U.N. urges foreign fishing fleets to halt "ocean grabbing"

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* Report says small-scale fishing needs promoting
* Says rules governing access to waters need tightening

By Alister Doyle

OSLO, Oct 30 (Reuters) - "Ocean grabbing" or aggressive industrial fishing by foreign fleets is a threat to food security in developing nations where governments should do more to promote local, small-scale fisheries, a study by a U.N. expert said on Tuesday.

The report said emerging nations should tighten rules for access to their waters by an industrial fleet that is rapidly growing and includes vessels from China, Russia, the European Union, the United States and Japan.

"Ocean-grabbing is taking place," Olivier de Schutter, the U.N. special rapporteur on the right to food and the report's author, told Reuters. "It's like land-grabbing, just less discussed and less visible."

The 47-page report on "Fisheries and the Right to Food", which said 15 percent of all animal protein consumed worldwide is from fish, will be presented to the U.N. General Assembly.

De Schutter said ocean grabbing involved "shady access agreements that harm small-scale fishers, unreported catch, incursions into protected waters, and the diversion of resources away from local populations."

The report cited the example of islands in the western and central Pacific that get only about 6 percent of the value of a $3 billion tuna fishery off their coasts. Foreign fishing fleets get the rest.

Equally, Guinea-Bissau nets less than 2 percent of the value of the fish caught off its coast under a deal with the EU. De Schutter said some countries where industrial fleets were based were already taking steps to tighten laws.

"What's getting worse is that the capacity of industrial fishing fleets is increasing," he said. Governments give an estimated $30-34 billion in subsidies to fishing each year.

That money is often spent on boat-building or fuel that skews competition.

"We need to do more to reduce the capacity of the industrial fishing fleets and to manage the fish stocks in a much more sustainable way," said de Schutter. Food security is also at risk from threats such as climate change and pollution, he said.

WASTEFUL

De Schutter said aquaculture was disproportionately concentrated in Asia which is responsible for 88 percent of all production.

"Extremely little has been done in Africa and Latin America in particular. There is a huge potential there," he said.

Fisheries received less attention than farming, he suggested, partly because the sector employed only about 200 million people globally. By contrast, the world has 1.5 billion small-scale farmers, he said.

The report said that local fishing was more efficient and less wasteful than industrial fishing, urging measures to promote small-scale fishing such as the creation of "artisanal fishing zones".

"Small-scale fishers actually catch more fish per gallon of fuel than industrial fleets, and discard fewer fish," it said. It praised some measures which have already been taken to promote local fishing - such as in Cambodia's biggest lake or off the Maldives.

Estimates of the scale of illegal catches range from 10-28 million tonnes, while some 7.3 million tonnes, or almost 10 percent of global wild fish catches were discarded as unwanted by-catches every year, the report said.

It said industrial fishing was by far the most wasteful.

Total global fish production was about 143 million tonnes - 90 million from wild fish catches and 53 million from fish farming, the report said.

De Schutter said fish farming would have to expand to feed a rising world population, now just above 7 billion. Population growth would raise demand by a forecast 27 million tonnes over the next two decades, he said. (Editing by Andrew Osborn)