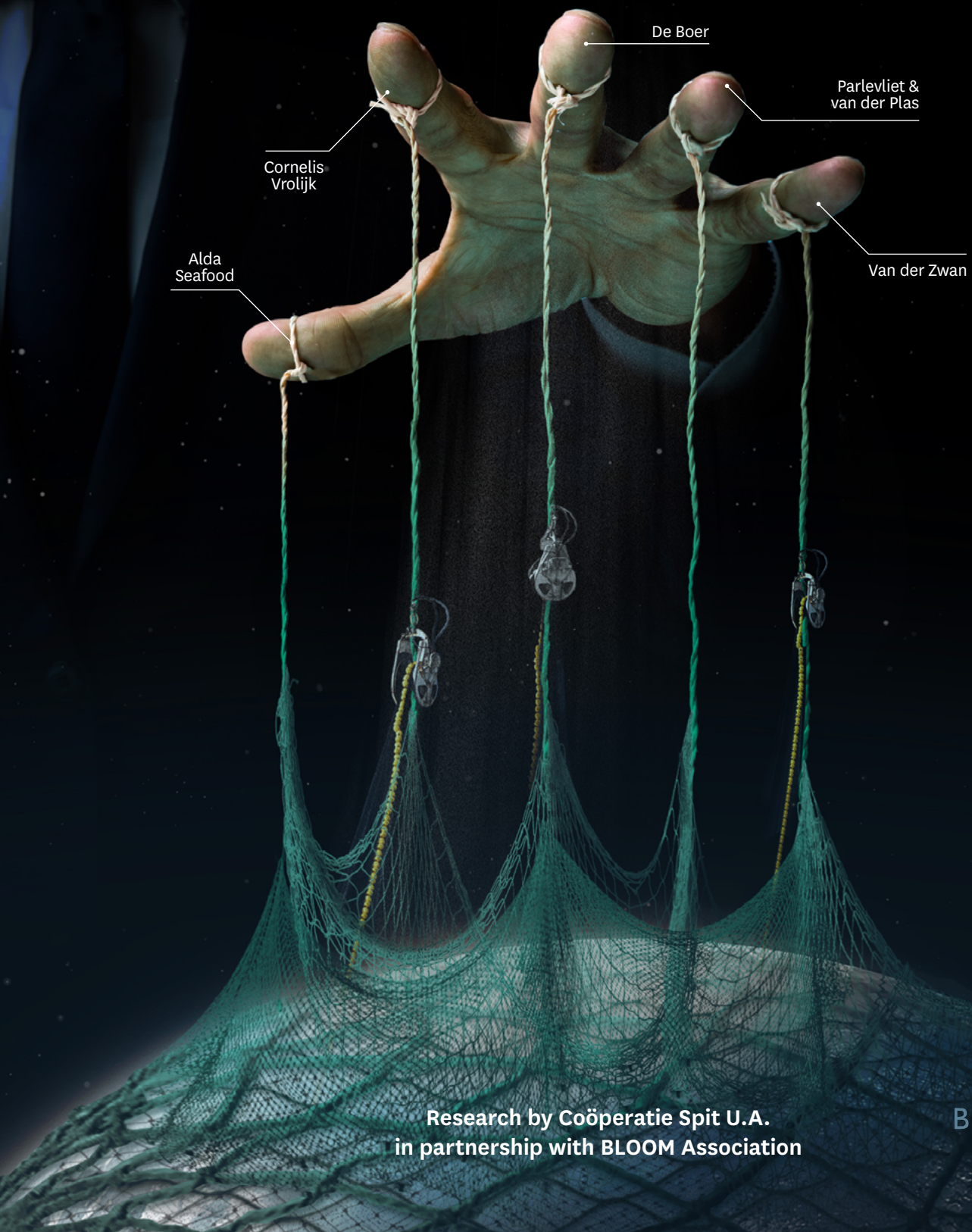
THE BIG 5

The grip of five Dutch corporate giants on the global ocean



Spit

BLOOM

Research by Coöperatie Spit U.A.
in partnership with BLOOM Association

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BLOOM, in collaboration with the "Spit" consortium of Dutch journalists, publishes a groundbreaking investigation into the activities and expansion strategies of five Dutch major companies who dominate industrial fishing in Europe and have extended their hold over the world's oceans. These five companies, nicknamed the "Big Five" — Parlevliet & Van der Plas, Cornelis Vrolijk, Van der Zwan, Alda Seafood and the De Boer family — control the entire production chain, from catch to plate, on a global scale. This study reconstructs the sprawling expanse of their subsidiaries, comprising around 400 companies and 230 vessels, as well as their complex commercial interconnections, to shed light on their hegemony.

Today, the Big Five's dominance constitutes a real oligopoly capable of influencing public decisions against the public interest. The Big Five's control over the European fishing industry is the result of permissive institutional mechanisms, political complicity, and intentionally opaque financial operations and structures. Some of the Big Five are now investing in real estate, revealing a harmful extractivist approach to wild resources: the opposite of the sustainable management advocated by the European Union. The Big five's approach maximizes short-term profits by turning fish into earnings to be invested elsewhere. In this way, the Big Five embody the most harmful form of financialized capitalism, one that drives public decision-making to privatize profits while socializing losses at the public's expense (destruction of marine ecosystems, jobs, coastal territories and public finances).

An opaque, interconnected network with global influence

Over the decades, the Big Five have built up a highly complex operational and financial network. They form a powerful network, sharing quotas, co-owning vessels, defending their common interests through joint lobbying and investing together in subsidiaries to increase their control over resources. Through international subsidiaries, the Big Five are members of **at least fifteen lobbying organisations** active in the European Union. Their powerful lobbying thus influences political decisions behind the scenes at the level of Member States and European institutions in an anti-democratic manner and contrary to the interests of European citizens.

Thanks to a complex network of subsidiaries, a fleet of technologically advanced vessels, and an aggressive acquisition strategy, these multinationals dominate the global fishing industry. This extreme concentration in the hands of a few players translates into an opaque stranglehold on fishery resources, to the detriment of marine ecosystems, artisanal fishers and the common good.

A giant fleet with destructive techniques

Their industrial logic is based on gigantic vessels and massive extraction capacity, which is incompatible with the preservation of healthy marine ecosystems. Together, the Big Five own around 230 fishing vessels, several of which are among the largest in the world. The most emblematic, the Annelies Ilena, is 145 meters long and catches 400 tons of fish a day (as much as 1,000 small-scale fishing boats do in a day). If you lined up all their ships in a row, they would stretch for almost 10 kilometres. **All Big Five vessels (except one) use destructive fishing techniques:** bottom trawling, pelagic trawling, demersal seining and fish aggregating devices (FADs) for tropical tuna. Their ecological footprint stretches across the globe, with their destructive gear deployed from the coasts of Africa to the Arctic, via Suriname and Chile.

Armed with fishing vessels, storage sheds, processing plants, distribution chains and even crew recruitment agencies - the Big Five control every stage of the fishing industry. This enables them to buy fish from their own subsidiaries at artificially low prices to reduce the wages paid to crews, who are often paid by the share, and to transfer profits to tax havens.

French fishing under Dutch control

After the Netherlands, it's in France that the Big Five have invested the most capital. 24 industrial vessels concentrating a large proportion of French quotas operate under the French flag via their subsidiaries: CFTO (Compagnie française du thon océanique) acquired by P&P in 2016 (10 vessels); Euronor and Compagnie des Pêches Saint-Malo, both acquired by P&P in 2011 (7 vessels combined); and France Pélagique (7 vessels), co-founded in 1988 by Cornelis Vrolijk. By sitting on bodies such as the Comité National des Pêches, the heads of the French subsidiaries give the Big Five a means of directly influencing the rules, in their own interests.

Fishing giants, frauds and corruption

Every company in the Big Five has been implicated in legal cases around the world. In Namibia, Peru, Norway and Cameroon, these companies and their executives have been accused or convicted of various offences, including illegal fishing, corruption related to obtaining fishing rights, tax evasion, “high-grading” (dumping the catch to replace it with fatter or more valuable species, causing high unreported fish mortality), unreported catches and marine pollution. Between 2012 and 2019, Icelandic company Samherji, which founded Alda Seafood in the Netherlands in 2019, was at the heart of the Fishrot corruption scandal in Namibia involving the payment of bribes to Namibian officials to obtain fishing quotas. One of the vessels that received corrupt quotas in Namibia, the Saga, was operated by Atlantex, then wholly owned by Samherji. The Saga also held European quotas (Polish in this case). In 2018, P&P acquired 50% of Atlantex at a knock-down price, and a few months later, P&P sold the Annelies Ilena to Atlantex to recover Polish quotas from the Saga, which in the meantime had fled to South America to launder its flag. These opaque and fraudulent operations demonstrate the predatory nature of these industrial giants.

Diversification into real estate reveals harmful extractive capitalism

Faced with the prospect of a depletion of fish populations, many of these fishing giants are beginning to redirect their investments towards real estate. This change is a sign that the extractive model has run its course. For example, the Van der Plas family recently sold its shares to the Parlevliet family, to concentrate on real estate. This development reflects the "scorched earth" economic logic analyzed by economist Colin Clark as early as the 1970s: as long as it is more profitable to overexploit a resource than to manage it sustainably, economic players give priority to the short term, even if this means compromising the ecological, social and economic future of their activities. **When fish become nothing more than a transitory profit lever, it is not only marine ecosystems that are at risk, but also the stability of coastal territories, food sovereignty and ultimately, the viability of our planet.**

Regaining control over the Big Five

None of this is inevitable. This system is the direct result of public policies that have allowed and encouraged the uncontrolled expansion of these companies. It is also the product of a system locked in opacity, where the economic interests of industrial players take precedence over the common good. Against this backdrop, we urgently need to fundamentally rethink the economic and political model that currently governs access to marine resources. **We must regain control of our fishing policies, protect artisanal fishers and the ocean from industrial appropriation, and move away from an extractivist economic model to build genuine social and ecological justice.** If we do nothing, it is not just biodiversity that will disappear, but also a certain vision of democracy and the common good, sacrificed on the altar of unbridled capitalist greed. There is still time to act, but the window is narrowing. Action requires political courage and independence from the harmful influence of industrial lobbies.

