

Indonesia's New Marine Laws Threaten Sustainable Fisheries



Indonesia's new zero tolerance policy towards foreign fishing vessels illegally entering the country's territorial waters has been making headlines in recent weeks, alongside images of Navy warships blowing up boats. Indonesia's popular new president Joko Widodo has publicly stated there are 5,000 foreign fishing boats operating illegally in Indonesian waters, costing the local fishing industry US\$24bn (£16bn).

The hardline measures are the most visible of a raft of new policies aimed at revitalising the maritime status of the world's largest archipelagic nation by improving infrastructure (including transport networks and ports), protecting local fisheries and reducing pressure on Indonesia's marine resources. Fisheries experts are welcoming the moves, as is an Indonesian public keen to see their new president assert himself on the world stage.

"Widodo and fisheries minister Susi Pudjiastuti are taking very positive steps to address illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and in the long run this has tremendous potential," says Andrew Harvey, a sustainable fisheries adviser for USAID. "The problem is the small scale fishing businesses that are unintended targets of these laws."

One of Pudjiastuti's first moves has been to introduce a six-month moratorium on issuing new fishing licenses and renewals so that the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (MMAF) can monitor the operations of existing fleets. Transshipments at sea – where smaller boats offload their catch on to larger foreign vessels with cold storage facilities – have also been banned, in a bid to prevent neighbouring countries from siphoning off fish illegally. These are both unprecedented moves for [Indonesia](#) and could help revolutionise fisheries management in the long term. But small-scale fishing operations have become immediate, if unintended victims of the new laws.

"Many of these are good, sustainable operations that don't have the resources to weather a long delay in fishing," says Harvey. "There are small-scale pole and line tuna businesses in East Flores that purchased their vessels from Japanese or Korean manufacturers. Because the boats are built overseas, vessels whose annual fishing license is up for renewal will be unable to fish for the next six months." Meanwhile, the ban on transshipment means that pole and line boats that usually stay out at sea for weeks will have to ferry their catch back to Indonesian ports, resulting in a crippling increase in fuel costs.

Indonesia is the world's biggest tuna fishery. It is also one of the least regulated. There is no quota system for tuna species (nor any other species for that matter) and turtles, sharks and dolphins are caught as by catch, mostly by trawlers and long liners. Recent research suggests that [20% of a typical commercial long liner's catch is 'discard'](#) Blast fishing remains popular amongst many tuna fishermen as a means of increasing catch. But traditional pole and line fishing techniques – where schooling tuna are flipped en masse on to boats by fishermen using flexible rods and hooks – are far more selective, avoid by-catch and provide more jobs.

Pole and line fishing is not new of course. It's a traditional technique that's been largely replaced by large-scale industrial operations. Still, Indonesia produces more than 100,000 tonnes of pole and line caught tuna per year, second only to Japan. "As 'ecosystem approaches' becomes the buzz term, here's a fishery that genuinely ticks the economic, social and environmental boxes," says Harvey. "What we're trying to do now is reinvigorate it."

The Maldives is the only tuna fishery in the Indian Ocean to have achieved Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification, but Indonesia is working hard to reach the required benchmarks through an improvement programme supported by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the International Pole and Line Foundation (IPNLF). This means making improvements across the supply chain, from the sourcing of baitfish to canning operations. The IPNLF estimates [only 10 to 20% of pole and line caught tuna in Indonesia is labelled as such](#)

. And a lot of raw tuna product is exported for processing in neighbouring countries.

According to Harvey, the IPNLF is currently bringing together experts from around the world to work with the government and the pole and line industry on training programmes. The aim is to secure MSC certification for Indonesian pole and line businesses within the next 18 to 24 months. Provided they haven't been inadvertently put out of business by well-intended but ill-thought-out legislation.

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/the-coral-triangle/2015/jan/14/indonesias-new-marine-laws-threaten-sustainable-fisheries>

Photo: A fisherman on an outrigger canoe catching yellowfin tuna with hook and line in Sulawesi, Indonesia. Photograph: Jurgen Freund/Jurgen Freund/Nature Picture Library/Corbis