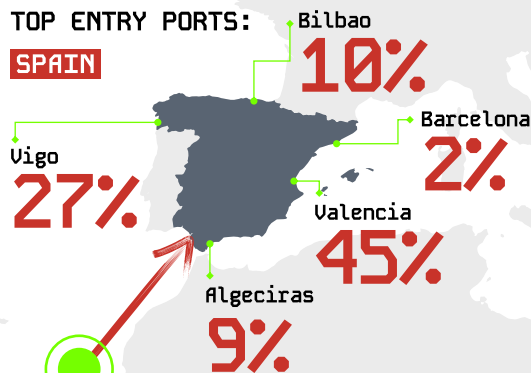


# The hidden face of imported squid in Spain

## Exploitative squid fishing puts Spanish markets and fishers at risk

Spain is the world's second-largest importer of squid and cuttlefish and plays a central role in the global squid trade. However, investigations show that Spanish importers may have unknowingly brought in squid linked to forced labour, overfishing, animal cruelty and environmental harm.

As the EU's primary entry point for squid, Spain is uniquely placed to take a leadership role in strengthening import controls and ensuring that seafood entering its market is not connected to human rights abuses or environmental destruction.



**UNREGULATED SQUID IMPORTS FROM MILE 201 VESSELS UNDERMINE SPAIN'S REGULATED FISHERS.**

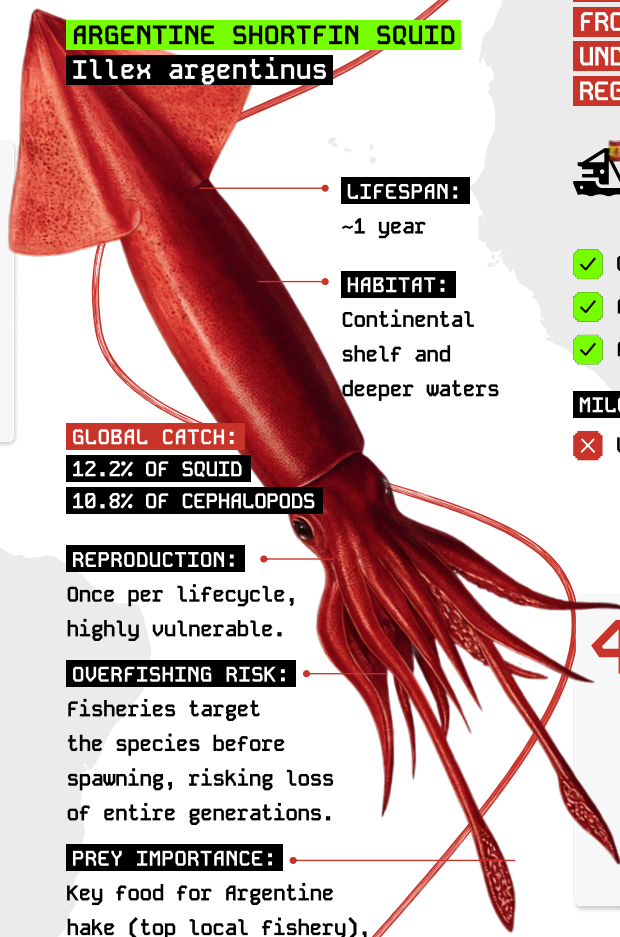
Around 30 Spanish trawlers operate lawfully under strict EU regulations.

- Onboard observers required
- Fisheries plans required
- Fishing areas closed for protection

**MILE 201 SQUID FISHING VESSELS**

Unregulated, unmonitored

**ARGENTINE SHORTFIN SQUID**  
***Illex argentinus***



**LIFESPAN:**

~1 year

**HABITAT:**

Continental shelf and deeper waters

**GLOBAL CATCH:**

12.2% OF SQUID

10.8% OF CEPHALOPODS

**REPRODUCTION:**

Once per lifecycle, highly vulnerable.

**OVERFISHING RISK:**

Fisheries target the species before spawning, risking loss of entire generations.

**PREY IMPORTANCE:**

Key food for Argentine hake (top local fishery), plus swordfish & tuna.

## #2

Spain is the world's second-largest importer of squid and cuttlefish.

275,000 tonnes/year (2019–2023 average)

**IMPORTS IN NUMBERS:**

20,000 tonnes/year of Argentine shortfin squid: €86 million value.

