



# Illegal fishing in arctic waters:

## Catch of today – gone tomorrow?

Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is a global concern, costing nations upwards of €10 billion (US\$15.5 billion) annually. Few places are of such great concern as the Arctic, home to some of the most outstanding marine ecosystems and most productive fisheries in the world. Indeed, between them the Barents Sea cod fishery and the Russian Far Eastern Alaska pollock fishery alone account for between 20 and 25% of the global catch of whitefish.

Recent years have seen significant progress in reducing - though by no means eliminating - IUU fishing in the Barents Sea. A new WWF report, *Illegal Fishing in Arctic Waters*, finds, however, that it remains a concern in the western Bering Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk in the Russian Far East. Moreover, globalization of the fishing industry has resulted not only in new markets and new governance structures, but also in new challenges and obstacles to combating the truly international criminal activity that IUU fishing has become.

This is of special concern in the Arctic not only because of the economic importance of its fisheries, but because Arctic ecosystems are particularly sensitive to climate change

and other environmental stresses that threaten their rich assemblage of species, from tiny zoo plankton to bowhead whales and polar bears. The cumulative and interactive impacts of these stresses, which include IUU fishing, are rapidly changing the Arctic in ways that bode ill for the future of its marine life and its fisheries. If we want to preserve the long-term viability of these fisheries, we must do everything we can now to eliminate, or at least mitigate, as many of these stresses as possible.



### Challenges and opportunities

*Illegal Fishing in Arctic Waters* examines available data to estimate the extent and the impact of IUU fishing in the Barents Sea and the Russian Far East. It also examines fishing practices, changes within the fishing industry, the effects of globalization and existing IUU fishing and control regimes, among other factors, to provide a more complete portrait of the problem and the roles that policymakers, the seafood industry, retailers and consumers can play in helping to solve it.

It concludes with a list of specific recommendations for each sector and is offered in the hope that the lessons we learn in the Arctic will also be of value in eliminating the scourge of illegal fishing, and ensuring the sustainability of fisheries, throughout the world.



### Definition – IUU

- **Illegal fishing**  
Illegal fishing is conducted by vessels of countries that are party to a fisheries organization but which operate in violation of its rules, or operate in a country's waters without permission, or on high seas without showing a flag or other markings.
- **Unreported catches**  
Unreported catches are not reported to the relevant authorities by the fishing vessels or flag state, whether they are parties or not of the relevant fisheries organization. The category includes misreported and underreported catches.
- **Unregulated fishing**  
Unregulated fishing is normally conducted by vessels flying the flag of countries they are not parties of or participants in relevant fisheries organizations and therefore consider themselves not bound by their rules.

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### Recent developments in the Arctic region

- **Joint Norwegian-Russian initiative for port state control.**

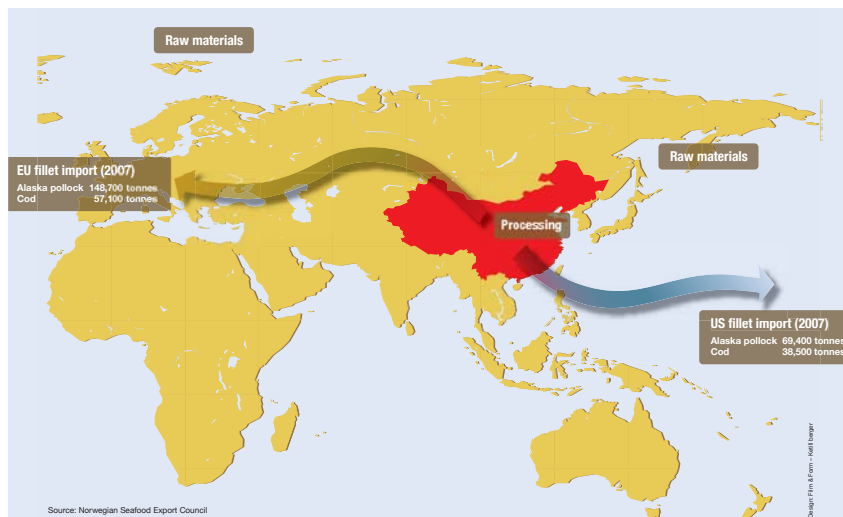
Norway and Russia successfully called for the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) to set in place a port control agreement, which came into effect 1 May 2007. The procedures provide for prior notification of landings of frozen fish that will include declarations from the fishing vessel, supported by verification from the flag state.

