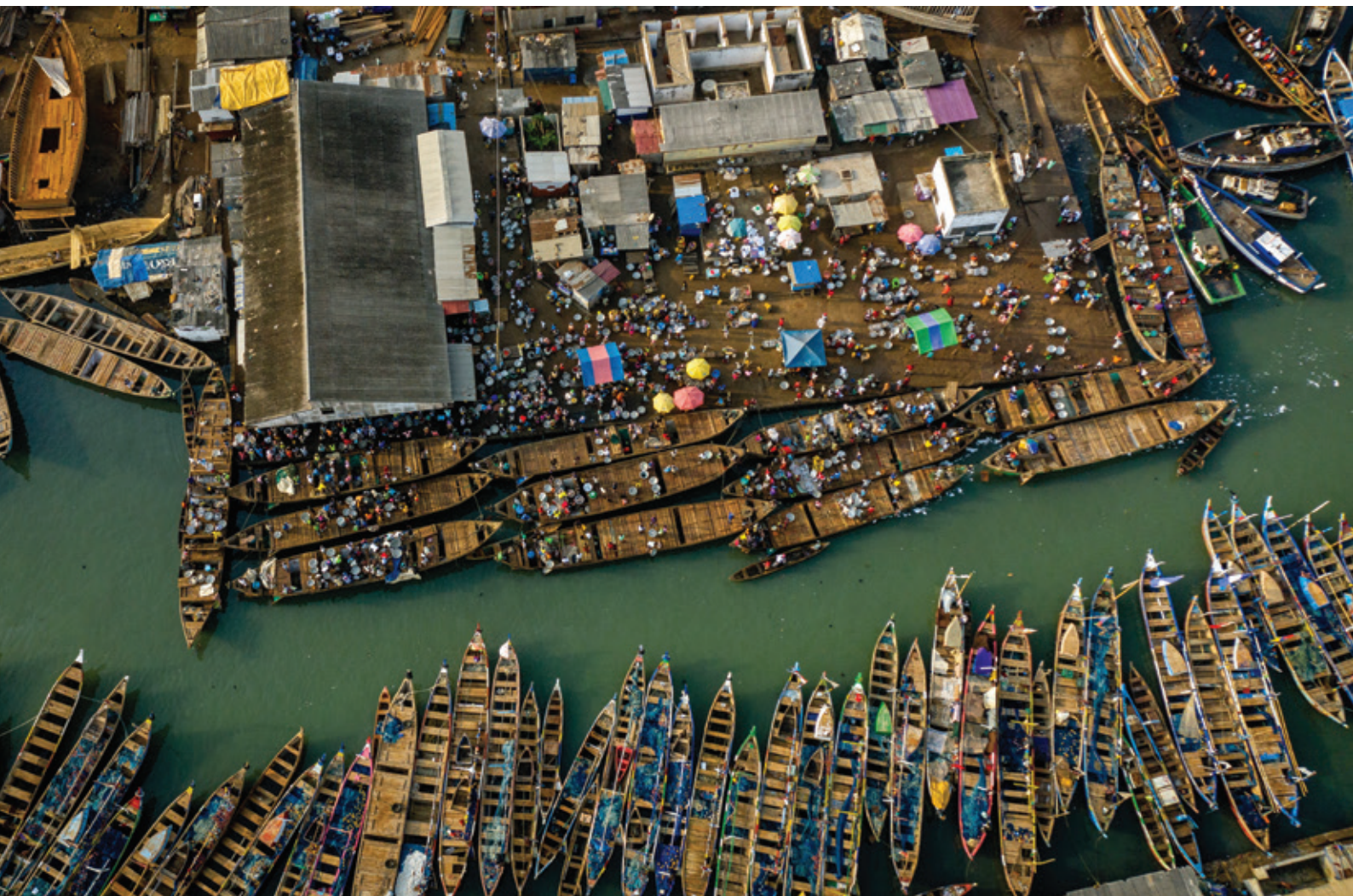


Update | July 2020

Illegal saiko landings at Elmina port

Summary

- In November 2019, the Government of Ghana committed to ending the highly destructive and illegal fishing practice known as “saiko” and banning any vessel found to be engaging in saiko from fishing in Ghana’s waters.
- Since this announcement, almost 400 saiko canoes have landed fish illegally at Elmina port, in full view of the enforcement authorities. As many as 13 saiko canoes have landed in a single day.
- Government-appointed fisheries observers are present on board all industrial trawlers, yet illegal saiko fishing continues. The observer programme is reportedly compromised by bribery, threats and intimidation.
- Urgent action is needed to eliminate saiko from Ghana’s waters to safeguard the livelihoods of 2.7 million Ghanaians and avert an ecological and socio-economic crisis.
- EJF is calling on the President to lead in taking action to ensure saiko is eradicated and avert the collapse of Ghana’s coastal fisheries.



