Oceana Report Exposes Thousands of Suspected Vessel Rendezvous at Sea

Bali, Indonesia – Oceana today released a report exposing the global scale of transshipping at sea, a practice that can mask illegal fishing practices and conceal human rights abuses. The report, which was released at The Economist’s World Ocean Summit in Bali, Indonesia, uses a new dataset released by Global Fishing Watch and Oceana’s partner SkyTruth to identify likely transshipping hotspots as well as the top countries whose vessels were involved in suspected rendezvous at sea and the ports they most frequently visited.

Transshipping enables fishing vessels to remain at sea for extended periods of time. Fishing vessels and refrigerated cargo vessels rendezvous at sea in order to transfer seafood, fuel or supplies. While this transshipping practice can be legal in many cases, it also can facilitate the laundering of illegally caught fish, especially on the high seas and in waters surrounding developing and small island nations with insufficient resources to police their waters.

“The practice of transshipping at sea can undermine fisheries management, threaten food security and facilitate unethical activities on our oceans,” said Jacqueline Savitz, Senior Vice President for the United States and Global Fishing Watch at Oceana. “When fishing vessels that remain at sea for many months at a time can hide the amounts of fish they are catching and selling, it makes it difficult to enforce sustainable fishing laws. This prevents fisheries managers from maintaining healthy fish populations and rebuilding those
that are overfished – a necessary process especially given global food security concerns. By avoiding scrutiny at port, captains can conceal suspicious activities like illegal fishing, human rights abuses and seafood fraud. The only way to ensure an end to illicit activities on our oceans is to ban transshipment at sea, require vessel tracking for all fishing vessels and establish consistent seafood catch reporting requirements worldwide.”

Highlights from the report’s findings include:

- Almost 40 percent of all suspected transshipment events occurred on the high seas, beyond national jurisdictions.
- High densities of suspected transshipment were revealed in Russia’s Sea of Okhotsk, the high-seas waters of the Barents Sea, the national waters of Guinea-Bissau and immediately outside of the national waters of Argentina and Peru.
- Of the suspected transshipment events worldwide, 50 percent occurred within Russian waters.
- In 2016, Russian-flagged fishing vessels ranked highest for the average number of suspected rendezvous per vessel in a national fleet.
- Comoros and Vanuatu, both flag of convenience countries, were the second and third highest-ranked countries for the average number of suspected transshipment events per vessel in a national fleet during 2016.
  - A flag of convenience is when a vessel pays a fee to register under the flag of a different country, and can allow fishers to avoid their own country’s regulations.
- Oceana highlighted two fishing vessels involved in suspected transshipment that remained at sea for more than 500 days in 2015 and 2016.
  - Transshipment allows fishing vessels to remain at sea for more than a year at a time, which can increase the potential for suspicious behaviors like illegal fishing and human rights abuses.
- Top ports visited by refrigerated cargo vessels engaged in suspected transshipment in 2015 include Vladivostok, Russia; Montevideo, Uruguay; Murmansk, Russia; and Busan, South Korea among others.

Oceana analyzed a new dataset released by its partner SkyTruth and Global Fishing Watch, the product of a partnership between Oceana, SkyTruth and Google, identifying 5,065 likely rendezvous of refrigerated cargo vessels with the largest commercial fishing vessels between 2012 and 2016. For a description of the dataset used to generate this map, and of the methods behind the data, see globalfishingwatch.org for SkyTruth and Global Fishing Watch’s companion report on the data analysis behind transshipment.

Access Oceana’s report on transshipment [here].

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Oceana is the largest international advocacy organization dedicated solely to ocean conservation. Oceana is rebuilding abundant and biodiverse oceans by winning science-based policies in countries that control one third of the world’s wild fish catch. With over 100 victories that stop overfishing, habitat destruction, pollution and killing of threatened species like turtles and sharks, Oceana’s campaigns are delivering results. A restored ocean means that one billion people can enjoy a healthy seafood meal, every day, forever. Together, we can save the oceans and help feed the world. To learn more, visit [www.oceana.org](http://www.oceana.org).

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