KEY FINDINGS

While the European fishing sector is going through a deep long-term crisis, five Dutch fishing corporations, nicknamed "the Big Five" [1], have built an empire based on the privatisation of resources, opacity, and an unprecedented concentration of power: Parlevliet & Van der Plas (P&P), Cornelis Vrolijk, Van der Zwan, Alda Seafood and De Boer Family.

Together, these five companies represent a turnover of

€2.4 BILLION (2023)

More than twice the turnover of the entire French fishing sector and around 40% of that of the entire European fishing fleet (€6.2 billion in 2020).



99.6%

of the vessels owned by the Big Five use destructive fishing techniques: bottom trawling, pelagic trawling and demersal seining. Their destructive fishing gears are deployed across the globe from the English Channel to the Arctic, and from West Africa to Chile.

The Big Five control around

230 VESSELS

including Europe's largest fishing vessels and the world's largest fishing vessel, the 145m-long Annelies Ilena.

Their combined capacity of 260,000 tonnes represents a sixth of all the fishing vessels in the EU and a cumulative length of 10 kilometres.

The volume of quotas held by these companies is opaque. However, P&P's director claimed in 2012 to manage 500,000 tonnes globally, which amounts to 1.5 times that of France's landings in 2022.



Each one of the Big Five has been implicated in a number of scandals: illegal fishing, a corruption scandal in Namibia, fishing gear sabotage, fisheries observer assault, pollution by oil spills, double accounting, unreported discards at sea, tax fraud and fishing regulation violations.

1 This refers to the 'Big Five' mammals of Africa that are popular with tourists on safaris — the lion, leopard, elephant, rhino and buffalo. The term was immortalised by Ernest Hemingway in 'Green Hills of Africa' (1935), at a time when these species were mainly prized by hunters and poachers.

These companies do not compete with each other: they form mutual alliances to crush other players.

The Big Five form a powerful network, sharing quotas, co-owning vessels, defending their common interests through joint lobbying and mutually investing to tighten control over ocean resources and maximise profits.

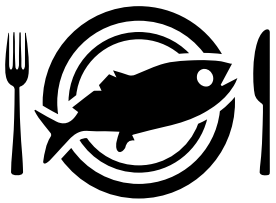
Their powerful lobbying shapes political decisions at both national and EU levels.

Through global subsidiaries, the Big Five wield influence inside key bodies (such as the Comité National des Pêches in France, the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations in the United Kingdom, and the Deutscher Fischerei Verband e.V. in Germany), steering rules in their favour.

FRANCE

is the first country country beyond the Netherlands in which the Dutch Big Five have invested, with 24 vessels operating under the French flag through Euronor, Compagnie des Pêches Saint Malo, Compagnie Française du Thon Océanique, and France Pélagique.





The Big Five control the entire chain

FROM TRAWL TO PLATE:

fishing, processing, sales and catering. This vertical integration allows them to buy fish at cheap cost from their own subsidiaries, shift profits to tax havens, minimise declared earnings and cut crew wages (as these are often based on the value of the catch).

The Big Five are now investing in real estate

, a strategic decision that reflects the cynicism of their strategy and their awareness of the depletion of resources, for which they are responsible.

METHODOLOGY

In order to map out the company structures, we used data from *Company.info*, *Orbis*, and *Northdata.com*. In order to map out the assets and activities of fishing vessels, we used data from *Equasis*, *Vesselfinder*, *MarineTraffic* and *Global Fishing Watch*.

Disclaimer: most of the data used comes from annual accounts from 2023. As a result, ship and company ownership may be outdated.

INTRODUCTION

The ocean has long been perceived as an inexhaustible source of food. Driven by this illusion of abundance, **governments have adopted public policies that subsidised the industrialisation of the fishing sector, financing the construction of ever larger and therefore more destructive vessels**. These policies have led to a dramatic increase in fishing capacity and effort worldwide. According to IPBES (the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services), **fishing has thus become the human activity with the greatest impact on marine biodiversity** over the past fifty years.[2]

Faced with the decline in fish populations inherent in this predatory growth of global fishing, the industry could have agreed on the sustainable management of marine resources. However, because of its insatiable thirst for profit, it chose instead to deploy a so-called 'triple expansion' model **by targeting new species, further offshore, and in deeper waters.**

After the Second World War, the transition from steam to diesel engines marked a turning point in fishing power. This increase in engine power led to the widespread use of towed fishing gear, particularly bottom trawls, which are large nets dragged along the seabed that cause considerable ecological damage. Modern fleets have also been equipped with sophisticated fish-detection technologies (sonar, radar, GPS) allowing them to locate and exploit the richest fishing grounds. These technological innovations have rendered the extraction of marine life increasingly efficient. In the post-war period, the development of this new industrial model led to an unprecedented increase in catches, which peaked for Europe in 1974.[3]

In recent years, **the scarcity of fish populations, combined with rising fuel prices and multiple geopolitical crises, has plunged the sector into a long-term economic crisis.** Most European industrial shipowners owe their survival solely to the generosity of European States, which **shower public subsidies on a sector that is structurally loss-making due to its production costs and high fuel consumption.** Today, just **1% of the EU's largest fishing vessels account for nearly half of all marine fish catches.** This extreme concentration of fishing power is not accidental. It reflects a deliberate strategy by industrial fishing companies aimed at dominating a sector that is increasingly marked by overexploitation and ecosystem collapse. These dynamics are identical in the Netherlands. **With large fishing quotas, modern fleets, vertically integrated operations, and considerable assets, five companies have established themselves as powerful players** – not only in their home country, but also in European and global markets: **Parlevliet & Van der Plas, Cornelis Vrolijk, Van der Zwan, Alda Seafood, and the De Boer family.** In this report, we examine the total assets and fishing activities of these **"Big Five"**, reconstructing for the first time the sprawling extent of their ownership structures and their complex commercial ties in order to shed light on the influence of this powerful network on the global ocean.

2 IPBES (2019), p28, *Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*, https://zenodo.org/records/3553579

3 See BLOOM report *S'affranchir du chalut* : https://bloomassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Rapport_SaffranchirDuChalut.pdf (in French)

BIG FIVE OVERVIEW

A global empire

In 2023, the five biggest Dutch companies Parlevliet & Van der Plas, Cornelis Vrolijk, Van der Zwan, Alda Seafood and the De Boer family owned around 230 fishing vessels between them: from small shrimp trawlers to the largest floating fish factories in the world. If lined up end to end, these combined length of these ships would reach nearly 10 kilometers. It would take two hours to walk the distance covered by these ships.

The fishing techniques used by these companies rely almost exclusively on towed gear, with 99.6% of vessels engaged in bottom trawling, pelagic trawling, demersal seining, and fishing with fish aggregating devices (FADs)[4] for tropical tuna. This dominance of towed gear goes hand in hand with the magnitude of increasingly large and powerful vessels, capable of sweeping vast and deep fishing areas to harvest massive quantities of fish.

These Big Five collectively achieved a turnover of €2.4 billion. The combined balance sheet value of these Big Five amounted to €2.3 billion in 2023.

After the Netherlands, France is the country in which the Dutch Big Five have invested the most, with 24 vessels operating under the French flag through their subsidiaries: CFTO acquired by P&P in 2016 (10 vessels);[5] Euronor[6] and Compagnie des Pêches Saint-Malo, both acquired by P&P in 2011 (7 vessels combined);[7] and France Pélagique (7 vessels), which was founded in 1988 by Cornelis Vrolijk.

The UK ranks third in terms of vessels owned by the Big Five, with 18 vessels, enabling it to maintain control of fishing areas and quotas despite Brexit, which was overwhelmingly voted for by British fishers in the hope of regaining control over their waters.

In terms of tonnage, Germany ranks second despite having only seven vessels — a figure explained by their size: they are exclusively factory ships ranging from 81 to 141 metres in length. Investment in Germany is primarily concentrated in the processing sector, with 30 subsidiaries operating across the country.

In Nigeria, the British subsidiary of Cornelis Vrolijk holds a third of the shares in a vast shrimp trawler fleet of 72 vessels.

The degree of transnational organisation of these companies is also visible from the different flags their vessels fly, and the countries in which they own subsidiaries (see the table below).

The Big Five, allies rather than rivals

These companies do not really compete with each other. Instead, they form alliances to further their expansion. They work together in order to pool or exchange fishing quotas so they can operate more efficiently. They also jointly own subsidiaries in joint-ventures and have shared ownership of certain vessels.

4 See BLOOM's report *Tuna War Games*: https://bloomassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/tuna-war-games.pdf

5 https://www.intrafish.com/fisheries/p-p-completes-acquisition-of-french-tuna-group/1-1-767281

6 https://www.intrafish.com/news/p-amp-p-samherji-buy-again/1-1-629445

7 https://www.intrafish.com/news/sources-p-amp-p-samherji-buy-french-surimi-group/1-1-633270

Distribution by country of subsidiaries and vessels owned by the Big Five

Country	Number of flagged vessels	Combined gross tonnage	Share of gross tonnage volume	Number of subsidiaries
Netherlands	26	54290	21.2%	226
France	24	34380	13.4%	22
United Kingdom	18	18702	7.3%	38
Faroe Islands	12	18818	7.3%	3
Germany	7	36744	14.3%	30
Norway	6	16171	6.3%	4
Lithuania	6	33332	13.0%	3
USA	2	4367	1.7%	3
Portugal	2	4274	1.7%	4
Poland	2	19536	7.3%	3
Latvia	1	2299	0.9%	2
Canada	1	4642	1.8%	5
Denmark	1	2223	0.9%	1
Italy	1	2137	0.8%	1
Spain	1	4290	1.7%	6
Nigeria	72[8]			2
Suriname	8			4

TABLE 1.A

Distribution by country of subsidiaries owned by the Big Five

Country	Number of subsidiaries
Namibia	12
Cyprus	4
Cote d'Ivoire	3
Curaçao	3
Estonia	2
Peru	2
St. Lucia	2
Ireland	2
Iceland	1
Mauritania	1
Mauritius	1
Bulgaria	1
Qatar	1
Morocco	1
India	1
Belize	1
Madagascar	1
Belgium	1
Hong Kong	1
Ghana	1
Romania	1

TABLE 1.B

8 The gross tonnage of most of the vessels in Suriname and Nigeria was not available in the online databases.

Scan me to access to the dynamic version online



Figure 1: *Global network of the susidiaries and vessels owned and jointly owned by the Big Five: De Boer, Van der Zwan, Cornelis Vrolijk, Alda Seafood and P&P*

