

China's Global Fishing Footprint

To meet the ever-growing global demand for seafood, distant-water fishing vessels are traveling farther from their national waters and fishing longer. These vessels may fish in vast expanses of international waters known as the high seas, which can be managed by regional fishery management organizations for specific species like tuna, or can be unmanaged with little to no oversight. Distant-water fishing vessels can also fish in another country's waters known as exclusive economic zones (EEZs), but they need authorization from each country.

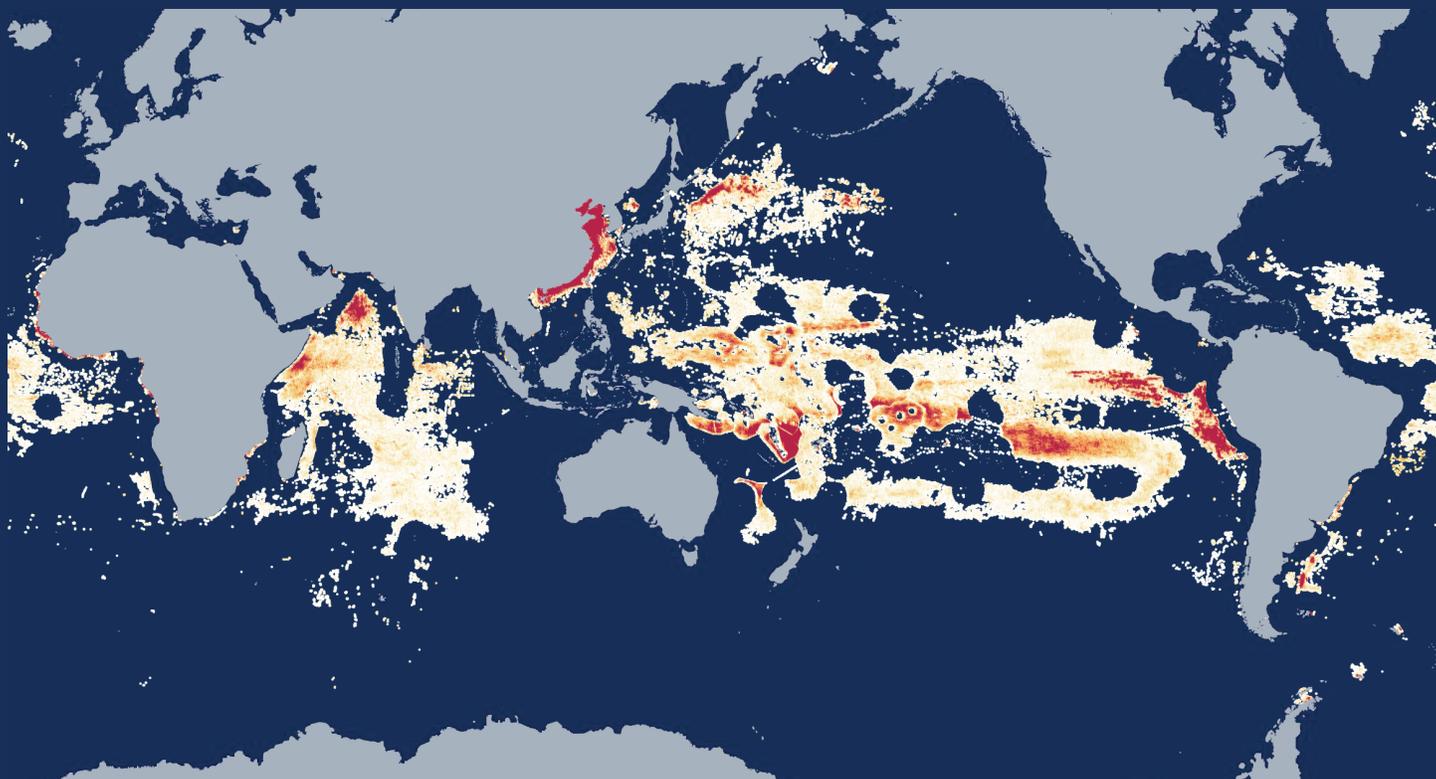
China is the largest fishing nation in the world. Using data from Global Fishing Watch* (GFW) — an independent nonprofit founded by Oceana in partnership with Google and SkyTruth — Oceana analyzed China's apparent fishing

activity** from Jan. 1, 2019, to Oct. 1, 2021. The activity was tracked using automatic identification system (AIS) data transmitted by vessels. AIS is a tracking system that transmits a vessel's identity, speed, and location. Vessels that were not transmitting AIS are not included in the analysis. While AIS analysis shows a large share of China's distant-water fishing activity, it provides only a partial view of China's total fishing footprint.

Oceana's analysis found that over 51,000 fishing vessels flagged to China fished for more than 47 million hours during the nearly three-year period. These vessels were responsible for over 34% of the global fishing activity reflected in the Global Fishing Watch data during this period.

CHINA'S GLOBAL FISHING FOOTPRINT (2019 - 2021)

Fishing Hours per 100km² 1 50



Note: Data based solely on vessels flagged to China and broadcasting AIS.

WHERE CHINA'S FLEET FISHED (2019 - 2021)

China heavily fished its own waters, with its domestic fleet fishing over **37 MILLION HOURS.**



~30% of all fishing on the high seas was conducted by China.

China spent nearly **10 MILLION HOURS** fishing outside of its EEZ.

China spent more than **6.5 MILLION HOURS** fishing on the high seas.