2019–2023:

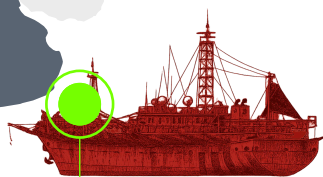
17% of Chinese-caught Argentine shortfin squid imported to the EU, Spain alone accounting for 10%.

47 Spanish importers unknowingly sourced squid from 5 Chinese companies implicated in human rights + environmental violations.

**ARGENTINA**

**MILE 201**

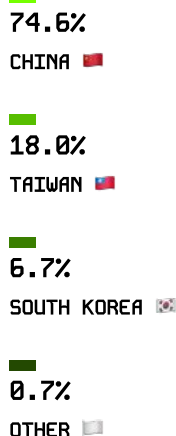
High seas past Argentina's EEZ, where unregulated vessels operate without oversight, control or accountability.



**SQUID JIGGER**

Machines jerk barbed "jigs" under bright lights to lure and catch squid.

**SQUID JIGGING FLEET COMPOSITION:**



**UNCONTROLLED + UNSUSTAINABLE**

91% of squid fishing effort is from Chinese vessels.

65% increase in fishing hours between 2019 and 2024.

85% surge in China's fishing effort, peaking at 350,528 hours in 2022.

343+ squid jigging vessels operate yearly at Mile 201 – visible from space.

# Environmental Justice Foundation investigation reveals systematic abuse at sea

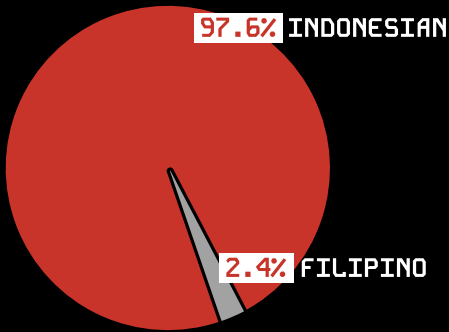
The Environmental Justice Foundation conducted an at-sea expedition with the Argentine Coast Guard (Feb–Mar 2025) to monitor distant-water squid vessels operating at Mile 201.

The scope and findings were guided by consultations with Argentine scientists, fisheries officers and Spanish seafood industry representatives.

## FORMS OF EXPLOITATION:

- 🔗 Human rights abuses
- 🐟 Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing
- 🐾 Animal cruelty

## CREW INTERVIEWED:



**169**

interviews with migrant crew who have worked on

**110**

squid jigging vessels between 2019 and 2024 covering roughly

**20.4%**

of the squid jigging fleet operating at Mile 201.

## DOCUMENTATION OF VIOLENCE:

SW Atlantic fishery crew interviews expose a pattern of human rights and environmental abuse, mainly on Chinese vessels.

Percentage of vessels where physical force was administered to control and repress workers:

**56.5%**

CHINESE-FLAGGED VESSELS 🇨🇳


**30.8%**

TAIWANESE-FLAGGED VESSELS 🇹🇼

**16%**

SOUTH KOREAN-FLAGGED VESSELS 🇰🇷


“  
When we made a mistake, the bosun would hit [the] shoulder or [...] back of the head.”



CREW MEMBER  
CHINESE SQUID JIGGER  
Interviewed by EJF  
January 2024

---

“  
There was violence every day.”



CREW MEMBER  
CHINESE SQUID JIGGER  
Interviewed by EJF  
February 2025

**29**

vessels implicated in worker death or physical violence.

**05**

crew deaths linked to four Chinese vessels.

**14**

vessels implicated in shark finning.

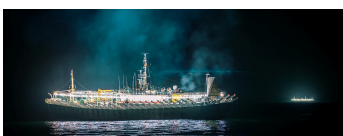
**09**

vessels implicated in obscuring of vessel identification.

**29**

vessels implicated in the harpooning of seals or walruses.

## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FOUNDATION'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SPANISH GOVERNMENT:



**01**

Spain can play a critical role in global ocean leadership by inspiring international focus on high-risk squid products, particularly from the Southwest Atlantic.

**02**

Spain must strengthen import controls and classify squid from Mile 201 as 'high-risk', ensuring products linked to forced labour or environmental harm stay out of Spanish and EU markets.

