



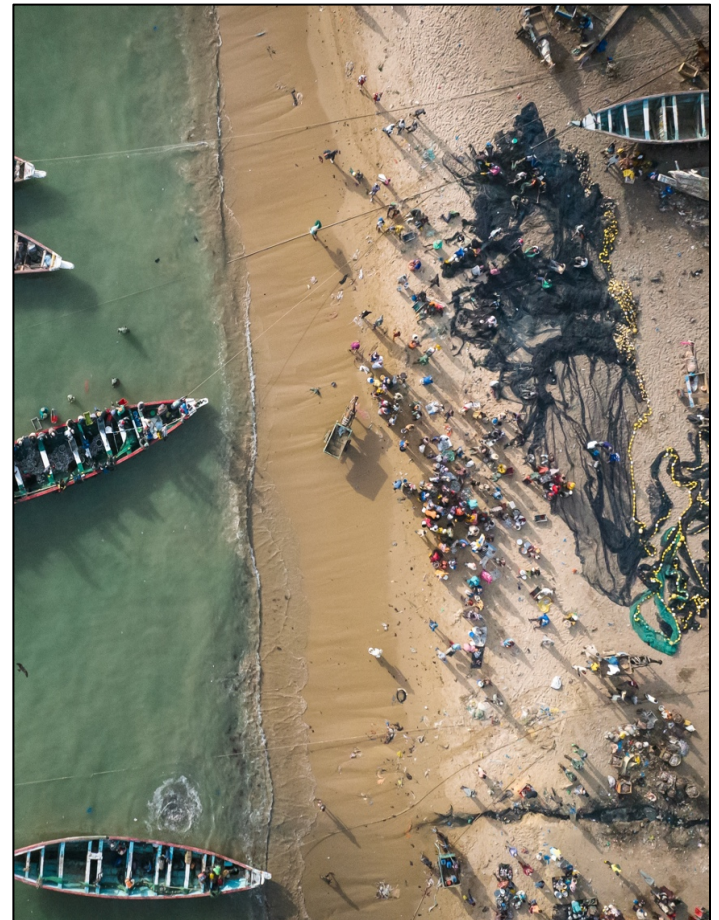
UNREGULATED SQUID FISHERIES AND ASSOCIATED ABUSES: THE CASE OF THE SOUTHWEST ATLANTIC

OCTOBER 2025 – BRUSSELS



The **Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF)** exists to protect the natural world and to defend our basic human right to a safe environment.

- EJF works internationally to **promote systemic and lasting reforms** that safeguard the environment and defend human rights.
- **We investigate and expose abuses, and we support environmental defenders.**
- Our campaigns aim to **ensure a peaceful, equitable, and sustainable future.**



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 - Lack of **regulation**
 - **Overexploitation**
 - **Human rights** abuses
 - **Environmental** abuses
- **EU and Argentine shortfin squid**
 - **Key market**
 - **Imports** linked to abuses
 - **Uneven level playing field**
- **Conclusions**
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Argentine shortfin squid in a squid fishing vessel in the Southwest Atlantic