China fished in the EEZs of over **80 OTHER NATIONS** for more than **3 MILLION HOURS.**

China's fishing vessels were most active in:

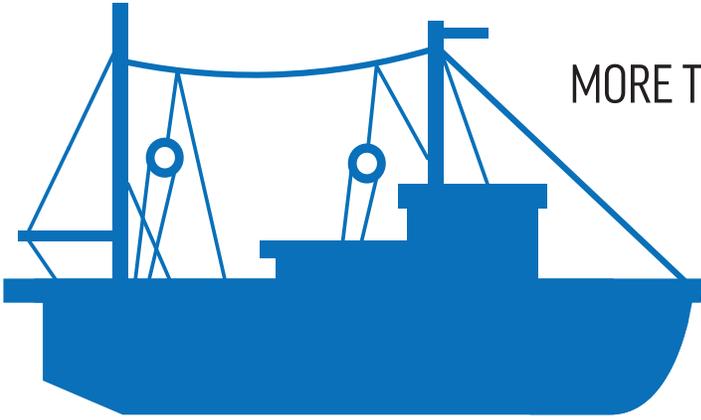


TOP 10 FOREIGN WATERS WHERE CHINA FISHED (2019 - 2021)



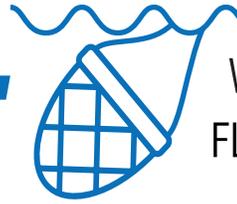
Note: Data based solely on vessels flagged to China and broadcasting AIS.

SPOTLIGHT ON CHINA'S FISHING FLEET (2019 - 2021)



MORE THAN **42,000 CHINA-FLAGGED FISHING VESSELS**

were active in the country's EEZ.



WORLDWIDE, OVER **24,000** VESSELS
FLAGGED TO CHINA WERE **TRAWLERS**,

vessels that drag large heavy nets behind them and pull up everything in their path.

China's fleet uses a variety of fishing gear. In addition to trawling, the primary gear types used were longlines, gillnets, and squid jiggers.



MORE THAN **9,000** OF CHINA'S
DISTANT-WATER FISHING VESSELS

were found on the high seas and in foreign EEZs.

HOW DOES CHINA OPERATE A FLEET THIS LARGE?

China's fishing on the high seas is only profitable because of government subsidies and low-cost labor.¹ China provides its distant-water fishing industry with an estimated **USD \$3 billion in harmful subsidies, which is more than the next seven most subsidized distant-water fishing nations combined** (Japan, Korea, Russia, United States, Thailand, Taiwan, and Spain).² Subsidies can include tax breaks and assistance with buying fuel, ship building, and repair, which enable China's fleet to fish anywhere in the world.

Transshipment also allows fishing vessels to remain at sea for longer periods of time by enabling the transfer of catch to refrigerated cargo vessels that can rendezvous with, or "encounter," multiple fishing vessels before returning to port. These vessels also resupply fishing vessels with fresh crew, water, and fuel. While transshipping can be legal, it can also be a weak link in the seafood supply chain. Vessels flagged to China accounted for **nearly 30% of the total global encounter events with over 125,000 encounters at sea.**

Most of these encounters occurred within China's EEZ (84%), but more than 20,000 occurred outside, mostly by vessels fishing for squid on the high seas. There were over 32,000 instances in which a vessel flagged to China appeared to be at sea for more than 90 days, and **nearly 10,000 cases in which the vessel spent over six months at sea without returning to land.**



Fishing vessels leaving a port in China.

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IN BRIEF...

China has the world's largest and most subsidized fishing fleet with tens of thousands of distant-water fishing vessels reaching all corners of our oceans. Large fishing fleets can have significant impacts on ocean health. With so much fishing occurring on the high seas and in the EEZs of other nations, transparency is essential to ensure this fishing occurs within the boundaries of the law. **Governments like the United States should require expanded transparency and traceability of imported seafood to help verify that it is safe, legally caught, responsibly sourced, and honestly labeled.**



China-flagged trawler fishing at sea.

¹Sala et al. (2018) The economics of fishing the high seas. Available: <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.aat2504> Accessed Nov 3, 2021.

²Oceana. (2021) Tracking Harmful Fisheries Subsidies. Available: https://oceana.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/994812/Oceana_Summary6-22.pdf Accessed Nov 3, 2021.

*Global Fishing Watch, a provider of open data for use in this fact sheet, is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing ocean governance through increased transparency of human activity at sea. The views and opinions expressed in this fact sheet are those of the authors, which are not connected with

or sponsored, endorsed or granted official status by Global Fishing Watch. By creating and publicly sharing map visualizations, data and analysis tools, Global Fishing Watch aims to enable scientific research and transform the way our ocean is managed. Global Fishing Watch's public data was used in the production of this publication.

**Any and all references to "fishing" should be understood in the context of Global Fishing Watch's fishing detection algorithm, which is a best effort to determine "apparent fishing effort" based on vessel speed and direction data from the automatic identification system (AIS) collected via satellites and terrestrial receivers. As AIS data varies in

completeness, accuracy, and quality, and the fishing detection algorithm is a statistical estimate of apparent fishing activity, therefore it is possible that some fishing effort is not identified and, conversely, that some fishing effort identified is not fishing. For these reasons, Global Fishing Watch qualifies all designations of vessel fishing effort, including synonyms of the term "fishing effort," such as "fishing" or "fishing activity," as "apparent" rather than certain. Any/all Global Fishing Watch information about "apparent fishing effort" should be considered an estimate and must be relied upon solely at your own risk. Global Fishing Watch is taking steps to make sure fishing effort designations are as accurate as possible.

To learn more, visit
usa.oceana.org/StopIllegalFishing