



United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization Overfishing

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Director's Letter

Dear Delegates,

My name is Violet Zhu and I give you all the warmest of welcomes to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UNFAO) at AbbyMUN 2021! I am currently in my senior year at Panorama Ridge Secondary School, and I am so thrilled to serve as your Director, alongside Rabbani Batra, your esteemed Chair, at an in-person Model United Nations conference.

Ever since I was reluctantly dragged into the world of MUN, I have found myself adoring the exhilaration of a room full of passionate peers and the satisfaction of resolving a good debate. Now, as I am forever indebted to MUN for the way it has helped coax me out of my naturally quiet personality, I sincerely hope that I can inspire you all to pursue experiences that are just as rewarding.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization is an active specialized agency that leads the world in implementing initiatives to end world hunger and food insecurity. With the world's largest and most comprehensive database system on agriculture, UNFAO plays a crucial role in helping society move forward in a direction towards humanitarianism.

I am excited to announce that the topic this year is overfishing, as statistics depict that this issue impacts not only the environment, but also billions of people. As delegates, I profoundly encourage you to utilize this background guide as a source to gain a deep understanding on the topic at hand. I advise you all to delve below the surface and come up with creative solutions to this urgent subject.

I believe that every successful Model United Nations conference should open up a new glistening door to another perspective on the world, and leave a lasting impact that hopefully allows every one of you to learn something new. Whether you are an experienced veteran or a brand new, bright-eyed beginner delegate, I will try my very best to provide an environment where you will experience fruitful debate.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me or any of the other dias members at unfao@abbymun.com. I wish you the best of luck!

Sincerely,

Violet Zhu
UNFAO Director
AbbyMUN 2021

Introduction to MUN

What is Model UN?

Model United Nations, also known as Model UN or MUN, is a political simulation where students role play as delegates to simulate the United Nations¹. This is an extracurricular activity and generally done through MUN conferences which are organized by high schools across Canada. During conferences you are eligible for awards which include best position paper, best new delegate, honourable mention, outstanding delegate and lastly, best delegate, for which you receive a gavel. Through MUN you gain the skills of research, public speaking, debating, collaborating, and writing expertises. Students are to give detailed speeches on their nation's position and offer possible solutions. Additionally, students are recommended to write a position paper on your given topic describing its history, solutions, etc. Position papers are mandatory to be considered for an award.

Recommendations for Choosing a Country

When picking a country it is crucial to find one that is the most suitable for you. Consider the following:

- Does my country have the same political views as me?
- Is my country challenging and can I step outside my comfort zone?
- Is my country involved in the topic at hand or would I be rather less involved?
- Is there substantial information about the country's history and actions on the topic at hand?
- Can I feel comfortable to come up with viable solutions and provide overall quality to the debate with this country?
- Can I provide statistics and reliable information to my fellow delegates?

Research Tips

Research is one of the reasons why some people are reluctant to join MUN. From the lack of available information or the sophisticated use of language, research can prove quite arduous for many beginner delegates. Nevertheless, the more research you do, the more confident and knowledgeable you will feel about the topic and the country you are representing. For many, Iikipedia is seen as an unreliable source. It is a great starting point but it should not be your only source of information. A great way to obtain more information is through the 'further reading' section of the backgrounder. Additionally, you should research in areas like culture, economics, politics, history and governmental organizations relating to the topic.

¹ <https://bestdelegate.com/what-is-model-united-nations/>

The United Nations

The United Nations (UN) is an international body established on October 24, 1945 after World War II. The UN was the second attempt to create an international organization after the failure of the League of Nations, which was created in 1919. The UN's office is currently located in New York City with additional headquarters in Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi. The officials include Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. The objective of the UN is to maintain peace and security, developing friendly relations, and solving global implications with respect to the basics of human rights. In addition, the United Nations is split into 6 sections. The Security Council, General Assembly (includes DISEC), Economic and Social Council, International Court of Justice, Secretariat and Trusteeship Council.²

