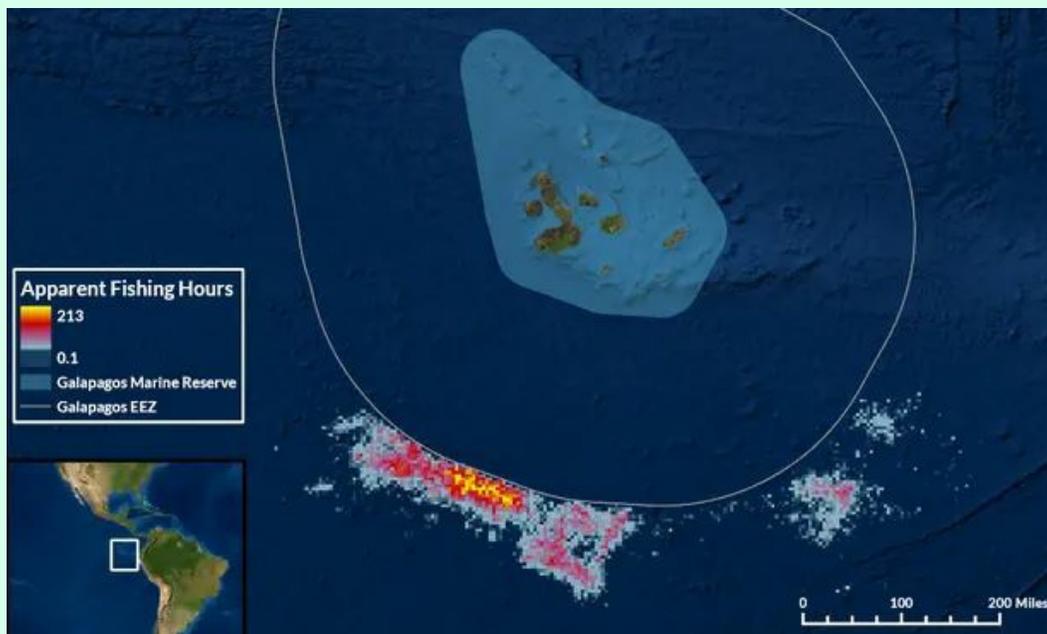




Dispatches From The Wild, Weird World Of Humanity And Its Biosphere

March 17, 2021

Seafood, Fishing, and Marine Ecosystems



For months on end, a 243-vessel China-flagged industrial fishing fleet has lurked around the edge of the Galapagos Islands, staying just on the edge of Ecuador's territorial waters and hoovering up [thousands of tonnes](#) of squid and fish that veer outside, including endangered hammerhead sharks. Within Ecuadorean waters, Ecuadorean tuna fishers are fudging boundaries on a smaller scale, using fish aggregation devices to lure fish out of the Galapagos Marine Reserve. (Pictured: *The Guardian* map of the pirate fleet outside Galapagos waters, inside which lies the Galapagos Marine Reserve). Now, outgoing Ecuadorean President Lenin Moreno is [considering a proposal](#) to expand the marine reserve, hopefully providing enough protections to local marine life that they can weather the increased fishing pressures.

Disturbingly, the products of illegal and/or blatantly unethical "pirate fishing fleets"

like the one surrounding the Galapagos can all-too-easily make it into the “normal” seafood supply chain. The Guardian recently conducted a [meta-analysis of 44 studies](#) covering over 9,000 samples of seafood from restaurants, fish markets, and super markets, and found that 36% of the seafood samples were mislabeled, said to be from one fish but actually composed of another species. For example, one study found that 70% of seafood samples sold as “snapper” in the UK were in fact from one of 38 different species, included several reef-dwelling fish at risk from habitat destruction and overfishing. Another study found that one out of three European caterers had sold mislabeled seafood. And in 2019, Oceana found that 47% of seafood samples collected in six Canadian cities were mislabeled. This “seafood laundering” isn’t just a matter of ripping off the consumer: it’s an entry point into the legal market for vast amounts of illegally caught seafood. Illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing is estimated to add up to 8-14 million tonnes per year, and a resulting loss of \$26-50 billion for the legal fishing industry that is undercut by the illegal, unregulated products. The same fleets often engage in [slavery](#) and [human trafficking](#), as few people willingly sign up for multi-year tours on illegal floating slaughterhouses. So rethink your next seafood meal: unless you’re really, really certain about where it came from (e.g. Gulf of Maine lobster and shellfish, or local aquaculture products) the restaurant or store that sold it to you in good faith may be unknowingly supporting oceangoing organized crime.