Aerial view of saiko canoes landing fish at Elmina port.

Background

Saiko is a destructive form of illegal fishing that is fuelling the collapse of Ghana's coastal fisheries on which over 2.7 million people depend for their livelihoods¹. In the saiko trade, industrial trawlers use prohibited nets and fish illegally in inshore areas to catch species they are not licensed to catch – such as the severely depleted small pelagics reserved for local small-scale fishers². The fish are frozen into blocks and transferred at sea to specially adapted boats for sale back to local communities for profit.

In 2017, an estimated 100,000 tonnes of fish were traded illegally through saiko, with a landed value of over US\$50 million³. With an estimated 60% of catches going unreported in 2017, this represents a significant loss of revenue to the state⁴. The lucrative saiko business is incentivising trawlers to actively target species which should rather be caught by local fishers. Much of the fish –99% of sardinella in blocks of saiko fish surveyed⁵–are juveniles below the minimum landing size, hindering the ability of fish populations to recover and replenish.

Saiko is prohibited under Ghana's fisheries laws, attracting a fine of between US\$100,000 and US\$2 million⁶. The minimum fine increases to US\$1 million where catches involve juvenile fish or the use of prohibited fishing gears⁷. Saiko is also prohibited at the regional level, under the framework of the Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC)⁸, to which Ghana is a Contracting Party. Despite being illegal, saiko activities take place openly and sanctions imposed are largely inadequate to deter offenders. Cases are generally settled through opaque out of court settlement processes, with fines imposed at well below the statutory minimum and in some cases going unpaid⁹.

Scientists predict that key fish populations in Ghana could collapse as early as this year¹⁰ if urgent steps are not taken to address illegalities such as saiko. Landings of sardinella, the staple catch of small-scale fishers, have declined by 80% over the past two decades¹¹. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has recommended the closure of the sardinella fishery shared between Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and Benin to allow fish populations to recover¹².

Current status of saiko

In the Government of Ghana's Budget Statement and Economic Policy for the 2020 Financial Year, presented to Parliament on 13 November 2019, the government committed to ending saiko and banning any vessel caught engaging in saiko from operating in the country's waters. On 15 November 2019, the Ghana Industrial Trawlers Association informed the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development of its decision to suspend saiko¹³, despite it having always been illegal¹⁴.

In spite of government and industry commitments, saiko landings continue to take place at Elmina port, the hub for the illegal trade on Ghana's coast. Daily in-person monitoring by EJF has observed almost 400 saiko canoes landing fish at Elmina since the announcements last November.

Definition:

Saiko – the illegal trans-shipment (transfer) of fish from industrial bottom trawlers to purpose built canoes at sea.

Definition:

Small pelagics – fish that live in the water column as opposed to near or on the seabed. Small pelagic fish are a critical food staple across West Africa and component of catches of small-scale fishers. They include species such as anchovies and sardinella that are usually found in coastal, inshore waters.

Excerpt from the Budget Statement and Economic Policy of the Government of Ghana for the 2020 Financial Year

718. Mr. Speaker, the Ministry will intensify the implementation of the Fisheries Act 2002, (Act 625) to ensure that domestic, regional and international laws that prohibit IUU fishing are strictly enforced through the following:

- *fishing vessels involved in any form of IUU fishing shall be surcharged and prevented from fishing in the Ghanaian Economic Exclusive Zone;*
- *artisanal canoe involved in IUU fishing shall be surcharged and banned from receiving premix fuel; and*
- *all domestic and international fleet that are involved in "Saiko" fishing (i.e. transshipment at sea) shall be banned from fishing in Ghanaian waters.*

During this period, an average of 11 saiko canoes have landed fish illegally each week, with as many as 13 saiko canoes landing in a single day (**Figure 1**). Evidence obtained by EJF indicates that the larger saiko canoes are now most active. A large saiko canoe can land up to 4,000 blocks or 44 tonnes of fish in a single trip¹⁵, the equivalent of around 800 artisanal fishing trips¹⁶.

Footage from Elmina port on 26 June 2020 (**Figures 2 and 3**) shows that saiko canoes, weighed down with illegally trans-shipped fish caught by industrial trawlers, continue to land in full view of the enforcement agencies. The magnitude and openness of landings raises serious concerns as to the government's willingness to eradicate the trade and the capacity of the observer programme to stop illegal fishing. Each industrial trawler is now mandated to have a fisheries observer onboard to report on illegalities at sea¹⁷, however, investigations have revealed that the system is compromised by bribery, threats and intimidation¹⁸. Each saiko canoe that lands at Elmina is evidence of an illegal trans-shipment at sea carried out in defiance of the observer system.

The Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNCFC), the representative association of small-scale fishers, and civil society have called on Ghana's President to lead and ensure all necessary actions are taken to end saiko fishing for good¹⁹. Urgent action is needed to eliminate saiko, to safeguard livelihoods and food security at a time when coastal communities are especially vulnerable due to the COVID-19 pandemic. If saiko is not stopped, the ensuing ecological and socio-economic crisis will likely spell disaster for fishing communities across Ghana's coast.

Figure 1:
Daily landings of saiko canoes at Elmina port from November 2019 to June 2020

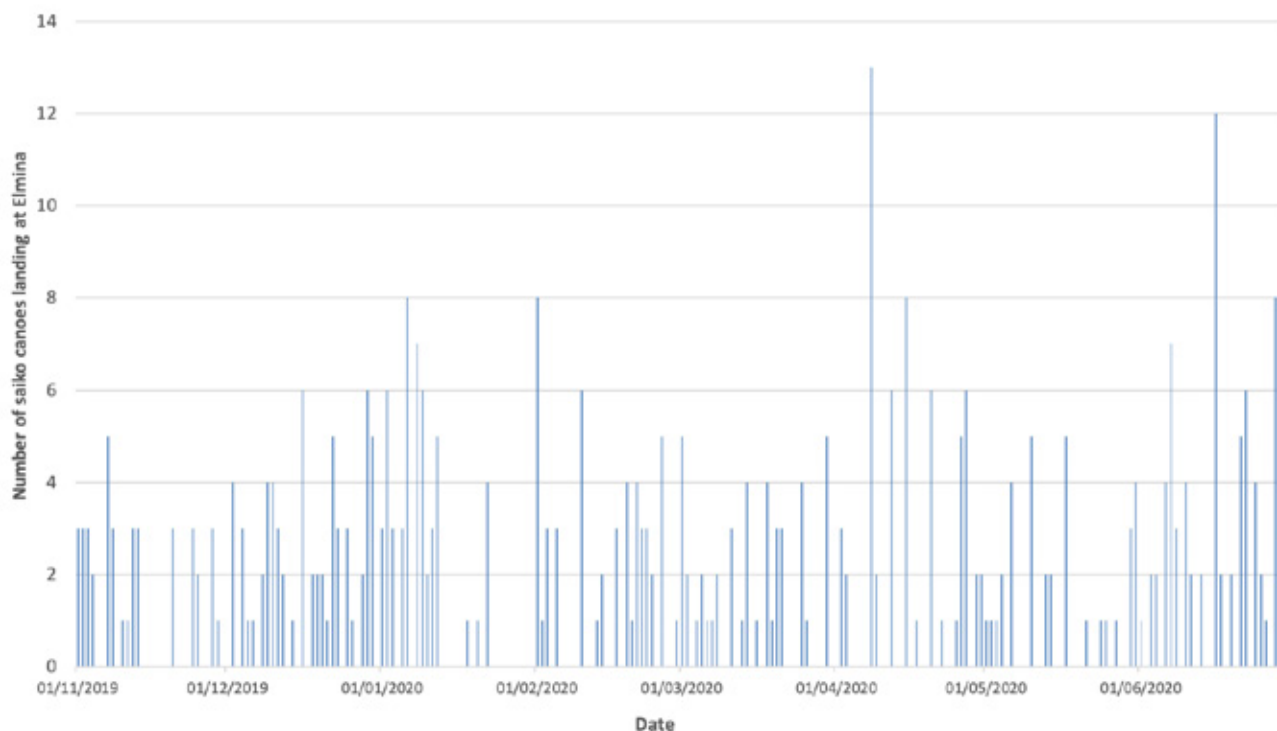


Figure 2:
A saiko canoe unloads blocks of fish trans-shipped from an industrial trawler (Elmina, Ghana - 26 June 2020)



Figure 3:
A saiko canoe unloads blocks of fish trans-shipped from an industrial trawler (Elmina, Ghana - 26 June 2020)