Committee Overview

During World War II, the issue of terminated agriculture sent the world into massive disruption. Although the diminished food supply had been widely discussed in the past, it was during this period of increased urgency that the formation of FAO began to be planned. On October 16, 1945, in Quebec City, Canada, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UNFAO) was established.³ Eventually, the headquarters for this newly officialled organization was set in Rome, Italy, with Sir John Boyd Orr elected as the first director-general. The UNFAO is a specialized agency within the United Nations working in an international effort to ultimately end world hunger. Its ambitious goal connects over 194 member states, and is active in over 130 countries worldwide. Leading the journey to providing food security for everyone, and regular access to quality food products in order to lead healthy lifestyles, the UNFAO believe that everyone can play a part in ending hunger.⁴

The Organization takes charge in the collecting, analysing, and interpreting of significant data in relation to food, nutrition, and agriculture. In regards to agriculture, the UNFAO includes all fisheries, forestry, marine products, and many forestry products loosely under this term. UNFAO also functions to promote scientific, social, economic, and technological research relating to food, and implement necessary action towards making progress. Not only does it maintain the world's most comprehensive statistical database on food and agriculture, UNFAO has had multiple other success stories. Some of the most notable include a program coordinated by FAO that eradicated rinderpest, a deadly livestock virus, in 2011, and the Codex Alimentarius, which was a huge success in removing blockages to world food trade. This specific project, formed under a partnership between the UNFAO and WHO, was a collection of standards and guidelines that contributed significantly to the protection of consumer health and ensuring fair practices in trade for over half a century.⁵ More recently, on June 5, 2016, the Organization created and adopted the Post State Measures Agreement

² <https://www.britannica.com/topic/United-Nations>

³ <http://www.fao.org/3/p4228e/P4228E03.htm>

⁴ <http://www.fao.org/about/en/>

⁵ <https://cemas.global/en/top-10-fao-achievements-you-should-know-about/>

(PSMA), the first binding international agreement to focus on combating illegal and unregulated fishing.⁶ The UNFAO has also contributed to the incredibly progressive mobilisation of Latin American Countries to target hunger, which has gone on to impact many other milestone initiatives.⁷

As the world continues to struggle with nutrition related drawbacks and accumulated hunger amongst the masses, UNFAO's work never ceases to demand calls-to-action. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization looks to combine humanitarianism and science in every solution, all while implementing and educating society with principles that will surely over bear the weight of the world's most heaviest problems.

Topic Overview

Overfishing is a globally recognized challenge that directly impacts marine life, sustenance and food availability for people around the world. Although simply catching fish is not intrinsically harmful, when too many fish are caught without enough adults to maintain an adequate population, the stock is overfished. As supply falls, the price and demand of fish only increases as fishing becomes more difficult, causing a large number of people to be unable to afford this crucial protein. Currently, 32.4% of the world's fisheries are beyond their biological limits as the studies in the UNFAO prove, and this percentage only continues to climb.⁸

As unsustainable as it is, the results of these declines in fish population are collapsing fish stocks and decades of quality lifestyles and food security threatened. It is known that approximately three billion people in the world rely on fishing as their primary source of protein.⁹ In fact, the worldwide fish consumption per capita broke a new record at 20.5kg per year in 2018.¹⁰ Without proper regulation and transparency of data, species becoming overfished leads to communities running out of proper nutritional intake.¹¹ However, to understand stock status and accurate fish population levels, regular scientific monitoring of the numbers being caught needs to be implemented. Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing can also cause inaccurate records that ultimately lead to overfishing.¹²

Unfortunately, this is not the only pressing issue. An occurrence related to overfishing is bycatch, which is the unintentional capture of marine life other than the targeted species. This

⁶ <http://www.fao.org/port-state-measures/en/>

⁷ <https://eco-nnect.com/research2/2018/11/27/food-and-agriculture-organization-fao>

⁸ <https://sustainablefisheries-uw.org/fact-check/how-many-fisheries-are-overfished/>

⁹ <https://seawestnews.com/3-billion-people-rely-on-seafood-to-survive/>

¹⁰ <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/6/8/more-than-a-third-of-fish-stocks-are-being-overfished-fao-warn>