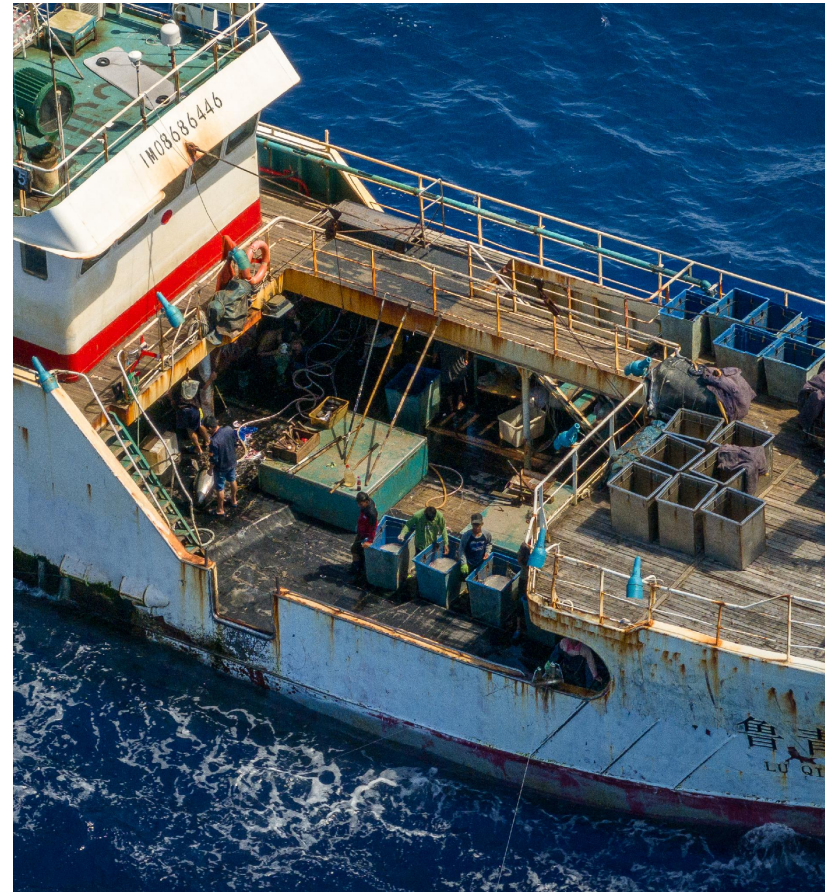


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Brief global context

2017 – 2020: **70% increase in global fishing effort on squid:**

- Demand increase
- Expansion of distant water fleets
- Depletion of certain commercial finfish populations



Fishing vessel in the Indian ocean

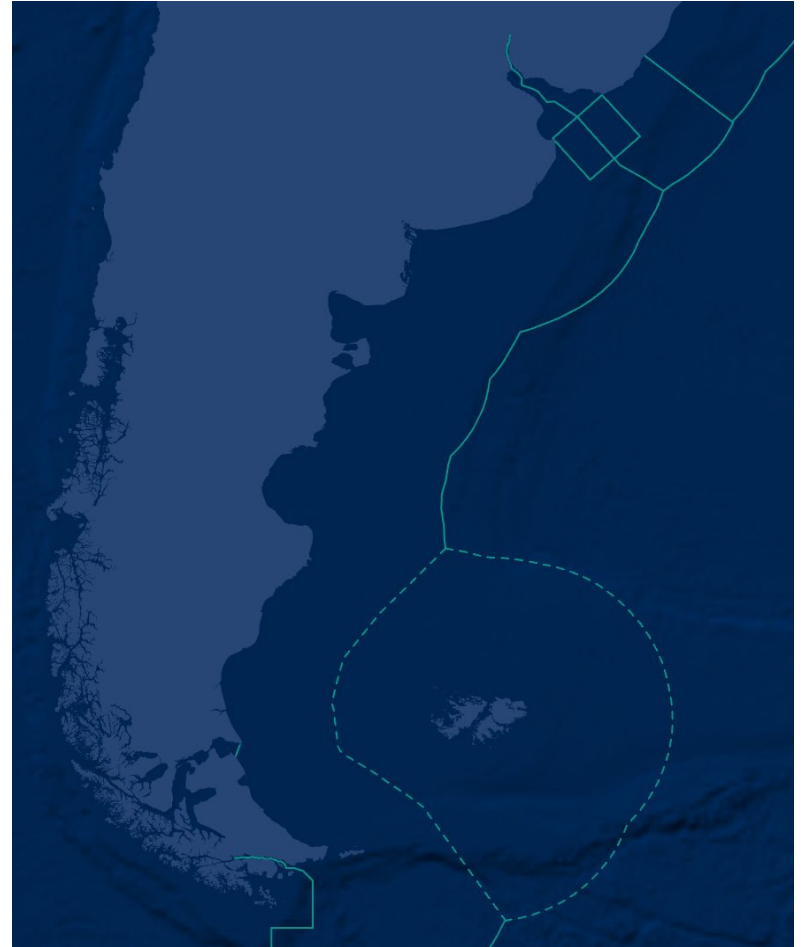
Brief global context

Around **86% of fishing effort on squid is not regulated:**

- High seas
- Fisheries not subjected to management (e.g., RFMO)

International waters of the **Atlantic Southwest:**

- **No fisheries management or international cooperation**
- Lack of information and transparency



Methodology:

Expedition to the 'Mile 201' with the Argentine Coast Guard (Feb – Mar 2025)