However, there is a fairly clear template for an ocean landscape that works for marine ecosystems and legal fishers: marine protected areas. There are countless studies that describe the “spillover effect,” in which protecting an area of ocean from fishing increases fish size and catch volumes nearby,

thanks to the fish having a safe place to breed and grow. Part of the reason the Galapagos area is such a major target for pirate fleets is that fishing productivity in the area has increased by 104% since the Galapagos Marine Reserve was established. In one stellar example, the tiny [Torre Guaceto Marine Reserve](#) (pictured) in southern Italy, covering just 5 miles of coast, helped transform the area from a drug-smuggling hub to an exemplar of sustainable marine governance. Only seven local fishers are allowed to fish in the reserve, entering but once a week and using shorter nets and larger mesh size. They’ve become staunch advocates of the reserve, as they can earn up to \$10,000 a day due to the unusual size of the fish caught in the protected area. Unsurprisingly, fishers from nearby communities are emulating their methods and hoping the reserve expands near them. As the Anthropocene continues, let us hope that pro-worker and pro-marine life ocean protections gain ground!



Secretary Deb Haaland

In the wake of President Biden and the Democrats' transformative and epic American Rescue Plan (and the [continued reversal](#) of Trump's anti-environmental deregulatory agenda), the Senate has confirmed a unique figure as a Cabinet Secretary. Representative Debra Haaland of New Mexico, a member of the Laguna Pueblo nation, became one of the first two Native American women elected to Congress in the 2018 elections. She also has a history as a dedicated climate activist, having [camped with and cooked for](#) the Standing Rock Sioux protesters in 2016, worked to help pass New Mexico's 100% renewables bill, and consistently [fought the fossil fuel industry](#) in defense of public lands in Congress. And on March 15th, the Senate confirmed her as the 54th United States Secretary of the Interior, and the first Native American Cabinet Secretary, by a 51-40 margin. (Most other members of Biden's cabinet [have already been confirmed](#), including such luminous figures as Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, and EPA Administrator Michael Regan). Secretary Haaland now oversees one of the most powerful and environmentally important Cabinet departments, in charge of federal-Native American relations through the Bureau of Indian Affairs and hundreds of millions of acres of public land (all together, about one-fifth of the United States' land area!) via the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and other agencies. Her confirmation is an immense victory for environmental activists, Native Americans, and the country as a whole, and she will likely be spearheading a new age of conservation and indigenous peoples' rights in American public land management. Spectacular news!



Maine

Maine's Board of Environmental Protection, a uniquely Maine governance body that essentially serves as a seven-member supreme court for state environmental issues, has voted to [add an environmental justice standard](#) to Maine's solid waste disposal rules, taking into account potential damage to nearby disadvantaged communities. This is noteworthy for several reasons as an example of the long-

overdue nationwide trend towards recognizing and working to avoid environmental racism, i.e. disproportionate environmental harm towards minority communities. Besides well-known examples like African-American communities' [greater exposure to air pollution](#), there have already been egregious cases in Maine, such as the siting of a West Old Town landfill directly adjacent to Penobscot Nation lands and the attempt to do the same thing with a landfill in Argyle. This writer also would like to note that one of the members of the Board supporting this development was his university professor and mentor [Dr. Robert Sanford](#), a Governor Janet Mills appointee.



Northern Right Whales



The northern right whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*) is one of the most endangered cetaceans on the planet. Only an estimated 350 are left in their habitat off the coast of eastern North America-but there's a glimmer of hope. Their 2020-2021 November-March breeding season, just now concluding, was the best for the species since 2013: an amazing [18 newborn calves](#) have been spotted! (Pictured, a mother and calf northern right whale from a previous breeding season). The species is still at risk from human activities: in 2021 so far two of the new calves have [already died](#), one from natural causes and one from a ship strike, while an adult died due to fishing gear entanglement off South Carolina. Still, new calves are excellent-and the successful breeding may mean that the species is beginning to adapt to the new feeding regime in the warming, ship-crisscrossed waters of the Anthropocene Atlantic.

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