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¹¹ <https://www.msc.org/en-au/what-we-are-doing/oceans-at-risk/overfishing>

¹² <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/6/8/more-than-a-third-of-fish-stocks-are-being-overfished-fao-warn>

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threat causes the unnecessary deaths of billions of fish and thousands of other ocean wildlife.¹³ When even one species is removed from its habitat, it can lead to an entire ecosystem collapse, so bycatch heightens this occurrence. To further this issue, as protein demand shifts from one overfished species to other parts of the ocean, this cycle of destruction only worsens when bycatch is added to the mix.¹⁴ More advanced technology and accurate fishing equipment allow large vessels to fish for longer periods of time, and more fish are being caught in shorter periods of time, than ever before.¹⁵ Moreover, the issue is even more critical in developing nations, as the limited management and available governance is more lenient than in developed countries. Indeed, the amount of fish consumption is a sixth of the global intake of animal proteins, and more than half are from countries such as Cambodia, Ghana, Bangladesh, the Gambia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Sierra Leone. In these areas of the world where sustainability is particularly difficult due to poverty, hunger, and conflicts, there is little alternative for more sustainable solutions.¹⁶

Simply fishing less, although it sounds appealing as it takes abused ecosystems and stocks into account, does not include its economic impact in this solution. Fisheries are committing these acts to provide food and livelihoods for the people and to receive economic returns, so it would be unsustainable in both the social and economic sense to just reduce fishing. In fact, in 2010, the World Health Organization projected that an estimated 70-80 million metric tons of fish would be needed to stay in pace with population growth. This is approximately a 50 per cent increase of the total aquaculture and fish productions of more recent times.¹⁷

Historical Analysis

Whaling is one of the earliest records of overfishing. They were used as a source of meat, oil, candles and even soap. Whaling has been practised since 3000 BC, but because of greater whaling and other breakthroughs, several populations were wiped almost to extinction during the 1800s. By the 1930s, it was believed that 50,000 whales were killed each year, and the International Whaling Commission prohibited commercial whaling in 1986 due to overfishing.¹⁸

The disastrous collapse of the once-iconic Northern Atlantic cod fishery in the early 1990s is still one of the most well-known examples of overfishing in the world.¹⁹ Overfishing by international fishing fleets has caused the cod species to decline. Between 1962 and 1977, the harvestable biomass of northern cod fell by 82%, resulting in a near-collapse of the stock and

¹³ <https://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/overfishing>

¹⁴ <https://www.msc.org/en-au/what-we-are-doing/oceans-at-risk/overfishing>

¹⁵ <https://www.seachoice.org/info-centre/fisheries/overfishing/>

¹⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/6/8/more-than-a-third-of-fish-stocks-are-being-overfished-fao-warn>

¹⁷ <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/achieving-and-maintaining-sustainable-fisheries>

¹⁸ <https://exoprotein.com/blogs/environment/overfishing-causes-solutions>

¹⁹ <https://www.seachoice.org/info-centre/fisheries/overfishing/>

industry.²⁰ Cod populations are still low today, with only a few populations showing indications of sluggish recovery.

International attempts to boost the availability and affordability of protein-rich diets led to concentrated government efforts to increase fishing capacity in the mid-twentieth century. Favorable regulations, policies, and loans led to the emergence of large industrial fishing enterprises. These enterprises developed more and more sophisticated methods and technology for finding and extracting their target species. Consumers soon became accustomed to having access to a diverse range of fish species at reasonable rates. However, by 1989, when approximately 90 million tonnes of catch were collected from the ocean, the business had reached its peak. A scientific research published in 2003 estimated that industrial fishing has reduced the number of huge ocean fish to 10% of their pre-industrial population. An analysis of capture data published in the journal *Science* in 2006 showed that if current fishing rates continue, all of the world's fisheries will collapse by 2048.²¹

Overfishing threatens 33.1 percent of global fish populations, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization." It was estimated in 1974 that 90% of fish stocks were at ecologically sustainable levels. In 2015, that figure had dropped to 67 percent. The percentage of fish harvested at an unsustainable level climbed from 10% in 1974 to 33% in 2015.²²

Many scientists believe that with the proactive management of fisheries, improved enforcement of catch rules, and expanded use of aquaculture, most fish stocks may be restored. However, unlawful fishing and unsustainable harvests continue to impact the sector. It is our responsibility to repair the damage we have caused.