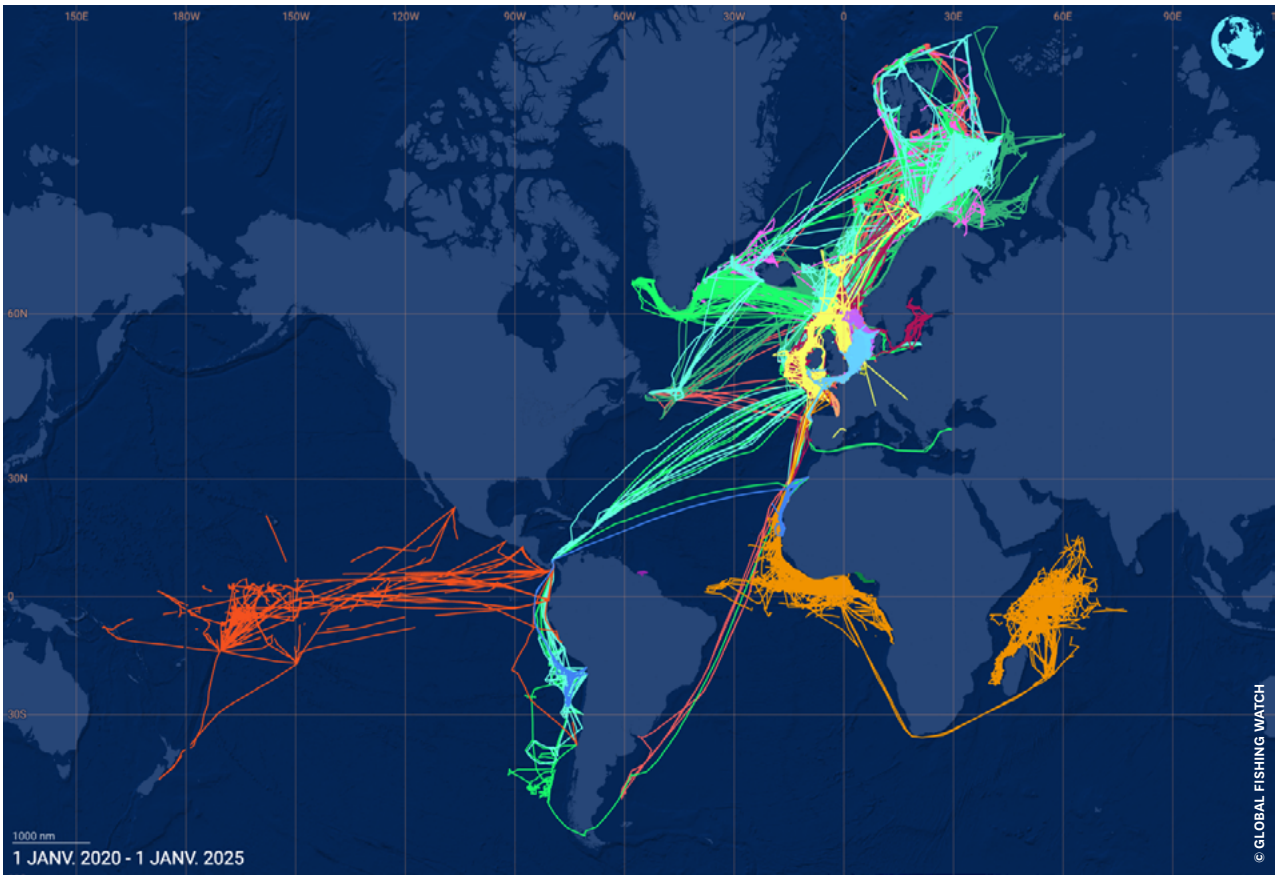


Figure 2: *Trajectories of vessels operated by the Big Five between 1 January 2020 and 1 January 2025*

In total, the five biggest Dutch fishing companies are members of at least fifteen lobbying organisations active in the European Union.[9] For instance, pelagic factory ships form a particularly **influential lobby organisation, the Pelagic Freezer Trawler Association (PFA), with eight member companies in six countries** (the Netherlands, France, Germany, Lithuania, Poland and the United Kingdom). These companies, which own 18 factory trawlers, are all subsidiaries of P&P, Alda Seafood, van der Zwan and Cornelis Vrolijk, which enables them to effectively defend their interests. A Freedom of Information (FOI) request revealed how the Dutch government actively supports these companies, particularly by facilitating quota exchanges with other countries.[10]

Opacity behind the quotas controlled by the Big Five

The most significant asset for these companies lies in their fishing rights. However, data on these are difficult to map out, as quota ownership is not transparent in many European countries. **The European Commission made an attempt to investigate this issue, also concluding that it is hard to find out exactly who owns what.**[11] The United Kingdom is the only country with a public register, where Fixed Quota Allocations (FQAs) are assigned to vessels.

9 Found in the EU lobbying register: Deutscher Hochseefischerei-Verband, AIPCE-CEP (through visfederatie), bottomfishingalliance.eu, European Tuna Group (Europeche), France Pelagique, EAPO, Lithuanian Long Distance Fisheries Association, PFA, Seafood Importers and Processers Alliance (through visimporteurs.nl), LDAC, NSAC, PELAC, DOPR, UAPF, ANOP, CNPMEM

10 https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/woo-besluiten/2023/09/15/besluit-op-woo-verzoek-over-externe-contacten-pelagische-visserij

11 https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-03/StudyOwnership-EMFF2016.pdf

[12] From this we find that the De Boer family owns just over 100,000 FQA units in the UK, making it by far the largest flatfish company in Britain. Through its UK flagged vessel Frank Bonefaas, Cornelis Vrolijk owns over 450,000 FQAs for pelagic species such as herring and mackerel.



Privatising fishing rights

With the introduction of individual transferable fishing quotas (ITQ), fishing rights have been largely privatised. Fishing companies that own a large number of quotas can use them as collateral to obtain loans, which allows them to invest in more efficient vessels, cold storage facilities, new fishing rights, and so on. The system of individual transferable quotas results in even larger profits for big companies, while small-scale fishers find themselves in financial difficulty because they have to rent quotas in order to be able to fish.[13]

Quotas can also be subleased to other fishers who do not have their own. They can even be subject to price financial speculation, artificially creating a shortage of certain fish species in order to drive up market prices. **This logic benefits companies that already hold large quotas, giving them an almost insurmountable advantage.**

In social sciences, this is referred to as the Matthew effect, in reference to a passage from the Bible: "For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them." - Matthew 25:29.

The Dutch, as a mercantile nation, understood these dynamics perfectly when these transferable quota systems became popular in the 1980s. **They bought fishing rights and fleets in other countries when prices were low, and are still profiting from those investments now.** Another factor that worked to their advantage was that fishing rights are often allocated on the basis of historical catches. The Dutch were the first to operate large freezer-trawlers, which made it possible to freeze catches directly on board the vessel so that they could travel further stay at sea longer. This enabled them to achieve much higher catch volumes than others.

12 An FQA (Fixed Quota Allocation) unit is an abstract measurement used to calculate a vessel's share of national fishing quotas. The actual amount of fish an FQA unit represents can vary each year. It depends on the total quota allocated to the UK by the EU, as well as any adjustments made by UK fisheries authorities before distributing the quota based on FQA holdings. https://www.fqaregister.service.gov.uk/

13 https://www.ouest-france.fr/economie/economie-de-la-mer/enquete-quotas-transferables-a-qui-profite-le-poisson-7171194 Also see for example: https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/competing-fish-how-one-dutch-company-slowly-taking-over-much-europes-fishing-sector

Vertical integration to control the entire supply chain

Most of these companies are vertically integrated. **This means they control the entire supply chain, from the fish in the sea to the fish on the plate.** They do not limit themselves to fishing, but are also involved in processing, trade and sale of fish. In addition to their vessels, these companies often own processing plants, cold storage facilities, fish and chip shops, and even their own recruitment agencies. This model gives them a considerable economic advantage, since crew members are often paid in a share of the catch. Thus, by selling the ship's fish to their own sales subsidiary at a low price, which in turn sells the fish to a foreign fish importer at a low price, **the profit can be shifted to countries with favourable tax regimes. On paper, the fishing company makes less profit, which means it can pay sailors less while minimising its tax bill.** This control over the entire chain also facilitates the use of so-called transfer pricing, which involves selling seafood products to companies belonging to the same group in order to artificially raise or lower prices.

From fishing to real estate investment

In addition to fishing rights, vessels, and processing plants, **these companies invest their assets in real estate, not only in buildings related to fishing but also in residential real estate, such as high-rise appartment buildings.**

In a recent development, the Van der Plas family has sold its shares to the Parlevliet family, which thus became the sole shareholder of P&P. Van der Plas now intends to focus on real estate. It should be noted that the Van der Plas family, like the Van der Zwan family, is involved in large-scale real estate activities. Fisheries economists fear that this could be a warning signal that, as a result of overfishing, the return on investments in the fishing industry is declining. **However, the principle of quoats was precisely to avoid overfishing in order to preserve the long-term profitability of the industry. If fishing companies can so easily transfer their investments to real estate, they have even less reason to be concerned about the sustainable management of fishery resources.** In other words, overfishing is becoming a short-term profitability strategy rather than a long-term risk, reducing any incentive to adopt sustainable management practices.[14]



Zeeland: Cornelis Vrolijk's factory ship

Fishing giants, global frauds

Each of the five companies has been implicated in controversies or legal cases all around the world, including in Namibia, Peru, Norway and Cameroon. These companies and their executives have been accused or convicted of various offenses such as **illegal fishing, corruption linked to fishing rights, tax evasion, highgrading** (discarding the catch to replace it with fatter or more valuable species, causing high unreported fish mortality), **unreported catches, marine pollution, and failure to comply with regulations or attempts to circumvent them.** Some legal cases are still ongoing.

14 See, for example, this paper by fisheries economist Daniel Bromley: https://www.vliz.be/imisdocs/publications/ocrd/252537.pdf

WHO ARE THE BIG FIVE?