Testimonies

- 169 crew members of squid fishing vessels operating in the area
- Scientists of the Argentinian government (INIDEP)
- Members of the Coast Guard

Public information

- Websites (p. ej., TradedataPro, UNCOMTRADE, Eurostat, FAOFishStat)
- Scientific publications and reports from governments and institutions

Satellite data

- AIS data from Global Fishing Watch



The 'Mile 201' in the adjacent waters of the Argentinian EEZ

Results:

Every year, around 343 squid fishing vessels arrive at the Mile 201

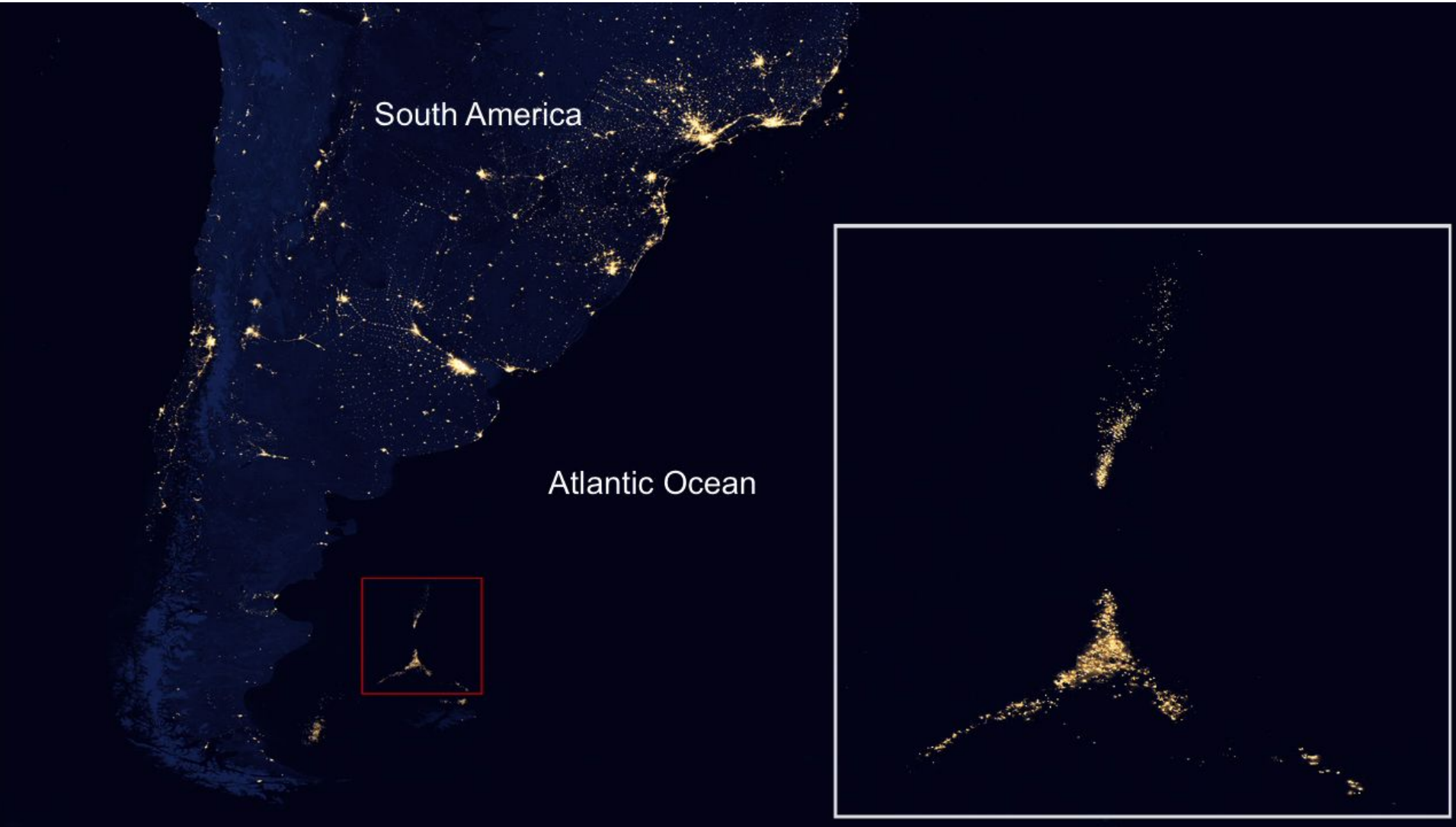
- **Target:** Argentine shortfin squid (*illlex argentinus*)
- Vessels from **China** (75%), **Taiwan** (18%) and **South Korea**(7%)
- **91%** of the fishing effort from **Chinese vessels**
- **65% increase** in fishing hours between 2019 and 2024
 - 85% increase in the case of China



