

EU Illegal Unregulated and Unreported Fishing

COLD ROBBERY:

Spanish vessels stealing fish in the Barents Sea



On **18 November 2005**, Norwegian coastguards arrested the Spanish trawler "**Monte Meixueiro**" in the Spitsbergen Fisheries Protection Zone, 35 nm from the South Cape of Spitsbergen, suspecting her of illegal fishing.

During initial onboard inspections the trawler crew tried to dispose of evidence by dumping fish overboard. This activity was filmed by the Norwegian coastguards, and this photographic evidence is available. The **Monte Meixueiro** was ordered to follow the coast guard vessel into Tromsø port. However, the captain refused to comply and was eventually towed.

On **20 November 2005**, the Norwegian coastguards arrested a second Spanish trawler, the "**Garoya Segundo**", once again suspecting the trawler of illegal fishing for Greenland halibut in the Spitsbergen Fisheries Protection Zone. Inspections in port revealed just over 354 tonnes of illegally caught Greenland halibut on the **Monte Meixueiro**, at an estimated value of **EUR 1 million**. Norway set a fine for the vessel of EUR 1.3 million. The **Garoya Segundo** held 508 tonnes of Greenland halibut on board, 308 tonnes more than allowed under a research quota that had been granted to the vessel by the Spanish government. The value of the illegal catch was estimated at **EUR 1 million**, equal to that of the **Monte Meixueiro**, and was also fined by Norway at slightly above the market value of the catch. It appears that the **Garoya Segundo**, at the time of its arrest, was equipped with a licence to carry out experimental fishing activities for the Spanish Fisheries Administration, which allowed it to catch up to 200 tonnes of Greenland halibut. This paints an ugly picture as regards the conduct of vessels engaged in fishing under Spanish research licence. Except for a small-scale and time-limited fishery, Greenland halibut is strictly protected in the Barents Sea and must thus not be caught.

The **Garoya Segundo's** captain has reportedly provided incorrect catch reports to the fisheries ministry in the past and has manipulated daily catch reports. The **Garoya Segundo** is owned by **Grupo Oya Pérez**, a Spanish-based fishing company associated with known fishing companies in Estonia, St. Vincent and Namibia. Grupo Oya Pérez is also the owner of the **Lootus II**, which has been cited for engaging in illegal fishing 7 times in the North West Atlantic since 2000 alone, and the **Ross**, one of the most well-documented pirate fishing vessels in the world. Despite the company's appalling track-record, representatives from Grupo Oya Pérez attended annual meetings of NAFO as part of the official EU delegation between 2003 and 2004.¹ On three separate occasions during 2005, Greenpeace asked the Spanish Government to

¹ Juan Manuel Oya Perez from Grupo Oya Perez was part of the EU delegation at the 25th Annual Meeting of NAFO from September 15-19, 2003 in Nova Scotia, Canada. In 2004, 3 of the members of the EU delegation to the NAFO meeting were from Grupo Oya Perez.

carry out an investigation into Grupo Oya's connection to such IUU vessels. Greenpeace has yet to receive an answer.

The Norwegian government contacted Spanish officials as early as July 1st to ask for greater co-operation between Spain and Norway as regards fisheries control. This request was answered by the Spanish government on August 8th. In their response the Spanish government acknowledges that serious problems persist with regards to illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing, most notably in the Barents Sea. The letter also notes, however, the 'legal and practical controversy [...] regarding the arrest by the Norwegian Coast Guard of the Spanish vessels *Olaberri* and *Olazar* in waters of the Fisheries Protection Zone around the Svalbard Archipelago in May 2004.' In the case of the **Monte Meixueiro** and **Garoya Segundo**, Spain has publicly accepted this week that both vessels were fishing illegally.

The Spanish high seas bottom trawl fleet is responsible for taking one of the - if not the - biggest share of the global catch by high seas bottom trawlers. Compared to other EU states, Spain has a sizeable fleet of bottom trawlers capable of deep sea fishing.

Bottom trawl fishing has been identified by scientists as the most destructive activity currently impacting deep-sea life. It threatens one of the most sensitive types of ecosystem in the marine environment. Fragile biological communities that develop around underwater features, such as seamounts, typically support slow-growing, long-lived species that are particularly sensitive to disturbance. Bottom trawl fishing, as this example shows, often takes place illegally or outside a regulatory framework. In comparison to the entire global fishing fleet, the size of the Spanish bottom trawl fleet is small in terms of the number of vessels involved and value of catch that is hauled in. The damage that this fleet does to vulnerable deep-sea habitats is, however, disproportionately large.

The Spanish government - through this and past incidents of IUU fishing linked to both Spanish vessels and companies- has shown itself unable or unwilling to manage its deep sea fishing fleet, and in particular high seas bottom trawl fleet. This reflects on the entire European Community as in essence, the activities of this small but highly destructive fleet of Spanish vessels is determining not only the position of the European Community at international negotiations, but also compromises the agenda for EU Member States that believe that high seas bottom trawling should be immediately suspended. Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom are amongst those that support a United Nations General Assembly resolution for a temporary moratorium on high seas bottom trawling so that those vulnerable deep-sea marine ecosystems that require protection from destructive fishing methods can be identified and protected, and policy makers can develop longer-term, comprehensive regulations to effectively control bottom trawling across the high seas. As much of the bottom trawling currently taking place on the high seas is unregulated, it could also work as a catalyst in the fight to combat IUU fishing.

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