

The Chinese Connection. Taking the Gap if Allowed to

By

[Andrew Johnston](#)

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25 May 2020



The recent presence and detainment of six Chinese vessels in South African waters, has led to a host of theories being bandied about. But even though it was confirmed they were not fishing illegally and were monitored as they transited South African waters, there continues to be a great deal of suspicion.

Andrew Johnston wrote the following article which was published in the October 2016 issue of *Fishing Industry News Southern Africa*...

The world's voracious demand for raw materials has driven up the prices of natural resources and food to unprecedented levels. In turn, the price hike has triggered a new scramble for Africa, pumping revenues into the continent. China the giant of the emerging market economies, comes without the baggage of colonialism. Indeed, many of the countries of the bottom billion have regarded it as an ally. But from the perspective of the rich countries, the Chinese arrival in Africa is not just unwelcome competition. It threatens to undermine international efforts to reform the governance of extractive industries, after decades of corruption and exploitation. Is China finally freeing the bottom billion from the lingering embrace of colonialism or plunging them back into a shameful past?

..... *The Plundered Planet by Paul Collier.*



The contribution of fisheries to the GDP of all African countries reached about USD1,910,000 million in 2014, with marine and inland artisanal fisheries accounting for more than half of this figure. Globally, illegal fishing costs the industry around USD23 billion a year, with one in four fish thought to have been caught illegally in African waters.

Chinese vessels in SA waters

The South African government, with 1.5 million km² of ocean to patrol on a limited budget, must be complimented for the seizure of Chinese vessels. This with only four patrol vessels, four naval helicopters and five planes that are not always available.

The presence of these vessels in our waters has long been reported by local fishers who believe illegal fishing and transshipping at sea has been an ongoing problem for a very long time.

Fisheries agreements

Driven by supply demands and the ever-present desire for greater profits, foreign nations and their companies constantly attempt to orchestrate fishing agreements, partnerships and arrangements in developing countries.

Fisheries agreements and partnerships with non-EU countries are negotiated and concluded by the Fisheries Commission on behalf of the EU. These agreements are intended to allow EU vessels to fish for surplus stocks in that country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), in a legally regulated environment.

The agreements also focus on resource conservation and environmental sustainability, ensuring that all EU vessels are subject to the same rules of control and transparency.

Human rights

Significantly, a clause concerning respect for human rights has been included in the aforementioned fisheries agreements. The European Union Fisheries Commission claims the move is a way of helping African countries.

However while claiming to promote conservation and human rights the EU Fisheries Commission will promote the vested interests of their fishing nation members, this to the detriment of Africa.

It is alleged that 60% of hake landed in Vigo Spain is "Black Fish" (illegally caught fish). Most African economies, supposedly sovereign and developing, are compelled to allow access to their fishing grounds as a result of being held captive by market forces, capital, loans and aid.

This economic colonialism is denying Africa their rightful ownership and control of their own resources. It is also leading to over-exploitation of the ocean stocks, environmental degradation, faster resource depletion to the point of collapse, and affecting food security.

It is, in other words, akin to importing destruction and the plundering of Africa's fishing resources.

Flags of Convenience

Our maritime environment is awash with stories of corrupt practices, bribery, illegal fishing and the use of Flags of Convenues.

Russian, Chinese, E.U. and Korean vessels are all harvesting our waters. It is reported that under Flags of Convenience the vessel owners can short-circuit red tape and expediently obtain a fishing arrangement, allowing them to fish with impunity and bypass international laws and treaties.

With mercenary policymakers in a particular African country prepared to accept bribes in return for sanctioning the freedom to harvest fish, it is said that a boat owner can obtain such a right by fax, email or by phone even while at sea.



Boats blown up because they have been caught poaching

Drastic action

African countries should take note of events in Indonesia and Argentina, where government officials have taken the most drastic action yet to stop illegal fishing in their waters – by blowing up the boats caught poaching.

While they are sending out a message – “don’t come fishing (illegally) in our waters” – Africa is being taken advantage of due to weak governance and an inability to enforce or monitor any unlawful practices.

The effect of plundering and dumping waste in Africa’s waters is there for all to see if we look north to the Horn of Africa.

A reformed “pirate” from Somalia once told me there were several reasons for piracy. These include the devastating consequences of the plundering of their fishing resources by foreign vessels; indiscriminate inshore trawling; dumping of nuclear waste; supporting and arming warlords; and the deliberate running down of their fishing boats by distant water fishing vessels.

An insecure future

The result was that there was no way local fishermen were able to achieve sustainable livelihoods and no means of obtaining food, which left them facing an insecure future.

This in turn meant they had no alternative but to go into unwanted marriages with criminal gangs to hijack and pillage foreign boats in order to survive.

If these “policing” nations had spent all of the resources they now deploy to end piracy on rather stopping the despoiling of their resources and sea, they might have avoided the piracy problem altogether.

Look after our own

Sustaining the resources and the well-being of society will depend on how those in power embrace collective democratic management and distribute natural resources.

In this they should be guided by human values and social justice, not just market forces, and stop placing themselves above the society from which they emanate.

We must satisfy the basic needs of the vulnerable people before we squander our limited resources.