The 'Mile 201' in the adjacent waters of the Argentinian EEZ



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Results:

Argentine shortfin squid:

- **Transzonal** species between Argentina's EEZ and the high seas
- **Short life cycle** (1 year)
- Sensitive to **environmental conditions** and **overfishing**

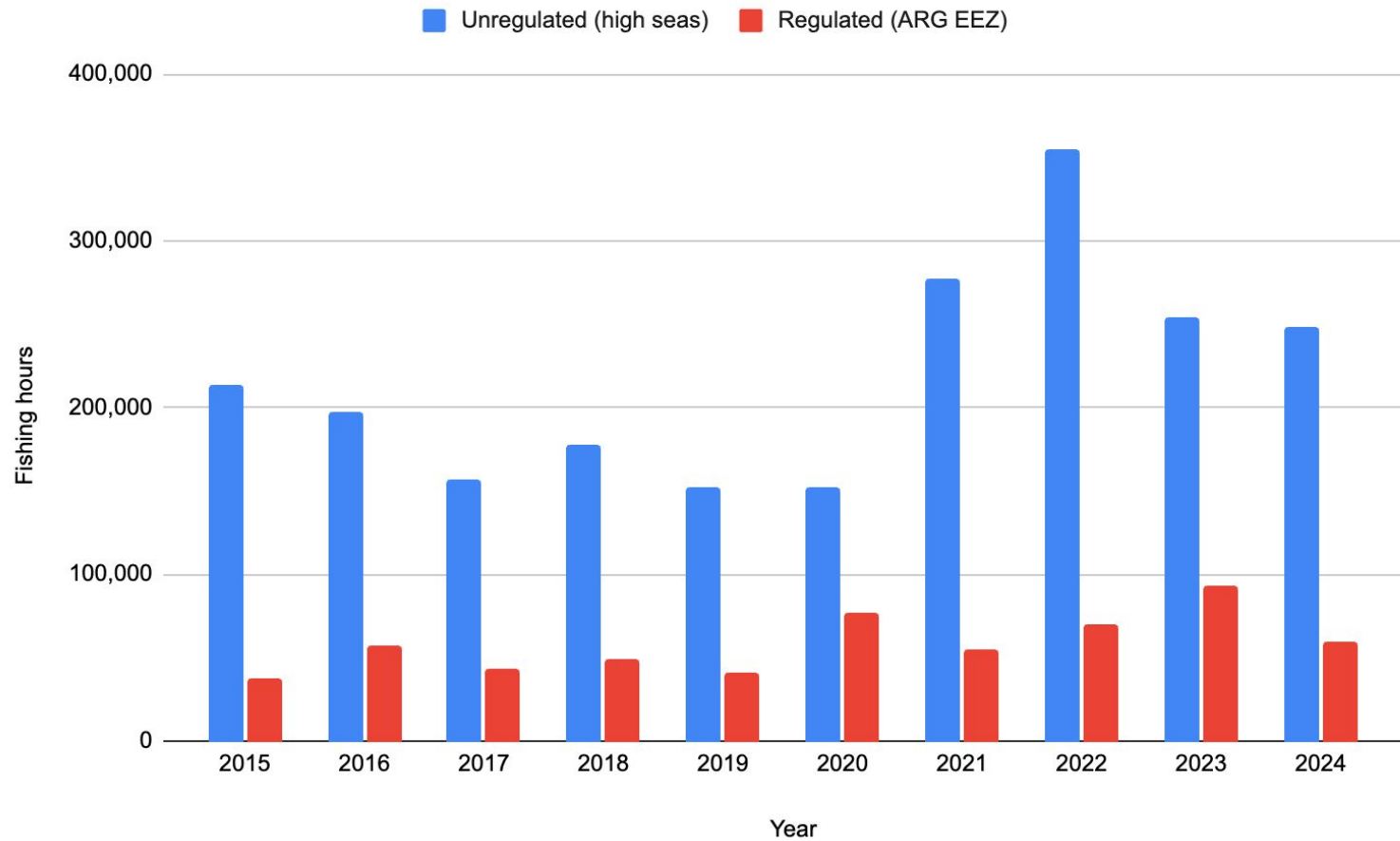
	EEZ of Argentina	High seas
Squid vessels	70 approx.	343 approx.
Resource management	Yes	No
Control	INIDEP, Coast Guard	-