Parlevliet & Van Der Plas
(P&P Group)

Year of establishment
1950

Turnover (2023)
€1.5 BILLION

Balance sheet value (2023)
€1.3 BILLION

Residency
KATWIJK, THE NETHERLANDS



Jan Maria: P&P's factory ship

P&P: Everything everywhere all at once

P&P is a Dutch fishing company that has grown to become the largest fish processing company in Europe. It was founded in 1950 by Dirk Parlevliet and the brothers Dirk and Jan van der Plas. Starting as a small herring trading business with 50 guilders and an old truck, the company has since expanded significantly. P&P has benefited greatly from the system of transferable fishing quotas, which have steadily increased in value over the years. For example, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, P&P acquired a significant portion of the East German long-distance fleet as well as a large volume of British quotas. **P&P currently employs over 8,000 people and operates in 19 countries.** The company manages the entire supply chain from catch to plate, with a turnover of €1.5 billion in 2023. It is involved in the fishing of both pelagic and demersal fish species, shellfish and shrimp, making it one of the largest fishing conglomerates in the world.

A study by Seas at Risk shows that between 2013 and 2022, P&P's asset value grew at a compound annual growth rate of 13%, rising from €458 million to €1.4 billion. Over the same period, its turnover increased at a compound annual growth rate of 15%, reaching €1.6 billion in 2022.[15] **This strong growth can be attributed to an active policy of company acquisitions.**

15 https://seas-at-risk.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/R6_Political-Socio-Economy-of-EU-Fisheries_4thApril-FINAL-1.pdf

The P&P joint-owned fleet

Vessel name	IMO	Length	Type	Flag	Yr built	Tonnage
Borgarin	9278258	78 m	Trawler	FO	2003	2921
Nordingur	9281633	69 m	Trawler	FO	2003	2017
Skoraberg	8825913	35 m	Trawler	FO	1988	481
Fuglberg	8825901	35 m	Trawler	FO	1989	481
Polarhav	9295804	35 m	Trawler	FO	2004	592
Safir	8414128	32 m	Trawler	FO	1984	305
Smaragd	8414142	32 m	Trawler	FO	1986	310
Stjornan	9295799	37 m	Trawler	FO	2004	592
Gadus	9907067	88 m	Fish Factory	FO	2023	5997
Arctic Viking	8517437	58 m	Trawler	FO	1986	1720
Pison	8610693	41 m	Trawler	FO	1987	593
Lodairo	9690676	86 m	Trawler	ES	2015	4290
Kirkella	9808405	81 m	Trawler	UK	2018	3976
Farnella (out of service)	9211808	40 m	Trawler	BZ	2000	667
Brites	7107431	80 m	Trawler	PT	1971	1926
Santa Princesa (out of service)	8609357	66 m	Trawler	BZ	1987	2114
Santa Princesa	9048902	66 m	Trawler	PT	1992	2348
Fisher Bank	9193549	34 m	Trawler	FR	1999	615
Otter Bank	9219721	39 m	Trawler	FR	2000	756
Bressay Bank	9261499	45 m	Trawler	FR	2002	826
Cap Saint Georges	9293014	43 m	Trawler	FR	2003	885
André Leduc	9294915	44 m	Trawler	FR	2004	836
Emeraude	9799898	81 m	Trawler	FR	2018	3976
Joseph Roty II (out of service)	7362500	90 m	Factory Ship	FR	1975	3188
Annelies Ilena	9204556	145 m	Factory Ship	PL	2000	14464
Alina	8918318	104 m	Freezer Trawler	PL	1990	5099
Dorado 2	8817540	67 m	Trawler	LV	1989	2299
Vilkas	8505484	74 m	Trawler	LT	1985	3751
Taurus	8411023	60 m	Trawler	LT	1985	1780
Lokys	9226736	70 m	Trawler	LT	2001	2772
Ieva Simonaityte	8607218	120 m	Factory Ship	LT	1989	7765
Simonas Daukantas	8607220	120 m	Factory Ship	LT	1989	7765

TABLE 2.A

Jointly owned with JFK Troll / Hanus Hansen (on paper, P&P has a 33% stake)

Jointly owned with Alda Seafood

Jointly owned with Magnus Roth

P&P's fleet

Vessel name	IMO	Length	Type	Flag	Yr built	Tonnage
Margiris	8301187	144 m	Factory Ship	LT	1997	9499
Jan Maria	9917397	80 m	Factory Ship	GE	2024	5997
Annie Hillina	9973432	112 m	Factory Ship	NL	2024	9800
Mark	9690688	91 m	Factory Ship	GE	2015	4248
Dirk Dirk	8209171	95 m	Pelagic Trawler	NL	1983	3181
Helen Mary	9126364	117 m	Pelagic Trawler	GE	1996	7278
Gerda Maria	8716928	81 m	Trawler	GE	1990	1825
Ocean Tiger	9136383	60 m	Shrimp Trawler	DK	1997	2223
Maartje Theadora	9182801	141 m	Pelagic Trawler	GE	2000	9082
Christina Maria	8997584	23 m	Shrimp Trawler	NL	2001	192
Gueotec	8912986	72 m	Tuna purse seiner	FR	1991	1692
Gueriden	8912998	82 m	Tuna purse seiner	FR	1991	2255
Avel Vad	9128520	67 m	Tuna purse seiner	FR	1996	1598
Cap Sainte Marie	9168063	67 m	Tuna purse seiner	FR	1998	1596
Cap Saint Vincent	9225536	67 m	Tuna purse seiner	FR	2000	1169
Sterenn	9225548	67 m	Tuna purse seiner	FR	2000	1606
Gevred	9741097	77 m	Tuna purse seiner	FR	2016	2357
Pendruc	9741102	77 m	Tuna purse seiner	FR	2016	2357
Kersaint	9747572	40 m	Support vessel	FR	2015	424
Cap Bojador	8908026	61 m	Tuna purse seiner	FR	1990	973
Torre Italia	9151084	82 m	Tuna purse seiner	IT	1997	2137

TABLE 2.B

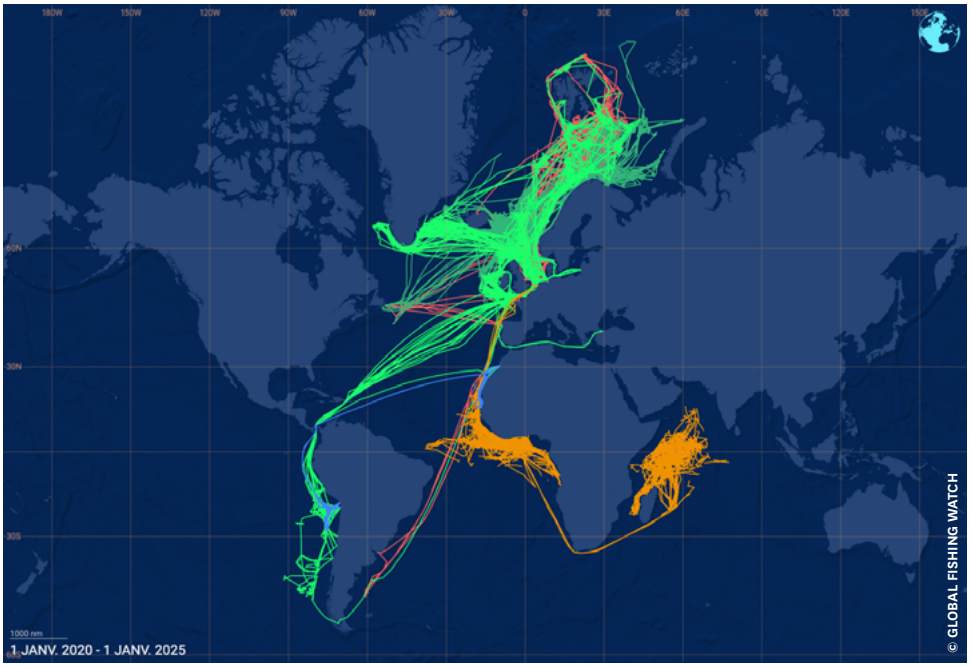


Figure 3: *Trajectories of vessels operated by P&P between 1 January 2020 and 1 January 2025*

UK Fisheries: an empire within an empire

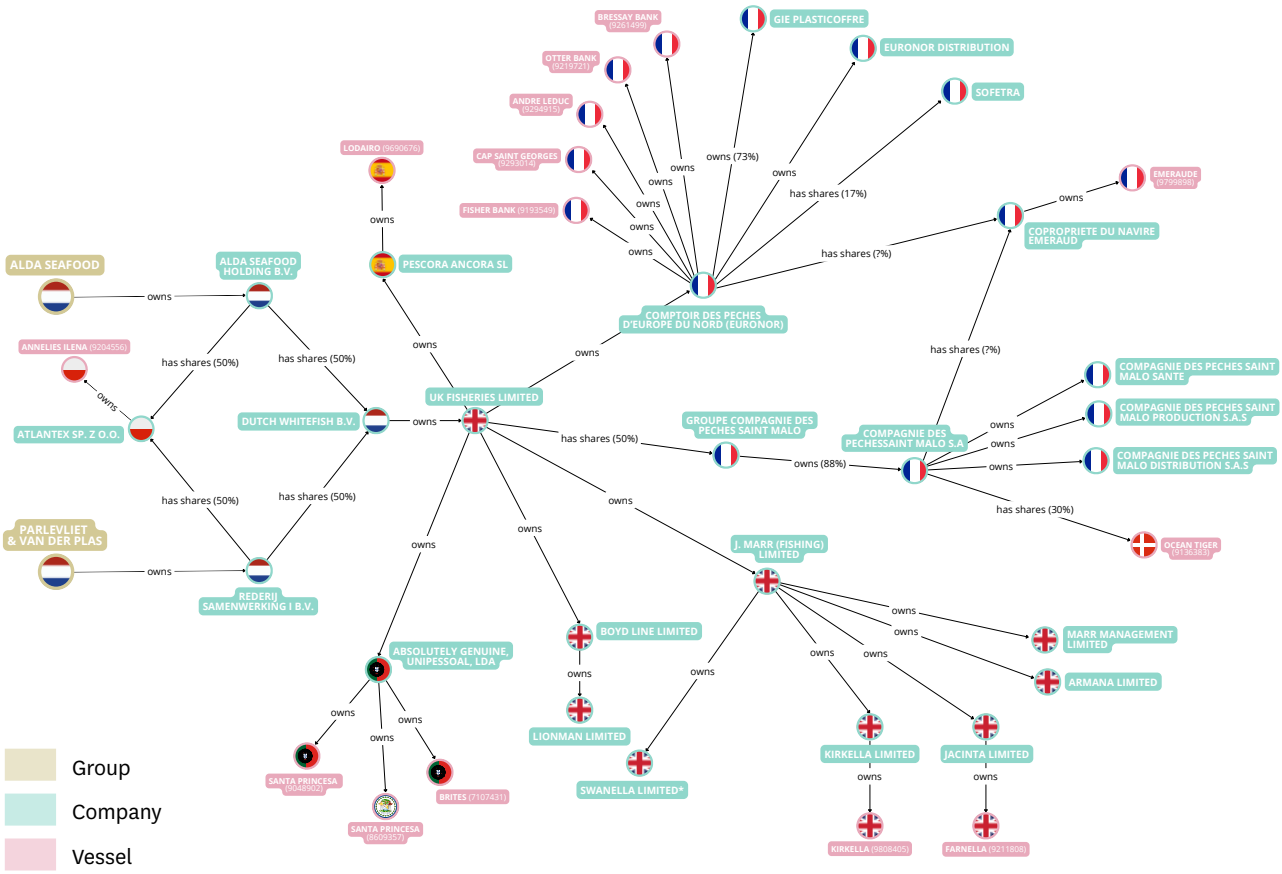


Figure 4: *Global network of the subsidiaries and ships owned by UK Fisheries (jointly owned by P&P and Alda Seafood)*

