

China will have to plug huge shortfall in fishery supply under new law

Chinese officials have reaffirmed an ambitious target to reduce fishing catch to 10 million tons from domestic waters over the next three years.

The three million-ton reduction is a significant slice of the country's overall seafood output from freshwater and seawater sources and suggests efficiencies or imports – or both – will have to rise significantly. Key species from domestic waters include squid, ribbonfish, flatfish, and croaker.

The statement was made during a national inspection tour of fishing ports by members of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the country's main legislative body. The decision will likely mean China will import more seafood, given government has also been reducing the national aquaculture footprint through a stronger enforcement of environmental laws.

China produced 64.5 million tons of seafood in 2018, up 0.19 percent, of which aquaculture accounted for 49.9 million tons, up 1.73 percent on the previous year. Distant-water fishing contributed 3.5 percent of the total volume, at 2.25 million tons.

Depletion of China's natural fishery resources has become an urgent issue requiring a quicker and more serious reduction of the national catch total, according to Wu Weihua, vice chairman of the Standing Committee, who also explained that fuel price subsidies paid to domestic water fishery firms will this year be cut to 40 percent of the 2014 level.

Similarly, China has committed itself to retiring 20,000 fishing vessels from its domestic waters by 2020, a reduction of 1.5 million kilowatts, Wu told fishermen and officials at a stop in Linjiang, Fujian Province. His delegation is touring the country for consultations on China's efforts to update its Fisheries Law, which was first published in 1986.



Wu's statement follows an initial announcement in December 2016 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs declaring the launch of a "fishing production reduction program," which effectively reduced the national catch by a quarter.

Government efforts to replenish fishing stocks through mass releases of fry – an increasingly common feature of government publicity efforts – were questioned by Wang Xumei, another member of the Standing Committee inspection team.

"Subsidies paid by government are not producing the results they should be," Xumei said. He who claims many companies contracted to release fry have been releasing "poor-quality" fry in order to pocket the subsidies.

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