The 'Mile 201' in the adjacent waters of the Argentinian EEZ



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Results:

Lack of full management of the resource (ARG EEZ + high seas)

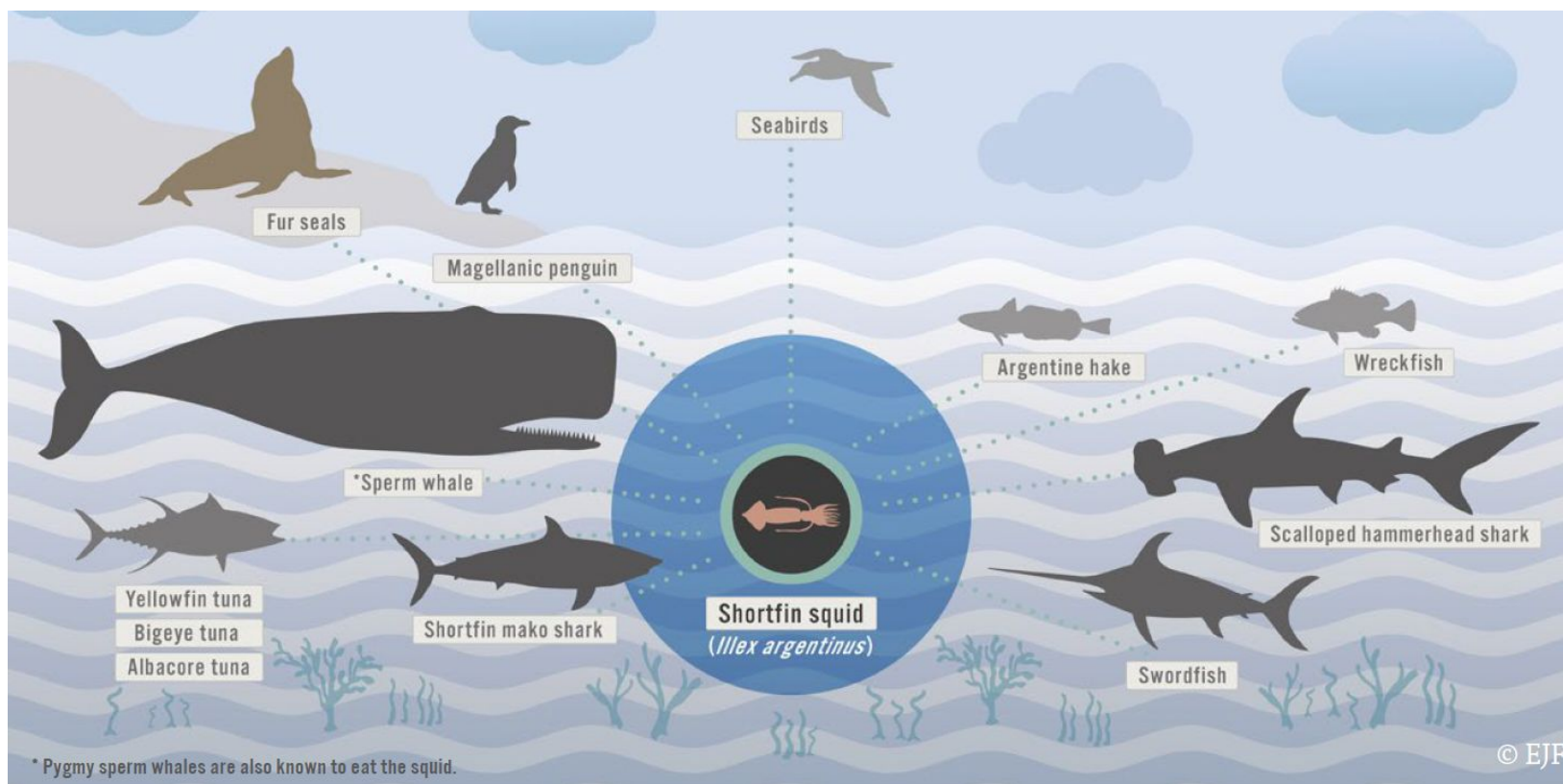
Uncontrolled fishing



Unfavourable environmental conditions



SQUID POPULATION COLLAPSE



Abuses :