Since 2011, UK Fisheries has been jointly owned by P&P and Alda Seafood. The group operates a diversified fishing fleet under British, Spanish, Portuguese and French flags, with a focus on whitefish and shrimp across key northern Atlantic regions. These include the Barents Sea, the North Sea, and the Northwest Atlantic, although they also make trips to Canadian and Argentine waters. The group's structure includes several subsidiaries:

- **Pesquera Ancora** (Spain)
- **Absolutely Genuine** (Portugal)
- **Euronor** (France), which concentrates its operations in the North Sea. The vessel Farnella was previously part of the fleet and was sold to Namibia.
- **La Compagnie des Pêches Saint-Malo** (France), which specialises in the harvesting of blue whiting and its processing into surimi. Together with Euronor, this company also owns Emeraude, an 81-metre bottom trawler.

The Spanish and Portuguese companies were acquired for their fleet, which holds a significant amount of cod quota in arctic waters. The Spanish vessel Lodairo alone holds 52% of all Spanish cod quotas in NAFO (Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization) managed areas in the North Atlantic, and 52% of the Spanish quota in Norwegian waters in the Barents Sea and the North Atlantic. In addition, they have quotas in Canadian waters in the Northwest Atlantic (Grand Banks).[16]

16 https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-03/StudyOwnership-EMFF2016.pdf



Figure 5: *Trajectories of UK Fisheries vessels including Euronor, la Compagnie des Pêches Saint-Malo, Pesquera Ancora, Absolutely Genuine, co-owned by P&P and Alda Seafood*

In 2024, the Compagnie des Pêches Saint-Malo invested €15 million to install a surimi-base production unit aboard the Annelies Ilena, a 145-metre pelagic trawler flying the Polish flag, co-owned by P&P and Alda Seafood through the subsidiary Atlantex. This investment was intended to replace the aging Joseph Roty II. To enable this transaction, France exchanged French blue whiting quotas with Poland for Arctic cod quotas, for the benefit of the French-flagged trawler Emeraude, sparking controversy in France.[17]



Figure 6: *Trajectories of Euronor vessels, co-owned by P&P and Alda Seafood*

Feeding markets, draining seas: the Dutch and German supertrawlers' grip on Africa and South America

The pelagic fleet operates worldwide with an emphasis on the northern Atlantic Ocean, off the west Coast of Africa and in the Pacific, as well as off the coast of Chile. It consists mainly of Dutch and German flagged supertrawlers that can stay at sea for weeks at a time. The catch is usually entirely frozen on board and unloaded in the Dutch port of IJmuiden.[18]



Figure 7: *Trajectories of P&P's fleet of pelagic trawlers*

Superpower and interference in the Faroe Islands

In the Faroe Islands, P&P co-owns JFK Troll, one of the largest fishing companies with a fleet that operates throughout the North Atlantic. On paper, P&P is the minority shareholder. However, the Faroese press revealed that that JFK Troll is largely financed by P&P through a Norwegian holding. This financial leverage may give P&P more influence than the nominal value of its share in JFK Troll.[19] P&P also used to own a factory on the Faroe Islands, but it was recently sold.[20]

17 https://bloomassociation.org/le-dossier-annelies-ilena/

18 https://agrimatie.nl/PublicatiePage.aspx?subpubID=2526&themaID=2276&sectorID=3534 for 2023: 'In terms of volume, Nigeria is the largest export market with 15%, accounting for 199,800 tonnes (0.2 billion kg). Exports to African countries consist mainly of frozen pelagic whole fish, such as herring, blue whiting, mackerel and horse mackerel.'

19 https://dagur.fo/frihedsbrevet-dokumentarur-avdukar-skipad-logarbrot-i-foroysku-fiskivinnuni

20 https://faroebusinessreport.com/seafood-fisheries-aquaculture/pelagos-acquires-pp-faroe-pelagic-factory-in-kollafjordur-to-become-faroe-islands-largest-operator-of-freezing-plants/

In 2017, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte was accused of interfering in the internal affairs of the Faroe Islands over a proposed fisheries reform.[21] The reform, led by Faroese Fisheries Minister Høgni Hoydal, aimed to nationalise and annually redistribute fishing quotas to prevent monopolisation by large companies. Rutte allegedly contacted the Faroese Prime Minister to warn that passing the law could harm trade relations with the EU, a move seen as protecting the interests of P&P.

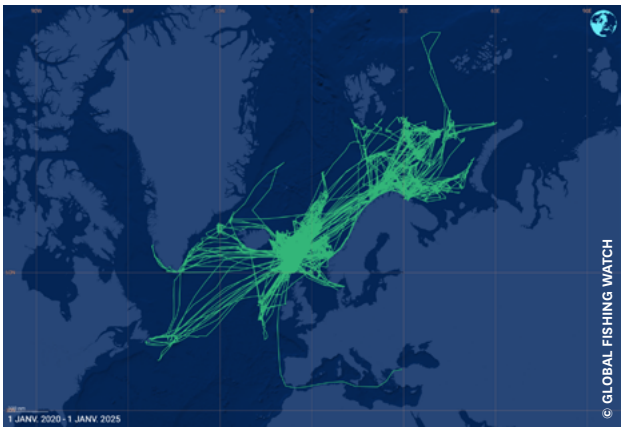


Figure 8: *P&P's Faroese fleet, co-owned by Hanus Hansen's JFK Troll*

Baltlanta, co-owned by P&P and a Norwegian businessman with Russian ties

In 2020, P&P acquired Baltlanta, a company operating two pelagic trawlers that were mainly active in West Africa and South America. **Baltlanta was co-owned by Magnus Roth, a Norwegian businessman who was formerly closely associated with Norebo, one of Russia's largest fishing conglomerates.[22]** Roth co-founded Norebo with the Russian billionaire Vitaly Orlov but eventually exited the partnership following a legal dispute, leaving Orlov as the sole owner of the Russian fishing giant.[23]

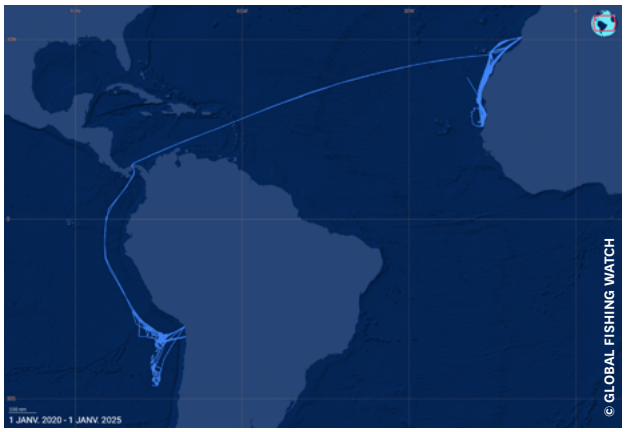


Figure 9: *P&P's Lithuanian flagged Ieva Simonaityte and Simonas Daukantas, co-owned by the Roth family, fish in Western Africa and the Pacific*

A French tuna empire: P&P at the helm of CFTO

The tuna fishing activities consist of two fleets, one in the southern Atlantic Ocean, with Abidjan as the home port, and one in the Indian Ocean, with the Seychelles and Madagascar as the main ports. **The ownership is held through P&P's French subsidiary CFTO (Compagnie Française du Thon Océanique), bought by Diederik Parlevliet in 2016.[24]** The vessels operate under the French flag (together with one Italian-flagged vessel). P&P also owns factories in the countries where tuna is canned. Recently, P&P sold three tuna purse seiners to the company Rawanq Al Salam International in Oman. The director of this company is Egill Helgi Arnason, a former director of Samherji who was implicated in the Fishrot scandal in Namibia.[25] Although the vessels were sold to Rawanq,[26] P&P will, through CFTO, continue to manage the vessels.[27]

21 https://www.groene.nl/artikel/de-quota-worden-duur-betaald
22 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norebo#cite_note-7
23 https://www.intrafish.com/legal/magnus-roth-shelling-out-35-million-to-buy-out-orlovs-share-of-hong-kong-firm/2-1-745710
24 https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-eco/2016/07/02/97002-20160702FILWWW00033-thon-cfto-rachete-par-un-groupe-neerlandais.php
25 https://www.bbc.com/afrique/articles/c14nvye8g8wo
26 https://mag.hookandnet.com/2025/02/07/2025-02tuna/content.html
27 https://mag.hookandnet.com/2025/02/07/2025-02tuna/content.html

A closer examination of the AIS signal map of P&P's tuna fleet reveals that vessels frequently switch off their geolocation systems, even though this practice is prohibited.[28]

Investment in processing

P&P owns Heiploeg, the largest shrimp processor in Europe. The company has a de-shelling company in Morocco, a distribution company and a fleet of 40 small shrimp trawlers in Suriname and Guyana, and a division in India.

In addition, P&P has interests in processing companies, trading companies and cold stores, including the highly automated processing plant Euro Baltic on the German island of Rügen. Its processing plant on the Faroe Islands was recently sold.