- 1 Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) (2014), cited in Fisheries Commission (2019). *2018 Annual Report*. Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development. April 2019. Unpublished.
- 2 EJF (2020). *The “people’s” fishery on the brink of collapse. Small pelagics in landings of Ghana’s industrial trawl fleet*. <https://ejfoundation.org/reports/thepeoples-fishery-on-the-brink-of-collapse-small-pelagics-in-landings-of-ghanasindustrial-trawl-fleet>
- 3 EJF and Hen Mpoano (2019). *Stolen at sea: How illegal “saiko” fishing is fuelling the collapse of Ghana’s fisheries*. <https://ejfoundation.org/reports/stolen-at-sea-how-illegal-saiko-fishing-is-fuelling-the-collapse-of-ghanas-fisheries>
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 EJF (2020). *The “people’s” fishery on the brink of collapse. Small pelagics in landings of Ghana’s industrial trawl fleet*. <https://ejfoundation.org/reports/thepeoples-fishery-on-the-brink-of-collapse-small-pelagics-in-landings-of-ghanasindustrial-trawl-fleet>
- 6 Section 132(2)(a) of the 2002 Fisheries Act, Act 625.
- 7 Section 88A of the 2002 Fisheries Act 625, as inserted by the 2014 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, Act 880.
- 8 Articles 16(2) and (3) of the Convention on Minimum Requirements for Access to the Fishery Resources of the Area of the Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC).
- 9 Anon (10.6.20). ‘Trawler re-arrested in Ghana for repeated illegal fishing crimes after refusing to pay fine’, *EJF*. <https://ejfoundation.org/news-media/notorious-trawler-re-arrested-in-ghana-for-repeated-illegal-fishing-crimes-after-refusing-to-pay-fine>. Accessed 8.7.20.
- 10 Lazar, N., Yankson K., Blay, J., Ofori-Danson, P., Markwei, P., Agbogah, K., Bannerman, P., Sotor, M., Yamoah, K. K., Bilisini, W. B. (2018). *Status of the small pelagic stocks in Ghana and recommendations to achieve sustainable fishing 2017*. Scientific and Technical Working Group. USAID/Ghana Sustainable Fisheries Management Project (SFMP). Coastal Resources Center, Graduate School of Oceanography, University of Rhode Island. GH2014_SCI042_CRC 22 pp. http://www.crc.uri.edu/download/GH2014_SCI042_CRC_FIN508.pdf
- 11 FAO (2019). *Report of the FAO/CECAF Working Group on the Assessment of Small Pelagic Fish – Subgroup South*. Elmina, Ghana, 12-20 September 2018. *Rapport du Groupe de travail FAO/COPACE sur l’évaluation des petits poissons pélagiques – Sous-groupe Sud*. Elmina, Ghana, 12-20 septembre 2018. CECAF/ECAF Series / COPACE/PACE Séries No. 19/81. Rome. <http://www.fao.org/3/i2545b/i2545b00.pdf>
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 Letter dated 15 November 2019 from the Ghana Industrial Trawlers Association (GITA) to the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development concerning the “*Suspension of transshipment of fish at sea from industrial trawlers to canoes*”.
- 14 Taylor Crabbe Initiative (TCi) (2018). *Legal opinion on transshipment in Ghana*. Submitted by TCi to EJF, May 2018. <https://ejfoundation.org/reports/legal-opinion-on-transshipment-in-ghana>
- 15 EJF and Hen Mpoano (2019). *Stolen at sea: How illegal “saiko” fishing is fuelling the collapse of Ghana’s fisheries*. <https://ejfoundation.org/reports/stolen-at-sea-how-illegal-saiko-fishing-is-fuelling-the-collapse-of-ghanas-fisheries>
- 16 Assuming an average catch per unit effort (CPUE) of 55 kg of fish caught per artisanal fishing trip, based on 159,726 metric tonnes of fish caught by 11,583 canoes fishing 250 days of the year. Figures taken from: Fisheries Commission (2019). *2018 Annual Report*. April 2019. Unpublished.
- 17 World Bank (2019), *Implementation Completion and Results Report 4979-GH, TFO10905-GH, on an International Development Association Credit in the amount of SDR 31.1 million (US\$50.3 million equivalent) and a Global Environment Facility Grant in the Amount of US\$3.5 million to the Republic of Ghana for a Ghana Project under the First Phase of the West Africa Regional Fisheries Program (P14775)*. 28 March 2019: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/866911554409721545/pdf/Ghana-Under-the-First-Phase-of-the-West-Africa-Regional-Fisheries-Program-Project.pdf>
- 18 McVeigh, K. and Dzradosi, N. (16.11.19), ‘The vanishing: Ghana’s defenders face new perils in fight against overfishing’, *The Guardian*. Accessed 8.7.20.
- 19 Anon (5.6.20), ‘Call for urgent action to end saiko to save the livelihoods of over 2.7 million Ghanaians’. <https://ejfoundation.org/reports/call-for-urgent-action-to-end-saiko-to-save-the-livelihoods-of-over-2-7-million-ghanaians>. Accessed 8.7.20.