Testimonies from **169 crew members**

- Covering **20% of the fleet** (110 squid jiggers)
- **Indonesia** (98%) and the **Philippines** (2%)
- 2019 – 2024

Serious and generalised **human rights and labour abuses**

- **Deaths of 5 crew members** on board 4 Chinese vessels
- Physical violence, intimidation, salary retentions, deplorable working conditions, etc.



Crew members on a squid jigging vessel in the Atlantic Southwest

Conditions indicative of forced labour reported by crew members working on board the high seas squid jigging fleet operating in the Southwest Atlantic

Indicator of forced labour (ILO)	% of crew interviewed on Chinese vessels (n=56)	% of crew interviewed on South Korean vessels (n=57)	% of crew interviewed on Taiwanese vessels (n=56)
Abuse of vulnerability	14,3%	1,8%	7,1%
Deception	78,6%	22,8%	55,4%
Physical violence	50%	8,8%	21,4%
Intimidation and threats	48,2%	28,1%	37,5%
Retention of ID documents	94,6%	87,7%	91,1%
Withholding of wages	57,1%	7%	19,6%
Debt bondage	94,6%	64,9%	83,9%
Abusive working and living conditions	76,8%	8,8%	33,9%
Excessive overtime	83,9%	82,5%	87,5%

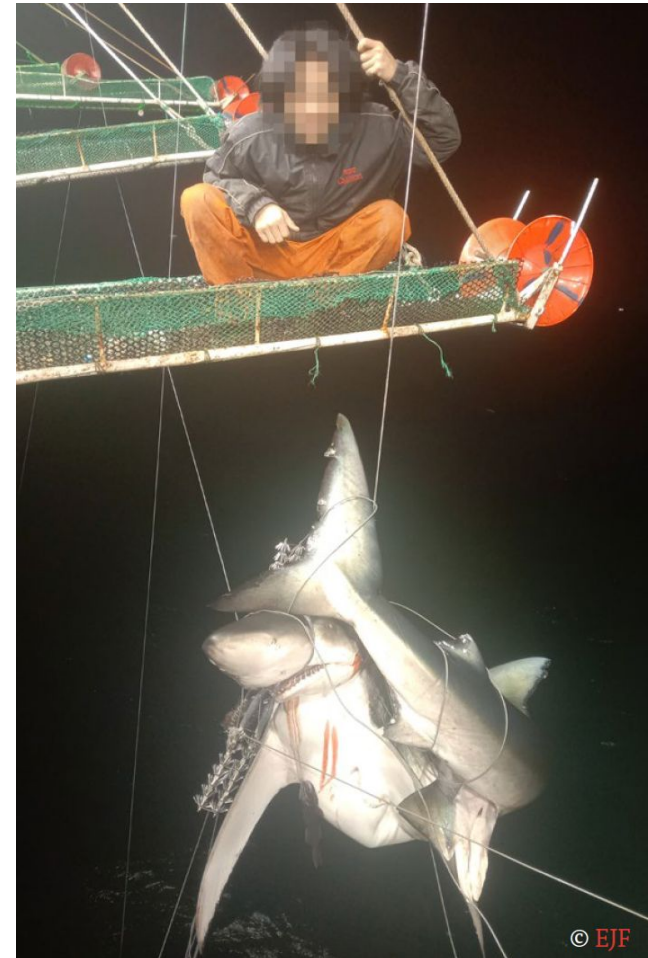
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Environmental abuses:

- **Obscuring vessel identification numbers and names**
- **Shark finning**
- Capture of charismatic megafauna