In December 2018, P&P acquired a majority stake in the Urk-based Dadas Groep, which specialises in flatfish fishing and processing.[29] The existing assets of Dadas Groep were integrated into a newly established entity, Dutch Flatfish BV. **With this acquisition, P&P was also able to invest in a number of trawlers via Dutch Flatfish BV. These trawlers have since been decommissioned, for which the company received €9.65 million in European subsidies through the Brexit-related fleet exit plan.**

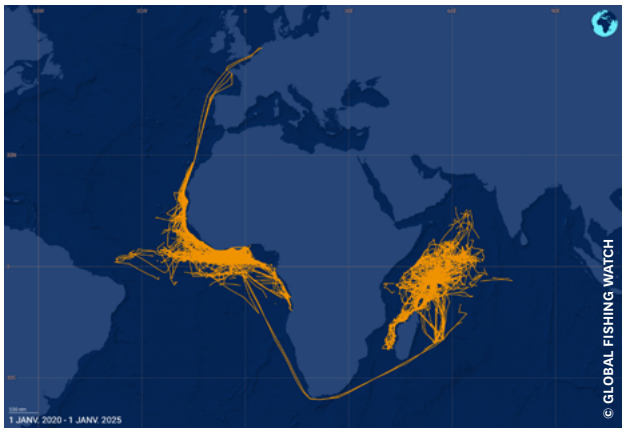


Figure 10: *P&P's tuna ships in African waters. There are many AIS gaps in the tracks of the tuna seiners*

Controversies

As the biggest fishing company in Europe, P&P has appeared on the news for illegal activities in several occasions. **In 2013, a former crew member revealed that they used double accounting: one official set of accounts for the authorities and another undeclared set corresponding to actual catches.**[30] The company has also been accused on several occasions of 'highgrading' (discarding catches to replace them with larger and/or more profitable species), a practice that results in high mortality rates for fish that are not recorded. Faroese journalists also published a video documenting this practice.[31] IIn 2012, **P&P's German subsidiary, Westbank Hochseefischerie GmbH, was fined €595,000 in Frnace for illegal fishing activities attributed to the 141-metre factory ship Maartje Theadora.**[32] One member of the Van der Plas family was also convicted of tax fraud.[33]

28 https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-and-comparative-law-quarterly/article/illegality-of-fishing-vessels-going-dark-and-methods-of-deterrence/8E5D5C30A15C91BF17423ED1EF6EE0E2

29 https://www.visserijnieuws.nl/nieuws/algemeen/20406/p-neemt-aandeel-in-dadas-groep

30 https://www.bnnvara.nl/zembla/artikelen/wild-west-op-zee

31 http://kvf.fo/netvarp/sv/2019/11/11/20191111naraberg, see also https://www.schuttevaer.nl/nieuws/visserij/2013/11/26/kw-174-verdacht-van-highgrading/#:~:text=De%20schipper%20van%20de%20vriestrawler,aangehouden%20en%20naar%20Killybegs%20begeleid and https://www.intrafish.com/news/parlevliet-van-der-plas-considers-appealing-disproportionate-fine/1-1-651768

32 https://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2012/12/19/le-chalutier-geant-allemand-arrete-a-cherbourg-ecope-d-une-amende-record_1808176_3244.html

33 https://www.rtl.nl/economie/business/artikel/5045241/belastingontwijking-parlevliet-van-der-plas-jan-6-miljoen-fiscus

Cornelis Vrolijk

Year of establishment
1880

Turnover (2023)
€499 MILLION

Balance sheet value (2023)
€650 MILLION

Residency
IJMUIDEN, THE NETHERLANDS

Cornelis Vrolijk is a family business that was founded in 1880 by Frank Vrolijk in Scheveningen, in the Netherlands. **Originally specialising in the herring trade, the company is now one of Europe's largest fish processing companies.** Cornelis Vrolijk controls the entire chain, from catch to sale, including processing, for species such as herring, mackerel, sole, plaice, shrimp and shellfish. Its main activities include fishing for pelagic species (such as herring and mackerel) and demersal species (such as sole, whiting and squid), as well as catching, farming and trading shrimp and molluscs. The group is also active in the processing of various fish species. **Cornelis Vrolijk claims to provide around 3 million fish-based meals per day worldwide.**[34]

In 2018, Cornelis Vrolijk claimed that 92% of its pelagic catches and 74% of its demersal catches of plaice were certified by the MSC 'sustainable fishing' label.[35] This percentage has steeply decreased since some stocks lost their certification, notably blue whiting and mackerel in the North-East Atlantic.[36]

In addition to fishing and trading activities, the holding company also invests in real estate and ships, as well as in other companies with a similar or related purpose.

In Europe, Cornelis Vrolijk's fishing fleet consists of several segments. **The demersal fleet is largely owned by the Jaczon subsidiary and consists of demersal seiners and beam trawlers. The pelagic fleet comprises six large freezer trawlers,** which sail under the Dutch or British flag. Under the French flag, Cornelis Vrolijk operates the moderrn Scombrus trawler and the older Prins Bernhard trawler. Vrolijk is also co-owner of a large trawler in the Faroe Islands. As a side business, Vrolijk also holds shares in a company that offers recreational fishing trips from the Dutch port of Scheveningen.

Although the exact ownership structure is difficult to determine, Cornelis Vrolijk owns shares in two American-flagged tuna seiners. **Its Nigerian subsidiary, Atlantic Shrimpers Ltd, operates a fleet of 72 vessels fishing for tropical shrimp. The company also owns 33% of the Surinamese fishing company Marisa Fisheries.**

34 https://www.cornelisvrolijk.eu/media/isjmsqik/mvo-eng-2023.pdf

35 https://web.archive.org/web/20201218144437/https://www.cornelisvrolijk.eu/userfiles/CV_CSR_report_2017&2018_ENG_LR.pdf

36 For Northeast Atlantic mackerel https://www.msc.org/media-centre/press-releases/press-release/msc-certificates-suspended-for-all-north-east-atlantic-mackerel-fisheries

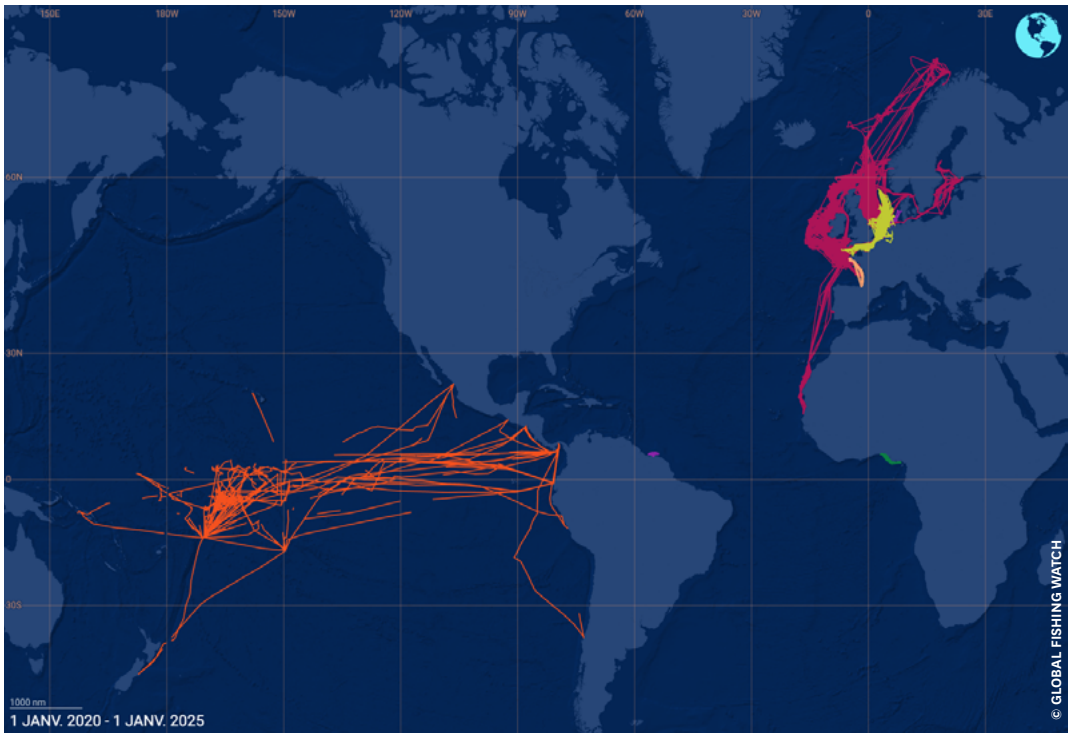


Figure 11: *Trajectories of vessels operated by Cornelis Vrolijk between 1 January 2020 and 1 January 2025*

Co-owned Cornelis Vrolijk's fleet

Vessel name	IMO	Length	Type	Flag	Yr built	Tonnage
Friesland	9310953	89 m	Tuna purse seiner	US	2005	2437
Capt. Vincent Gann	9018880	67 m	Tuna purse seiner	US	1990	1930
Jupiter	9273777	76 m	Trawler	FO	2004	2809
Albatros	8432900	25 m	Yacht	NL	1963	72
Estrella	8432962	58 m	Yacht	NL	1933	366
Maartje	7117400	31 m	Supply tender	NL	1960	119
Milton	5116787	29 m	Trawler	SU	1961	162
Dona Isa	8958021	24 m	Trawler	SU	1999	140
Javro	9834832	25 m	Trawler	SU	2017	200
Kjell	9834820	25 m	Trawler	SU	2017	200
Bramme'ie	9006019	24 m	Trawler	SU	1990	151
Opportune	9171785	25 m	Trawler	BZ	1998	299
Aravis	9034389	30 m	Trawler	SU	1990	252
Floreat	9112791	25 m	Trawler	SU	1995	270
Minerva	9213349	25 m	Trawler	SU	2000	311
Vanquish	8997572	25 m	Trawler	NL	2003	246

TABLE 3.A

33/49% ownership, jointly with unknown co-owner
30% ownership, jointly with G. de Ruiter
30% ownership, jointly with Sp/f Vita
33.3% ownership, jointly with J. de Boer

In addition, Vrolijk's shrimp division Primstar owns a fleet of 72 shrimpers in Nigeria, operated by Atlantic Shrimpers Ltd, each with a length of 22 metres.

