

Turkish Fisherman Shot in Head as Fight Against Unsustainable Fishing Gets Ugly in Istanbul

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[Science](#) / [Ocean Conservation](#)

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The fight against overfishing in the waters around Istanbul took a dramatic and tragic turn this past weekend, when the leader of a local fishing co-op was shot in the head -- reportedly by illegal fishermen angry at his efforts to push for a crackdown on the practice.

Fisherman Ahmet Aslan lost his left eye in the [gun attack](#), which came after he had sent a scathing report describing problems with [illegal fishing](#) on the Bosphorus to the head office of the country's union of fishermen's associations, environmental activist Defne Koryürek told TreeHugger today.

Illegal Fishing On The Rise

"This incident is the very tip of the iceberg. With the limited [fish stocks](#) and the amount of debt fishermen are facing, we have been expecting something like this to happen for some time now," said Koryürek, whose Slow Food Istanbul group is part of a committee fighting against illegal fishing on which Aslan has been active.



A fish market in Istanbul.

Despite the severity of his injuries, Aslan is recovering and is expected to be released from the hospital Saturday afternoon. Members of local fishermen's co-ops and Slow Food Istanbul plan to be there to show their [support](#), and to call for stricter regulations on illegal fishing, which has increased sharply over the past year.

Enforcement Weak

"You cannot bring an illegal load of [cigarettes](#) through the Bosphorus, but for some reason the government keeps the punishments very weak when it comes to illegal fishing," Koryürek said. "We know of instances where an illegal trawler has been fined eight or nine times [without losing his license or his boat]. That shouldn't be happening."

Many local fishermen worked with Slow Food Istanbul on its successful campaign to increase the minimum catch size for *lifer*, an endangered [bluefish](#), but others vociferously [protested](#) the change, saying it would drive them out of business.

Consumers Can Help

Koryürek agrees that the fishermen are in a difficult position, often forced to take on large debts to equip boats that bring in ever-diminishing returns. "The bottom line is there are too many fishermen around the Marmara Sea to gather the few fish that are left," she told TreeHugger. "The future of fishing as a sector is not good, but as [consumers](#), we can help protect our waters by protecting our fishermen. We should be willing to pay more for fish."