



THE INVISIBLE WAR IN HIGH SEAS: IMPUNITY, ILLEGAL FISHING & THE URGENT NEED TO PROTECT OUR OCEANS!!

A Critical Diagnosis from the Front Line of Direct Action.

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Club Náutico Tomas Maestre. La Manga del Mar Menor. Spain. 19/09/2026

In the vast and unregulated arena of the global oceans—which cover more than 70% of our planet's surface—a silent conflict is being waged.

Although international treaties, moratoria and multilateral commissions exist to regulate marine resources, the reality on the high seas differs radically from the legal framework laid out on paper. We are faced with nominally regulated scenarios, but in practice absolutely uncontrolled, where the voracity of the fishing industry and illicit activities operate under a mantle of structural impunity and, at times, with the direct or covert complicity of certain governments.

1. The Illusion of Regulation and the Role of Institutions

From the global moratorium on commercial whaling issued by the *International Whaling Commission (IWC)* in 1982, to the recent signing of the *High Seas Treaty* or the conventions on biodiversity, the international fisheries legal framework appears to provide safeguards.

However, in the high seas where there is no direct sovereignty of a State, international conventions and Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) ultimately become subordinate to particular pecuniary and commercial interests.

Frequently, the protection afforded by supposed «scientific research» — such as the historic Japanese program in waters of the Southern Ocean— JARPA II- or the unilateral self-allocation of catch quotas, such as that assigned to the Icelandic whaling fleet or to the Japanese whaling fleet itself, have served to conceal the continued commercial exploitation of species on the brink of extinction, demonstrating that regulatory structures suffer from a lack of willingness to carry out genuine control and inspection.

2. Hidden State Intervention: The Case of Iceland (Campaign-86')

State collusion is not an abstract phenomenon; it manifests itself in contemporary geopolitics. A glaring example is the hunting of the fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*) in Iceland, promoted by private monopolies with the approval and active protection of the Icelandic government itself. During the development of Campaign-86' promoted by the **Captain Paul Watson Foundation (CPWF)**, it became clear to what extent States are willing to intervene to protect illegitimate private fishing interests. In response to the interception and nonviolent resistance actions deployed by the Vessel **MV BANDERO** to prevent the hunting of the fin whale —a species endangered according to the **IUCN**—, the official response was not to inspect the whaling vessel, but to deploy military units and special boarding forces (*Viking Force*).



The result was the boarding of the environmentalist vessel, the deportation of its crew and the administrative detention of the ship in the port of Reykjavík without legitimate charges, while official patrol boats served as a liaison to facilitate the activists' positions to the whaling vessels and thus allow the Icelandic whaling fleet to continue with its illegal hunt. As of today the vessel remains detained but free of charges, awaiting a decision by the Icelandic prosecution service.





3.- Shadows at Sea: «Ghost Vessels» and the Farce of Satellite Monitoring.

To silence public criticism, fisheries administrations have promoted the implementation of electronic onboard monitoring systems (**GPS**, **VMS**, **AIS**). However, the effectiveness of these tools is illusory when they are easily manipulated.

Studies published in scientific journals such as *Nature* and *Science* in 2024 reveal that approximately 75% of the world's industrial fishing vessels operate as «**ghost vessels**», intentionally switching off or manipulating their AIS transponders when they enter protected fishing grounds, exceed authorized quotas or carry out illegal transshipments on the high seas. Without patrols or a physical presence, digital control becomes a mere cosmetic façade.

4.- The Tragedy of International Observers: High-Risk Work and Impunity

In this lawless environment, the figure of the international fisheries observer represents the last link in independent oversight aboard the industrial fleet. However, the work of these professionals has become one of the most dangerous professions on the planet.

Those observers who refuse to be bribed or who document serious violations (massive catches without a license, use of prohibited fishing gear or fishing for protected species) suffer extreme pressure, extortion, assaults and, in multiple documented cases, are murdered or thrown overboard under the official guise of «*navigation accidents*». The absolute impunity with which these fleets operate turns the decks of ships into free zones for crime.



5. - The Impact of Bycatch and the Collapse of the Global Ecosystem

The direct consequence of this lack of control is the biological devastation of the oceans. The phenomenon of accidental fishing or discarding (bycatch) represents an alarming figure within the total annual catches.

Impact Category	Estimated Figure / Direct Impact
Accidental Fishing(Bycatch)	40% of the Global Annual Catch
Affected Species	38,5 million of mammals, turtles & sharks
Krill Overexploitation	Collapse of the Food Chain in Antarctic
Effective Protection	Only 3% of Global Marine Waters

This means that millions of living beings are caught and returned to the sea dead or dying because they are not the target species. Added to this is the overexploitation of Antarctic Krill by industrial norwegians & chinese trawling fleets, depriving penguins, seals and whales of their primary food source to manufacture aquaculture feed and oil supplements.

Conclusion: Protecting the Ocean Means Defending Our Own Existence

The oceans generate more than 50% of the planet's oxygen, absorb heat and carbon dioxide and regulate the global climate. Despite covering more than 70% of the Earth, the lack of real protection places us at a point of no return.

As leading conservation figures such as **Sylvia Earle**, **Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente** or **Paul Watson** warned: «*If the oceans die, we will die too*». In the face of inaction, institutional corruption and the hidden complicity of governments, the testimonial work, public denunciation and direct action on the high seas by NGOs such as **CPWF** in defense of the Oceans constitute the last line of defense for preserving *Life on Earth*.



All of this is available on the following videos and platforms:

- A Commander Rises. Cero Tolerance Campaign/Antarctica. Internet.2013
- Sea Piracy> Dirty business at sea. Netflix. 2021
- Fatal Watch. Fishing Observers. Prime.2022
- The Cove. Taiji. Dolphin Killing. Netflix. 2009(Oscar 2010)
- The Grind. Is Feroe. Pilot Whales. You Tube. Annual
- Chasing the MV Hunter. Patagonian Toothfish. Antártica. You Tube.2018
- Whales War. All Antarctica Campaigns. You Tube.
- Sea of Shadows. Vaquita Dolphin. Baja California. Prime. 2019
- The End of the Line. Overfishing. Prime. 2009
- Galápagos. SSCC. You Tube. 2011
- The Whaler. Icelandic Whaling Fleet. Prime. 2022
- Fin. Shark-Business. L. DiCaprio Prime.2021.
- Sharkwaters. Shark Fin Industry. Apple/Amazon.2008