Current Situation

Overfishing occurs when people catch a lot of fish which makes the breeding population too depleted to recover. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the number of overfished stocks in the world has tripled in half a century, and one-third of the world's assessed fisheries are now pushed past their biological boundaries.²³ Around the world, around 90 percent of fisheries have been reported as fully exploited or over exploited.²⁴

If action is not taken as soon as possible, there will be severe consequences which will not just influence the balance of life in the oceans, but also the social and economic well-being of

²⁰ <https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/economy/moratorium.php>

²¹ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/critical-issues-overfishing>

²² <http://www.fao.org/state-of-fisheries-aquaculture/en/>

²³ <https://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/overfishing>

²⁴ <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/sdgdatalatlas/archive/2017/SDG-14-life-below-water.html>

coastal towns who rely on seafood for a living. Millions of people rely on fishing for a living, and billions rely on fish as their primary source of sustenance. Many fish supplies have been depleted due to growing overfishing techniques and a lack of sustainable management. Too much fishing appears to be a profitable enterprise, but it endangers ecosystems and disrupts the balance of life in the oceans. Many fish species, like sharks and tuna are endangered because of overfishing. 90% of major predatory fish stocks, such as sharks, tuna, marlin, and swordfish have already depleted. It also results in poor coral reef health. Overfishing can also cause a food crisis.²⁵

A factor which must be kept in mind is that for any solution to be put forward it should not be a universal solution. The solution should be adaptable and should vary based on different fisheries, countries and other developments. This is one of the reasons why finding a solution, an end to this problem is not an easy path.²⁶ Another reason for this is overcapacity. There are way too many parties chasing the few fish.²⁷ A solution for overfishing is not a simple approach and many factors need to be considered.

Past Actions

The Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) was launched in 1995, by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, to clarify principles to an international basis and identify behavioral standards for sustainable management and development of aquaculture. The CCRF strove to contain globally comprehensive plans of action, and although voluntary, it was based upon significant laws from around the world.²⁸

In 25 years, the CCRF has made significant impacts to offer guidance. 2012 research also depicted that states with more compliance with the CCRF showed increased fishery sustainability. However, implementing the Code itself has proved to be made difficult by many state-specific challenges, as well as expensive to effectively follow.²⁹ Studies show that even the leading countries: Australia, Canada, Iceland, Namibia, Norway and the United States, were only scoring about a 60% compliance rate to the CCRF. In 2021, the pressing issue of marine fisheries supplying the main source of protein for many is ever more troubling.³⁰

²⁵https://www.edf.org/oceans/overfishing-most-serious-threat-our-oceans?gclid=CjwKCAjwwsmL.BhACEiwANq-tXKPubQaC5daDfEmtOyXW9vdyTPdceWJBwoKAGMwtKGDicHfu2p6zBhoC95QQAvD_BwE&gclidsrc=aw.ds&utm_campaign=edf_fishing_upd_dmt&utm_id=1518122175&utm_medium=cpc&utm_source=google

²⁶ <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/research-news/2015-07-03-a-chain-of-fools.html>

²⁷ <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2009/08/why-the-free-market-cant-fix-overfishing/22524/>

²⁸ <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/international-affairs/code-conduct-responsible-fisheries>

²⁹ <https://globalfishingwatch.org/news-views/code-of-conduct/>

³⁰https://www.divephotoguide.com/underwater-photography-scuba-ocean-news/study_many_ignore_un_code_to_cut_overfishing/

Moreover, the FAO reported that illegal, unregulated fishing was responsible for a yearly 11-26 million tonnes of fish loss with an economic loss of US\$10-23 billion. These statistics led to the Sustainable Development Agenda Target 4 of Goal 14, established in 2015 by the UN General Assembly, to encourage effective regulation of fish practices around the world by 2020. On June 5, 2016, the previously adopted Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing, entered into full force. These binding measures were first supported in the 2009 FAO Conference, and worked to specify the minimum actions to prevent unregulated fishing.