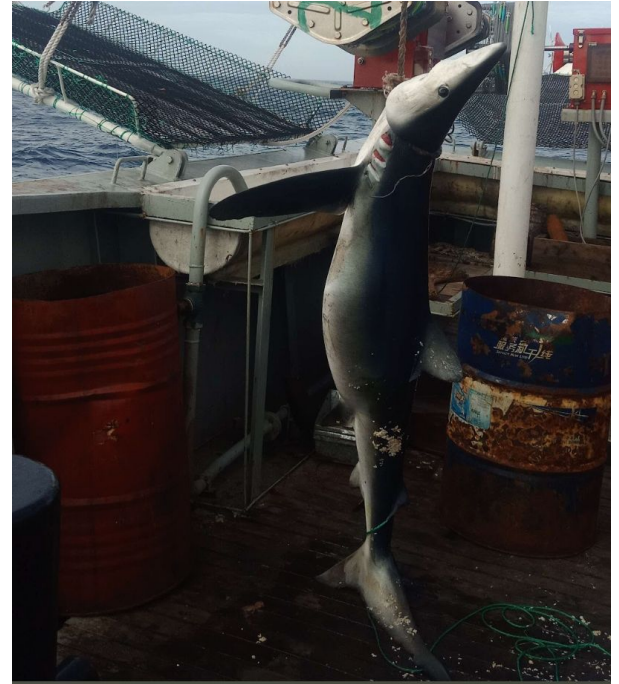
A shark entangled in a jigging line in a squid jigging vessel in the Atlantic Southwest

Overview of alleged illegal fishing and harm to marine wildlife reported by crew members

	% Chinese squid jigging fleet at Mile 201 covered by interviews	% South Korean squid jigging fleet at Mile 201 covered by interviews	% Taiwanese squid jigging fleet at Mile 201 covered by interviews
Changing or covering vessel names/ numbers	19,6%	0,0%	0,0%
Harpooning of seals	43,5%	4%	20,5%
Shark finning	26%	0,0%	5,1%

“[It happened] often. If the seals got close to the vessel, the vessel would harpoon them. After the seals were brought on board, the teeth were pulled. The vice [captain] took the teeth and genitalia. Sometimes he also took the body and skin – but the (bodies) were often discarded.”

Crew member working on board a Chinese squid jigger, interviewed by EJF in September 2021



**What about
the EU?**





Squid catches on board a squid jigging vessel in the Atlantic Southwest

A key market state globally

- **Spain alone is the second biggest importer** of squid and cuttlefish worldwide (15%), after China
- National consumption: **85% imported**
- **The EU's gateway: 65%** of all imported squid enters via Spain.



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Squid jigging vessels carrying out transshipments at sea in the Atlantic Southwest

A key market state globally

Argentine shortfin squid represents 13.3% of all Spanish squid imports

- From **China** (41%), **Argentina** (39%), **Taiwan** (12%) and **Islas Malvinas/Falklands** (7%)



42.9% from unregulated areas (Mile 201)



A key market state globally

- **47 Spanish importers** bought through intermediaries from
- **5 Chinese companies implicated in abuses** and fishing in the Southwest Atlantic
 - 10.825 tonnes between 2019 and 2024 (**9%** of Spanish imports of shortfin squid throughout the period)
 - Entry points: Valencia (45%), Vigo (27%), Bilbao (10%), Algeciras (9%), and Barcelona (2%)



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Trawlers operating in the high seas of the Southwest Atlantic

Uneven playing field

- Around **30 Spanish trawlers operate at Mile 201**
 - Squid: accessory catch
- Subjected to **stricter national and EU laws** and standards:
 - **Observers** on board
 - **Closure of areas** for fishing
 - Submission of **fisheries plans**
- Captures of the same squid stock by the EU fleet (regulated) and the Asian fleets (unregulated) **compete in the same market**



Conclusions:

