

# Role and impact of China on world fisheries and aquaculture

[See the full study](#)

China's mariculture and marine fisheries are analysed in the study with emphasis on the operations of its Distant Water Fleets (DWF). The study also reviews China's DWF with some emphasis on the subsidies they receive from their government, their Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) catches and practices, and the challenges they represent to international agreements, as well as to competing fleets from the EU. Finally, the trade of Chinese fishery and mariculture products is also analysed.

## Main observations

There is a large discrepancy and uncertainty in the **number of vessels of the Chinese distant water fleets (DWFs)**. The low estimate of 'visible' vessels is around 900; a higher estimate assumes that about 2000 'invisible' vessels must be added.

### The study

provides up-to-date information on the role and impact of China on world fisheries and aquaculture.

China's **mariculture industry** reached 16 million tonnes (mt) in 2020, and it generates about EUR 52 billion per year, most of which stem from production of bivalves. From an **international trading** perspective, the overall situation of China is of transition from a leading processor of fish raw material for re-export as primary products (fillet) increasingly towards one of sourcing aquatic products.

China provides USD 2.4 billion annually to its distant water fleets operating in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of other countries, and USD 68 million to its distant water fleets operating in the high seas. Harmful **subsidies** provided by China to its DWFs are concentrated on those operating along the coast of African countries. The large number of vessels of the Chinese distant water fleets, and the various techniques that enable these vessels to 'go dark', increase the

chances of **IUU** infractions. The **EU-China cooperation** in the area of fisheries and ocean governance has considerably advanced in the recent past at bilateral and global level. However, the fact that China is concluding individual agreements with some Member States might jeopardise the role of the central EU institutions in negotiations with China. One of the most important **environmental consequences** of the Chinese fishing fleet on the EU's distant-water fishing activities is the depletion of fisheries stocks, which is associated with environmental degradation and results in reduced resource availability for all actors involved. Furthermore, **illegal fishing** undermines any form of good governance that the EU might hope to see introduced.



## Policy recommendations

The study has the following recommendations:

- To develop an **appropriate strategy** to respond to China's increasing domination of global fishmeal supplies, and to secure EU access to this important resource.
- To encourage EU seafood firms to seek primary **processing partners outside China**.
- To protect **EU access to fishing opportunities**.



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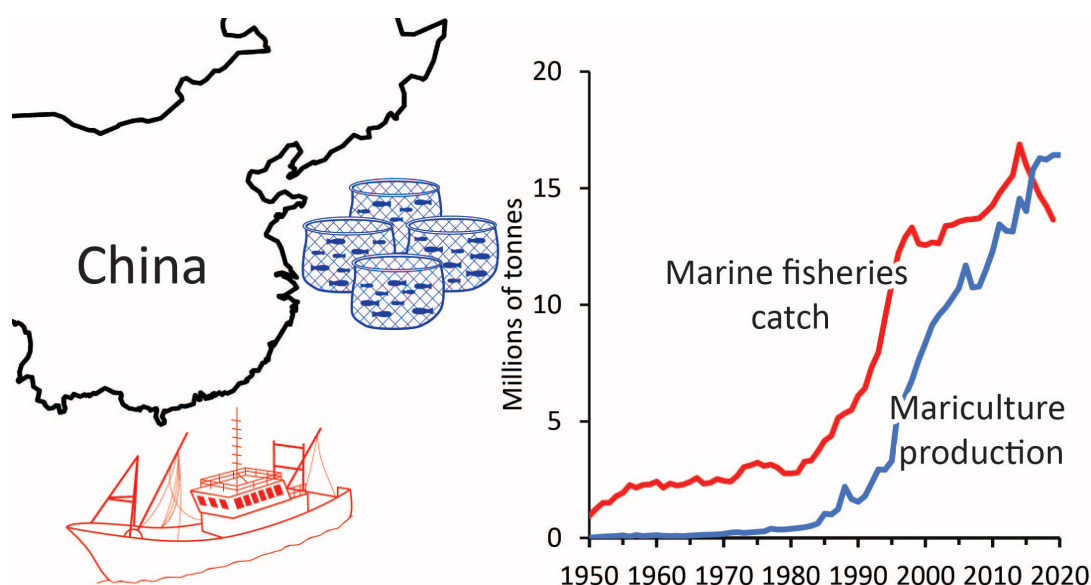
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- To encourage the Member States **to refrain from negotiating individual agreements**
- To call for **more transparency** and reliable information on fishing activity and fisheries agreements of Chinese DWF.
- To support and provide **funding of civil society organisations** investigating and reporting the activities of actors who prefer to operate in the dark.
- To ensure an adequate **implementation of the existing EU legislation** (e.g., IUU Regulation, Due Diligence Directive).
- To ensure a **rule-based global system** that considers the divergent interests of all parties is in place to regulate international ocean affairs and economic activities, including fisheries.
- To ensure an **effective implementation** of international agreements on safety at sea of fishing vessels (Cape Town Agreement - IMO) and labour conditions on fishing vessels (ILO C188).
- To strengthen the **monitoring, control and surveillance units** of the Department of Fisheries (or equivalent agencies) of the countries with which the EU has signed fisheries agreements.
- In interactions with Chinese negotiators, to point out that China's central government has proclaimed an 'Ecological Century' and insists on **international cooperation leading to mutual benefits**.

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Source: own elaboration

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The present note is based on the study *Role and impact of China on world fisheries and aquaculture*, authored by: Prof. Daniel PAULY (University of British Columbia), Contributions from: Ansell, M., Chu, E., Emam, W., Franceschelli, N., Jiang, C., Krueger, K., Palomares, M.L., Parducho, V.A., Peacock, N., Sanz, M., Tong S., published in: December 2022

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