Back in 2015, FAO's General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean planned the declaration of an International Day for the Fight against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing. June 5 was chosen as this date reflected when the Port State Measures Agreement was officiated as an international treaty. The proposal finally passed in December 2017, and the same resolution also included 2022 as the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture. The purpose being to bring awareness to women and small-scale fishermen that make up 90% of the fishery workforce.³¹

Other actions include the Fisheries Language for Universal Exchange (FLUX), adopted by the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business. This standard is an easily accessible, global tool to help access electronic data on fishing vessels for the monitoring of fishery stocks and fish origins.³² This new system of updated and reliable information on aquaculture improved research on the science of fishery management.³³

Possible Solutions

Creating More Marine Protected Areas

Only around 7 percent of the oceans are protected. More no-catch zones must be constructed to allow fish populations and ecosystems to recover in order to provide fishing for future generations. These Marine Protected Areas guarantee that fish can breed and sustain healthy populations by imposing boundaries that prevent overfishing. Marine Protected Areas can help depleted species recover, promote sustainable fisheries and conserve the health of the oceans for future generations by conserving entire ecosystems.

Banning Trawling

Trawling is a fishing technique that includes dragging a fishing net across the water behind one or more vessels. Trawling involves dragging giant nets across the water, scooping up every animal and habitat in its path, resulting in massive wasteful bycatch. This results in

³¹ <https://www.un.org/en/observances/end-illegal-fishing-day>

³² <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/supporting-shift-more-sustainable-fishing>

³³ <https://www.salttraceability.org/effort/fisheries-language-for-universal-exchange-flux/>

waste of sea life. Hong Kong imposed a ban on trawling and this two-and-a-half-year ban on trawling in the Hong Kong maritime environment has considerably boosted biodiversity, according to a recent research. According to the findings of the study led by the City University of Hong Kong, a trawl ban might help to restore and protect biodiversity in tropical coastal seas.

Reducing Government Subsidies

Many governments throughout the world continue to finance fishing equipment. This subsidy allows unprofitable fishing businesses to continue operating, eventually leading to overfishing. Subsidies that cut the operational expenses of fishermen include assistance with cheaper fuel, equipment, and cargo boats. Access to these kinds of supplies at below-market prices boosts fishing activity. Subsidies of this type also tend to favour bigger fishermen over smaller, traditional fishers, who are regarded as the most susceptible.

Developing Efficiency of Scientific Data

Global fisheries often lack accessibility to produce data that would help understand fishing activities. A way to approach fisheries with limited data has been utilized successfully in keeping track of species such as the Suriname seabob by rock lobster Chilean Juan Fernandez Islands fisheries. Countries such as South Africa, Mexico, and Indonesia are working with a large variety of stakeholders to adopt sustainable fishing.³⁴

Bloc Positions

Countries Dependant on Fishing

When discussing the issues and solutions to overfishing, each countries' capability of reaching sustainability must be taken into consideration. Developing countries are especially dependent on fish, as they contain 97% of the world's workforce, delivering the largest production globally. More so, among the fishermen these countries employ, 90% are small-scale.³⁵ In fact, 70% of the urbanized population are expected to be living in coastal cities by 2025. Of seafood worldwide, 60% are from developing countries. Among fishing vessels globally, 68% are in Asia, and the leading countries are China, India, Vietnam, and Indonesia. The countries with a dependency of over 50% include Sri Lanka, Ghana, Cambodia, Sierra Leone, and Bangladesh.³⁶ Subsidies are often given by the governments which are also a major cause of overfishing. The fact that 70 nations failed to provide subsidy data as required by the World Trade Organization underscores the difficulty in ascertaining