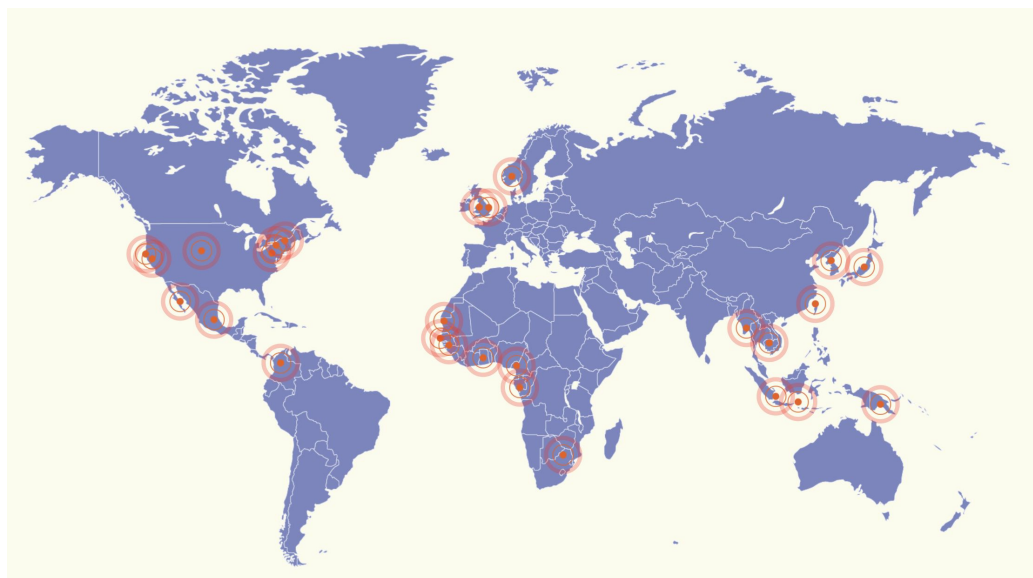
- The **EU's squid supply chains** are currently exposed to serious **environmental and social risks**
- Part of them originate from **unregulated fisheries** linked to:
 - **unsustainable fishing,**
 - **ecosystem degradation, and**
 - **human rights violations.**
- **EU fishers**, subject to stricter rules, risk being undermined by cheaper imports resulting from an **uneven playing field**.
- As a key market for squid, the EU has both the influence and the responsibility to act.



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Recommendations:

- To all coastal and Flag States, the adoption of the **Global Charter for Fisheries Transparency**



Coalition for Fisheries
Transparency



Global Charter for Fisheries Transparency



Vessel information	1	#	Require all fishing vessels, refrigerated transport vessels and supply vessels (hereafter 'fishing vessels') to obtain unique identification numbers and also provide them to the FAO Global Record, RFMOs and other relevant bodies.
	2	✓=	Publish comprehensive and up-to-date lists of fishing vessel licenses (including key vessel information), authorizations, subsidies, official access agreements and sanctions (for fisheries and labor offenses) and also supply this information to the FAO Global Record.
	3	🚢	Make public the information on beneficial ownership of vessels.
	4	🚩	Stop the use of flags of convenience by fishing vessels by enforcing the UNCLOS Article 91 requirement for a genuine link between vessels and their flag state, and prevent vessels from engaging in illegal fishing and associated crimes regardless of their flag and punish the vessel(s) that do.
Fishing activity	5	📶	Require vessel position to be public (by sharing VMS, or sharing other non-public systems or mandating AIS).
	6	🚢	Ban transferring fish between boats at sea – unless pre-authorized, carefully monitored and publicly logged.
	7	🐟	Mandate the adoption of robust control systems that ensure seafood is legal and traceable from boat to plate, conforming to relevant catch management measures whose key data elements are made publicly available.
Governance and management	8	📄	Ratify and comply with international instruments that set clear standards for fishing vessels and the trade in fisheries products, including FAO PSMA, ILO Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and ILO C188, and IMO Cape Town Agreement.
	9	🔍	Publish all collected fisheries data and scientific assessments in order to facilitate access to information for small-scale fishers, fish workers, indigenous communities, industry associations, and civil society in developing fisheries rules, regulations, subsidies and fisheries budgets, and decisions on access to fisheries resources. Make these processes, policies, and decisions easily accessible to the public and enforcement agencies.
	10	📊	Collect and verify robust data on crew identification and demographics (including nationalities, age, race, and gender), contractual terms, recruitment agencies, location and means of joining vessels, and conditions on vessels as well as publish this information in aggregate form.



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Recommendations:

- **Reinforce existing import control mechanisms across the EU**, ensuring they include squid species, such as Argentine shortfin squid, that are at high risk of being associated with forced labour and IUU fishing practices.
- Push for the establishment of appropriate multilateral **governance structures** for the effective **regional conservation and management of Argentine shortfin** squid in the Southwest Atlantic



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THANK YOU
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