervised and regulated. In contrast, artisanal fishing is erratic, heterogeneous and poorly regulated, despite the fact that it is an essential sector, providing tens of thousands of jobs and protein for the population.

In the absence of regulations, since 1996, the Peruvian government has continuously monitored landings and, in some years, carried out major surveys on the activity and level of education of fishermen working along the 3,000 km Peruvian coastline. Some 3.5 million logs have been collected through these efforts. French and Peruvian research teams have analysed this wealth of information to develop knowledge on the 270 species fished.

••• Multiple studies have shown  
a risk of collapse in Peruvian  
fish stocks •••

The conclusions are concerning. Between 1997 and 2016, the number of artisanal boats rose from 6,200 to 16,000, and catches from 200,000 to 1.2 million tonnes per year. By way of comparison, the entire French fleet only catches around 500,000 tonnes of fish per year, all seas and species combined.

This rush to the sea accelerated following changes in legislation and the introduction of quotas per shipowner for industrial fisheries, leading to a drastic reduction in the number of industrial vessels. Under these sidelining measures, many fishermen have reverted to artisanal fishing, significantly increasing the pressure on fish and giant squid stocks.

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“Peru urgently needs to improve the management of artisanal fishing, which is unregulated and oversized, threatening species sustainability and the country’s food security, on top of climate change. This excessive artisanal fishing is a result of the 2003 decentralisation law, which gives regional governments (GORE) fisheries management powers, enabling them to grant licences for all fishing methods, whether on boats or otherwise, and for all species. Measures to remedy overfishing include: (1) creating a fisheries and aquaculture superintendency that would take back control of fisheries granted to GOREs; (2) a new census of artisanal fishing; and (3) formalising the artisanal fleet. The Peruvian government is making progress in these areas, while improving cross-sectoral fisheries control and inspection initiatives.”

Mariano Gutierrez, Humboldt Institute for Marine and Aquaculture Research, Peru



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Fishermen catching small coastal fish in the port of Paita, Peru.

This is a cause for concern given the high level of environmental variability that characterises this part of the world, as well as climate change, which could ultimately lead to a collapse in the system’s productivity. These results highlight the urgent need to implement measures to limit fishing, which has not been possible to date for fear of violent social unrest.

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Children fishing on a reef flat in Reao, French Polynesia. © IRD/S.Andréfouët

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