Cornelis Vrolijk's fleet

Vessel name	IMO	Length	Type	Flag	Yr built	Tonnage
Galibier	8120442	34 m	Demersal seiner	NL	1982	274
Aravis	9917268	24 m	Trawler	NL	2022	240
Wiron I	9117519	51 m	Trawler	NL	1995	1059
Quo Vadis	9073878	44 m	Beam Trawler	NL	1994	498
Simplon	8108688	34 m	Demersal seiner	NL	1984	310
Zeeland	8901913	114 m	Pelagic Trawler	NL	1989	6128
Vertrouwen	9880142	25 m	Demersal seiner	NL	2020	251
Johanna	7928835	34 m	Demersal seiner	NL	1981	310
Tempus Fugit	8985141	24 m	Beam Trawler	NL	2002	152
Larche	8324531	34 m	Demersal seiner	FR	1985	319
Tourmalet	8219499	34 m	Demersal seiner	FR	1983	317
Maarten Jacob	9242754	42 m	Beam Trawler	NL	2001	496
Afrika	9175834	126 m	Pelagic Trawler	NL	1999	7127
Cap Blanc	8814665	56 m	Trawler	NL	1990	1230
Carolien	9162655	126 m	Pelagic Trawler	NL	1998	7053
Frank Bonefaas	9074951	119 m	Pelagic Trawler	UK	1994	6562
Scombrus	9828936	82 m	Trawler	FR	2020	4025
Prins Bernhard	8224406	88 m	Trawler	FR	1983	2610
War Raog 3	8592592	17 m	Purse seiner	FR	2001	54
War Raog 4	8592607	17 m	Purse seiner	FR	2006	80
Berceau de l'Océan	8592621	16 m	Purse seiner	FR	2002	52
Northern Joy	9073866	44 m	Beam Trawler	UK	1993	556
Wiron 5	9249556	56 m	Trawler	UK	2002	1230
Wiron 6	9249568	56 m	Trawler	NL	2002	1230

TABLE 3.B



Scombrus: France Pélagique's factory ship (Cornelis Vrolijk's subsidiary)

A sizeable fleet of demersal seiners and beam trawlers

Cornelis Vrolijk operates a number of modern demersal seiners equipped with advanced technology for detecting, catching, preserving and packaging fish. Together with Wageningen University and the Good Fish Foundation, they are involved in scientific research into the sustainability of demersal seining as a fishing method, **a technique that is causing concern and anger among small-scale fishers in the Channel due to its significant spatial footprint and low selectivity.** The vessels operate mainly in the southern North Sea and the English Channel. The main ports where fish is landed are Boulogne-sur-Mer (France), Ostend (Belgium), Vlissingen (Netherlands). Fish that is landed in French ports is transported by trucks to auctions in the Netherlands. Flatfish is prepared in Bertus Dekker's processing plant in IJmuiden.[37]



Figure 12*: Vrolijk's demersal fleet of beamtrawlers and demersal seiners is active in the North Sea and the English Channel*

Pelagic trawlers from the North Sea to West Africa

Vrolijk's pelagic fleet has been fishing in the North Sea, in the Atlantic Ocean (West of Ireland and the Bay of Biscay), in Norwegian waters, as well as in Western Africa. **These catches are most often entirely frozen aboard the ship and landed in the Dutch port of IJmuiden. From there, boxes of frozen fish are loaded onto a refrigerated cargo vessel that sails to West Africa, where frozen fish is sold on markets in countries like Nigeria and Ghana.**



Figure 13: *Trajectories of Cornelis Vrolijk's pelagic trawler fleet*

Small but controversial purse seiners called "bolincheurs"

Cronelis Vrolijk owns three 17-metre purse seiners through its subsidiary France Pélagique: the War Raog 3, the War Raog 4 and the Berceau de l'océan. In 2023, the War Raog 4 made headlines after capturing and killing 150 tonnes of meagre on the verge of spawning.[38] These vessels operate in the Bay of Biscay and land their catch in ports in Brittany and south-western France, such as Saint Jean-de-Luz.

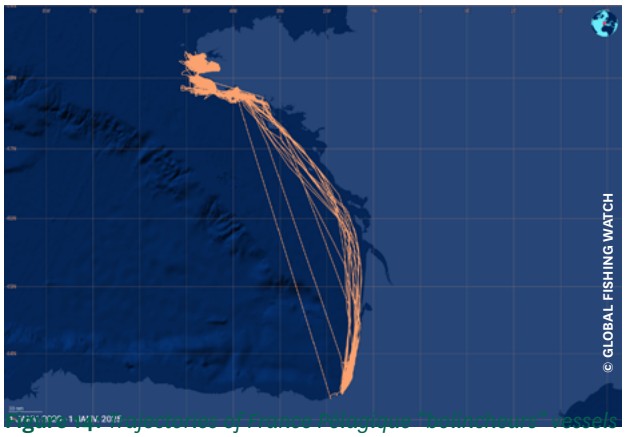


Figure 14: *Trajectories of France Pélagique "bolincheurs" vessels*

37 https://www.bertus-dekker.eu/services

38 https://www.bloomassociation.org/en/making-a-killing-150-tonnes-of-fish-in-one-haul-a-crime-by-any-yardstick/

Tuna in the Pacific Ocean

Cornelis Vrolijk appears to own a stake in two companies based in Curaçao, in the Dutch Antilles, which in turn own American companies registered in Nevada, operating two tuna seiners: the Friesland and Captain Vincent Gann. **These vessels operate throughout the Pacific with Pago Pago in American Samoa as main port. Althouth the practice is illegal, they often turn off their AIS geolocation signal.** This makes it impossible to know where these vessels are operating, sometimes for several weeks at a time, leaving them free to fish in prohibited areas, such as certain exclusive economic zones or marine protected areas.

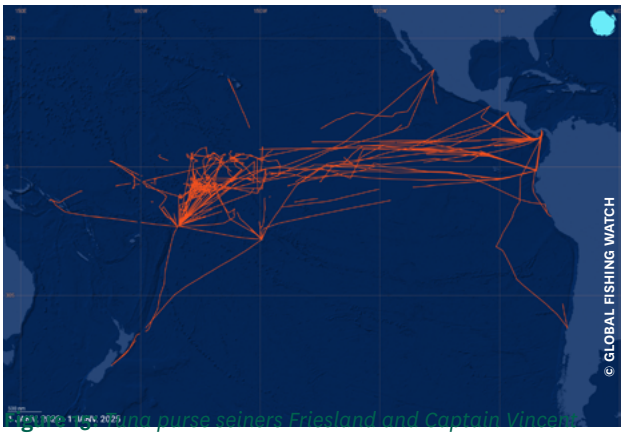


Figure 15: Tracks of tuna purse seiners Friesland and Captain Vincent Gann operating in the Pacific. Vrolijk has a minority share in the ships

Suriname fleet with former European trawlers

Cornelis Vrolijk expanded his demersal fishing activities in Suriname in 2016 and owns a share in Marisa Fishing Company, which fishes with former European otter trawlers.[39] In 2017, the fleet was expanded with the addition of two new vessels, the Kjell and the Javro. The fleet now owns about ten vessels. **The company has also been the owner of a fish processing plant since 2019.**[40] Most of the fish is exported to Central America and Europe.

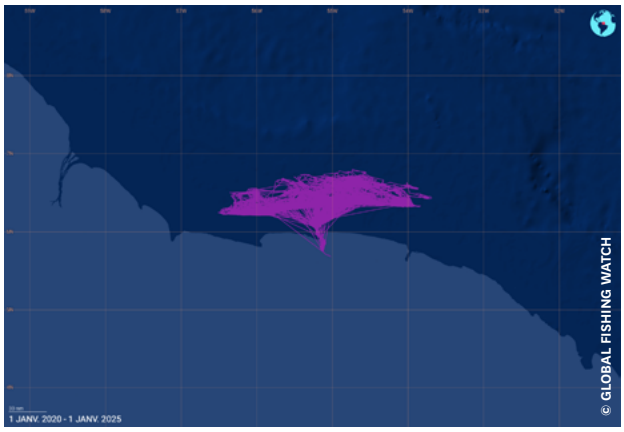


Figure 16: *Apparently incomplete data from Marisa's fleet operating off the coast of Suriname*

A sizeable shrimp fishing fleet in Nigeria

Cornelis Vrolijk is a big player in the shrimp-industry. Subsidiary Primstar had a turnover of nearly €70 million in 2023. **Tropical shrimps are caught in Nigeria, where the subsidiary Atlantic Shrimpers owns a fleet of 72 shrimp trawlers.** Processing is carried out in Spain, through its subsidiary Gambastar.

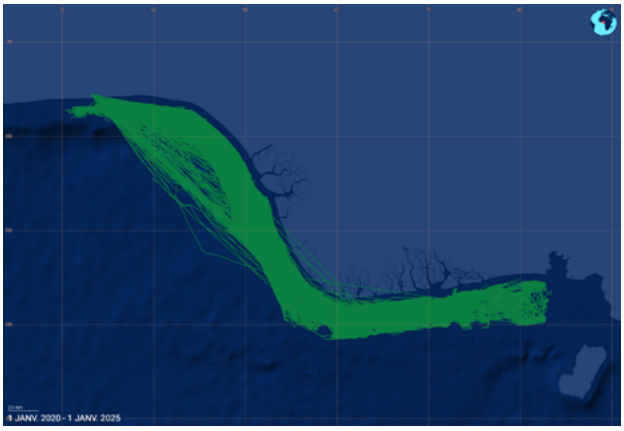


Figure 17: *Vrolijk's fleet of shrimpers off the coast of Nigeria*

39 https://www.cornelisvrolijk.eu/media/5rbdoupy/cv-mvo-20172018_en_def_lr.pdf

40 https://www.cornelisvrolijk.eu/media/gxpaz2zl/cv-mvo-2019_def_eng_lr.pdf

Other activities

Cornelis Vrolijk has made recent investments in **mussel farms** in the Netherlands, Ireland and Northern Ireland. Vrolijk owns **trading companies** such as Den Dulk Haasnoot, **processing companies** such as Bertus Dekker and **shrimp peeling company** Kant. **In Mauritania, Vrolijk operates the fish processing factory Cap Blanc Pelagique in Nouadhibou.** It also has a side business that offers fishing trips for individuals from the Dutch port of Scheveningen.