³⁴ <https://ideas4development.org/en/overfishing-developing-countries/>

³⁵ <https://www.fishforward.eu/en/topics/developing-countries/>

³⁶ <https://ideas4development.org/en/overfishing-developing-countries/>

the exact level of subsidies. According to University of British Columbia studies, China offers the greatest subsidies of any country, amounting to \$7.2 billion in 2018, accounting for 21% of worldwide assistance. During the last decade, money provided by China for helpful subsidies has fallen by 73%, while money allocated for destructive subsidies, such as paying for gasoline or boat-building, has more than quadrupled.³⁷ These countries need to be focused on in order to solve this issue, as their economic and social sustainability are especially needed to be taken into consideration. Therefore, since the population of these countries are so reliant on fish, there is little room for sustainable fishing, so solutions must be thoroughly thought out.

Countries Leading the Fight Against Overfishing

On the other hand, many maritime countries have taken significant steps to cease overfishing, restore dwindling fish populations, and halt the flow of plastic garbage into the seas over the next ten years. These countries include Barbados, South Korea, Iceland, Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, Norway, Palau and Portugal.³⁸ Seeking to end subsidiaries which are major contributors of overfishing, they also intend to put a stop on illegal fishing. By implementing national fishing strategies and policies based on scientific information and evidence, these nations have pledged to manage all regions of the ocean under their national control in a sustainable manner by 2025.³⁹ Their pledges also include a worldwide goal of protecting 30% of the oceans of the world by 2030. It is important to note that developed countries hold more responsibility for providing monetary aid to developing nations, as well as, implementing realistic solutions to sustainable fishing practices. These countries want to develop a worldwide sustainable ocean strategy, which they believe will also have a significant impact on the climate.

The European Union

On a global scale, the European Union (EU) is the largest importer of fish, and more than 50% of these accepted deliveries are from developing countries.⁴⁰ In 2013, all EU member states agreed to a new law that pledged to eliminate Europe's addiction to overfishing by 2015, as well as the wasteful habit of discarding dead or dying fish back into the sea. Nonetheless, fisheries ministers continue to disregard scientific advice, awarding quotas to commercial fishing fleets much beyond the recommended limits. EU member states are letting certain sectors of the fishing industry to run wild, enabling damaging fishing tactics that maximise short-term profitability and benefit only a few, at the expense of long-term sustainability.⁴¹ Furthermore, sustainable ocean economies have become increasingly important in assisting many countries in achieving their development goals, drawing attention to another challenge to ocean sustainability: harmful subsidies that contribute to overcapacity,

³⁷ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/sea-running-out-of-fish-despite-nations-pledges-to-stop>

³⁸ <https://www.oceaneos.org/sustainable-fishery/countries-where-the-fisheries-are-sustainable/>

³⁹ <https://www.planet.veolia.com/en/14-countries-commit-sustainable-fishing>

⁴⁰ <https://www.fishforward.eu/en/topics/developing-countries/>

⁴¹ <https://our.fish/what-we-do/the-story/>

overfishing, and illegal, and unreported fishing.⁴² The European Union has also expanded its fishing fleet and it awarded \$2 billion in harmful support in 2018.⁴³

Guiding Questions

- 1) How dependent is your country on fishing?
- 2) Has your country done anything to curb overfishing? If so, what?
- 3) What other sectors in your country's economy can be explored to decrease the economic dependability of fishing?
- 4) Agriculturally, can other food sources within your country be explored that would be just as accessible as fish, and lead to less demand for fish?
- 5) How can we increase regulation and reporting of fish that are caught around the world?
- 6) How can we prevent bycatching (the unintentional capture of marine fish different from the target species)?

Further Research

1. <https://www.edf.org/oceans/overfishing-most-serious-threat-our-oceans>
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⁴²https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/ga12297.doc.htm&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1634979798791000&usg=AOvVaw0Lfm42-yOIbs3tEi0Pj_PX

⁴³<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/sea-running-out-of-fish-despite-nations-pledges-to-stop>

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