- **New Russian legislation.**

New Russian legislation addresses several aspects of fisheries management, including quota allocation and stronger control systems. All catch from within the Russian Federation's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) will be subject to custom procedures and several measures are taken to strengthen sanctions against companies found guilty in illegal fishing.

- **New EU initiative**

In October 2007 the European Commission proposed a number of measures to address IUU fishing activities, including sanctions against EU nationals involved in IUU fishing, enforced penalties and better international cooperation measures with the aim of closing the EU market to IUU products.



Map showing China's key global role in processing of whitefish from arctic waters © Film & Form/Ketill Berger

### WWF recommendations

Preventative efforts should be directed to every step of the supply chain, including harvesting, transportation, storage, distribution, processing and marketing, with focus on transparency, documentation, and traceability. This requires international cooperation among governments, businesses, organisations and seafood consumers. The new WWF report, *Illegal Fishing in Arctic Waters*, recommends a series of measures as preconditions for saving the arctic marine ecosystems for future generations.

### Policy recommendations

- Strengthen control at sea in the Barents Sea and Russian Far East.
- Strengthen Barents Sea port control in Norway and Russia.
- To ensure that imports are not the result of IUU fishing, countries that are the main consumers of arctic seafood (such as EU member states, the US and Japan) should strengthen their port controls.
- Develop and implement a global port state agreement. Illegal cod fishing in the Barents Sea has diminished in large part due to effective port state control through NEAFC.
- Expand bilateral agreements on port control to be used as supplements to regional agreements.
- Treat IUU fishing as a transnational crime problem, using best practices in responding to those threats, such as communication, coordination and information sharing.
- Impose substantial and consistent penalties on cheaters to bring consequences for IUU fishing in line with the threat level and significant international scope of the problem.
- Improve general coordination and information sharing among national control authorities.

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Fishery Zones in the Bering Sea

The Western Bering Sea is defined by the Commander Islands in the south and the Bering Strait in the north. An area known as the 'Donut Hole' straddles the US EEZ and international waters. The Sea of Okhotsk lies west of the Kamchatka peninsula and the Kuril Islands. With the exception of an area of international waters in the middle, the whole Sea of Okhotsk is included within Russia's EEZ. Alaska pollock is the second largest fishery in the world and is an important part of Russian and US seafood production in the Pacific region.



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Major transport routes and ports for Barents Sea cod

The Barents Sea is adjoined to the northeastern part of the Atlantic Ocean and is, to a large extent, covered by Norway's and Russia's Exclusive Economic Zones. The Barents Sea holds the world's largest stock of Atlantic cod. Main landings of cod from the Barents Sea take place in EU, Norway and Russia. The same ports are used by vessels carrying illegal fish. Increased port controls since 2007 is one of several measures that have significantly reduced Barents Sea IUU fishing.

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### Supply chain recommendations

- Establish a mandatory traceability system for the exchange of trustworthy documentation connected to the actual flow – and trade – of fish and fish products.
- To remove IUU fish from the supply chain, adopt and implement certification and market-based schemes such as eco-labeling certifiable products, and catch and trade documentation schemes.
- Expand consumer education initiatives to raise consumer awareness of fish sustainability issues and to communicate the availability of sustainable alternatives to traditional favourites that are targets of IUU fishing due in part to high consumer demand.
- Demand certified seafood from restaurants and retailers, asking for information about the origin of seafood on the menu and on store shelves.
- Develop understanding of the negative economic impacts and environmental consequences, costing billions of dollars across the supply chain, as well as lost tax revenue to governments.

To download a full copy of the WWF report *Illegal Fishing in Arctic Waters* go to [www.panda.org/arctic](http://www.panda.org/arctic)



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