



PRESS RELEASE

## ‘Narco-Fish’ study exposes growing drug trafficking risk for global fishing sector

**JUNE 26 2020, Vancouver, BC** – Drug trafficking on the water is increasingly putting small-scale artisanal fish harvesters, coastal communities, and marine ecosystems at risk. The new study “Narco-Fish: Global fisheries and drug trafficking” published today in *Fish and Fisheries* found that in the past eight years the use of fishing vessels in drug trafficking has tripled — accounting for 15% of the global retail value of illicit drugs. The study shows how drug trafficking ‘by necessity’ becomes a response to the lack of economic alternatives or government support in times of ‘need’. The COVID-19 pandemic could further exacerbate this trend globally. Not only has the pandemic disrupted land routes more than maritime ones,<sup>1</sup> but many fish harvesters have lost income during the crisis<sup>2</sup> while drug cartels are eager to regain market access as economies reopen.

An analysis of 292 reported cases globally between 2010-2017 revealed that 522 tonnes of drugs, representing the street value of \$16.5 billion USD, was handled illegally onboard fishing vessels. The majority of the vessels found with drugs aboard were small-scale boats. This study adds to the body of evidence on fishing and illicit activities, including illegal fishing, slavery, human trafficking, and arms trade.

Dyhia Belhabib, PhD, Ecotrust Canada’s Principal Investigator in Community Fisheries: *“This study provides further insight on the role that the fishing sector plays as a platform for transnational criminality. The level of involvement in the small-scale sector requires a deeper look into the issues of securitization that often drive fish harvesters further into poverty, and toward the edge of necessity.”*

David Wrathall, PhD, Oregon State University: *“This paper is the first piece of evidence about an important new problem. For a decade, I’ve been involved in research showing how drug trafficking pumps astronomical sums of money into cattle ranching in fragile forested areas. Drug trafficking has become a major cause of deforestation in transit countries. This paper tells us a similar story — that drug trafficking is pumping money into fragile fisheries.”*

Philippe LeBillion, PhD, University of British Columbia: *“Artisanal fishers have lost income during COVID-19 confinement and restaurant closures. I am afraid this will make them more vulnerable to drug smuggling networks.”*

### About Ecotrust Canada

Ecotrust Canada is an enterprising charity that works with rural, remote, and Indigenous communities toward building an economy that provides for a healthy and resilient natural environment; sustainable and abundant energy, food, and housing; prosperous and meaningful livelihoods; and vibrant and inclusive cultures. We call this approach **building an economy that provides for life**. Our on-the-ground work and systems approach is entrepreneurial, partnership-based, and relentlessly practical. [ecotrust.ca](https://ecotrust.ca)

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.unodc.org/unodc/press/releases/2020/May/how-covid-19-is-changing-the-world\\_-unodc-highlights-impact-on-homicide-and-drug-trafficking.html](https://www.unodc.org/unodc/press/releases/2020/May/how-covid-19-is-changing-the-world_-unodc-highlights-impact-on-homicide-and-drug-trafficking.html); <https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/covid/Covid-19-and-drug-supply-chain-Mai2020.pdf>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08920753.2020.1766937>