Controversies

Vrolijk's Nigerian shrimp division Atlantic Shrimpers has been accused of **illegal fishing in Liberian waters,** with an effort led by Sea Shepherd resulting in an arrest by the Liberian authorities.[41] Furthermore, the turtle excluder device (TED), which is mandatory for MSC certification of sustainable catches, was not in use at the time, even though the products were being sold as such. **Similar practices are also said to have taken place in Cameroon.**[42] In 2015, one of Vrolijk's biggest vessels – Frank Bonefaas – was arrested for **illegally fishing mackerel in a restricted area.**[43] The company was, however, allowed to keep the catch and sell the illegally caught fish. In 2020, the crew of the vessel Cornelis Vrolijk Fzn was **arrested for assaulting a fisheries observer while fishing in Namibian waters.** The court acquitted them, as is often the case in such matters, where the observer's word is pitted against that of the captain, with no independent witnesses on board.[44] In 2021, the crew of the partially Vrolijk owned tuna purse seiner Captain Vincent Gann was forced to **pay $725,000 for polluting the waters in American Samoa following an oil spill.**[45]

41 https://theecologist.org/2017/may/26/sea-shepherd-helps-arrest-sustainable-shrimp-trawler-illegal-fishing-liberian-waters

42 https://www.ftm.nl/artikelen/nederlandse-visgigant-weer-gepakt-voor-illegaal-vissen-in-afrika?share=eKXZk6NUDNAiIZzTCnm9TunHUWNoaIojJZzWf0r3jJ9grAzA%2FZqjvnOBXXtw

43 https://www.gov.uk/government/news/master-and-owner-ordered-to-pay-over-102000-for-illegal-mackerel-catch

44 https://www.undercurrentnews.com/2020/11/16/fishermen-accused-of-observer-assault-at-cornelis-vrolijk-partner-cleared-of-charges/

45 https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/united-states-settles-clean-water-act-claims-against-fishing-companies-manager-and-vessel

Alda Seafood

Year of establishment

2019

(created by Samherji, founded in 1983)

Turnover (2022)

€285.3 MILLION

Balance sheet value (2022)

€173 MILLION

Residency

OEGSTGEEST, THE NETHERLANDS

Alda Seafood Holding B.V. (Alda Seafood, Alda) is a vertically integrated fishing company which owns a group of fishing companies that are active worldwide, particularly within Europe. Alda Seafood was established in 2019 in the Netherlands, with its headquarters located in Oegstgeest. The company was founded by the third-generation founders of the Icelandic fishing company Samherji. Baldvin Thorsteinsson, son of Samherji's CEO, took control of Alda Seafood in 2019.[46] This restructuring occurred during the Fishrot scandal, in which Samherji was accused of corruption when exploiting fish stocks in Namibia.

Currently managing industrial fishing operations across Europe and North America, Alda Seafood represents a continuity of Samherji's global reach, but under a new name.

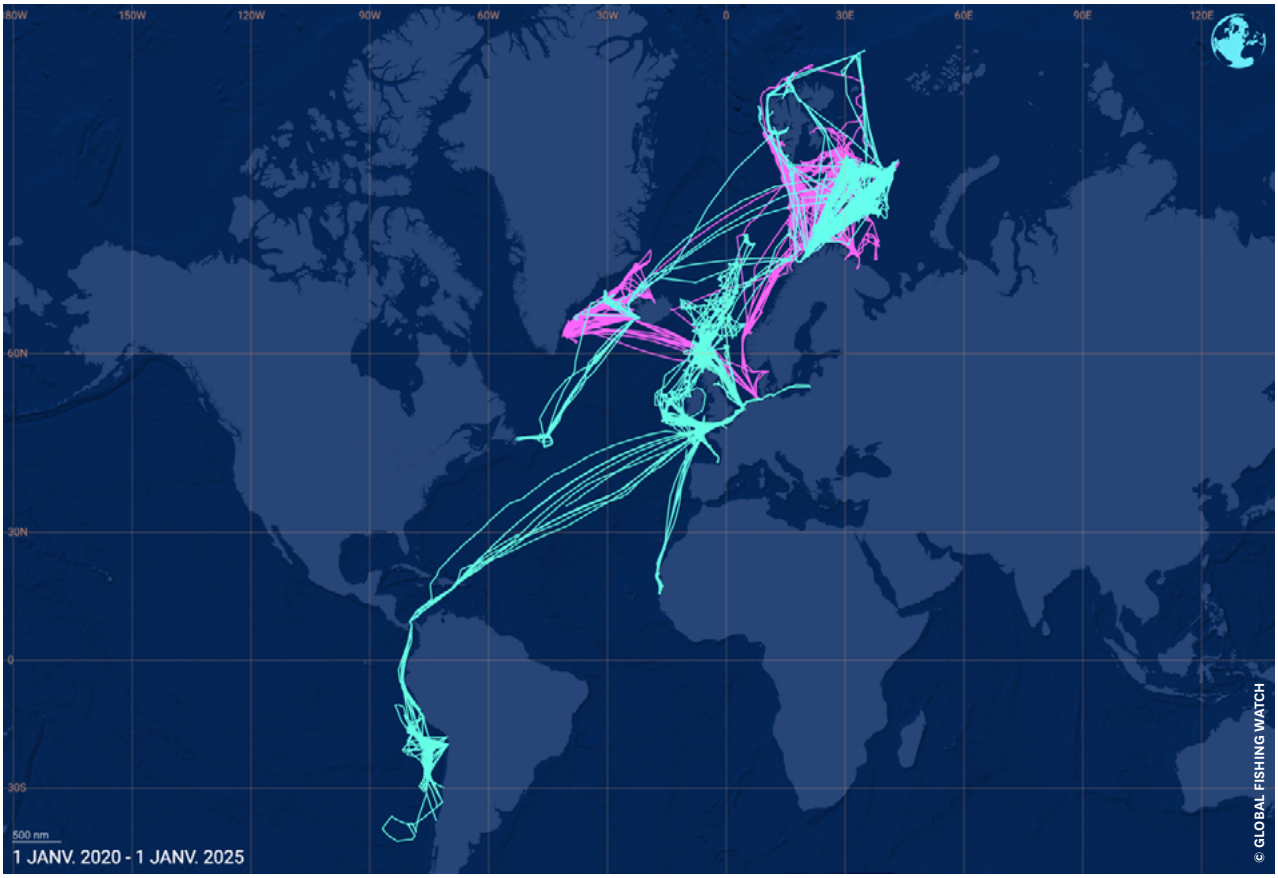


Figure 18: *Trajectories of vessels operated by Alda Seafood between 1 January 2020 and 1 January 2025*

46 https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/premium/business-finance/samherji-s-foreign-operations-sold-to-son-of-ceo

Alda Seafood's fleet

Vessel name	IMO	Length	Type	Flag	Yr built	Tonnage	Fuel used (2023) - millions of litres	Catches (2023) - in tonnes
Cuxhaven	9782778	80 m	Trawler	GE	2017	3969	3.4	4940
Berlin	9969558	81 m	Trawler	GE	2024	4345		
Baldvin (out of service, new Santa Princesa)	9048902	80 m	Trawler	GE	1994	2968	2.6	5550
Vestfisk	8015893	39 m	Longliner	NO	1980	526		
Newfoundland Victor	9787223	80 m	Shrimp Trawler	CA	2016	4642	5.1	9541
Kagtind II	9188465	64 m	Trawler	NO	2000	1648		
Bergvoll	9214501	57 m	Trawler	NO	2000	1483		
Senja	9858436	80 m	Trawler	NO	2020	4172		
Breidtind	9906532	80 m	Trawler	NO	2022	4172		
Sorkapp	9962146	81 m	Trawler	NO	2023	4170		
Lodairo	9690676	86 m	Trawler	ES	2015	4290	2.7	9165
Kirkella	9808405	81 m	Trawler	UK	2018	3976	3.6	6721
Farnella (out of service)	9211808	40 m	Trawler	BZ	2000	667		
Brites	7107431	80 m	Trawler	PT	1971	1926		
Santa Princesa (out of service)	8609357	66 m	Trawler	BZ	1987	2114		
Santa Princesa	9048902	80 m	Trawler	PT	1992	2348	2.3	2960
Fisher Bank	9193549	34 m	Trawler	FR	1999	615	1.3	2444
Otter Bank	9219721	39 m	Trawler	FR	2000	756	1.1	1539
Bressay Bank	9261499	45 m	Trawler	FR	2002	826	1.2	2214
Cap Saint Georges	9293014	43 m	Trawler	FR	2003	885	1.3	2866
André Leduc	9294915	44 m	Trawler	FR	2004	836	1.4	2979
Emeraude	9799898	81 m	Trawler	FR	2018	3976		
Joseph Roty II (out of service)	7362500	90 m	Factory ship	FR	1975	3188		
Annelies Ilena	9204556	145 m	Factory ship	PL	2000	14464	9.4	45152
Alina	8918318	104 m	Freezer Trawler	PL	1990	5099	5.7	21781
Dorado 2	8817540	67 m	Trawler	LV	1989	2299	3.1	4827
Vilkas	8505484	74 m	Trawler	LT	1985	3751		
Taurus	8411023	60 m	Trawler	LT	1985	1780		
Lokys	9226736	70 m	Trawler	LT	2001	2772		

TABLE 4

Owned by Alda Seafood (100%)

Owned by Nergård, co-ownership betweed Alda Seafood (40%) and Norsk Sjømat (60%)

Co-owned with P&P Group

Furthermore, Alda Seafood maintains strong ties with P&P. As mentioned above, the two groups share several subsidiaries, including UK Fisheries and its subsidiaries (such as Euronor and Pesquera Ancora), the Polish company Atlantex – which operates two factory trawlers, the Annelies Ilena and the Alina – and Batterfisa in Latvia. The majority of vessels operating on behalf of Alda are MSC certified for the fisheries concerned. Most of Alda's ships have MSC-certification for the fisheries they are engaged in.

Trading companies and a fish & chips supplier

Alda Seafood owns stakes in **trading companies** such as Seagold in the United Kingdom and SubLand in Estonia. In the United Kingdom, Alda Seafood is also affiliated to the **fish & chips supplier** Collins Seafoods.

Fishing activities via Deutsche Fischfang Union (DFFU)

Deutsche Fischfang Union GmbH (DFFU), **Germany's oldest industrial fishing company, was acquired in 1995 by Samherji.** This subsidiary operates two factory trawlers: Berlin NC 107 and Cuxhaven NC 100. They fish for whitefish and shrimp in the Barents Sea, Greenland's waters, Svalbard, and the Norwegian coast.[47]

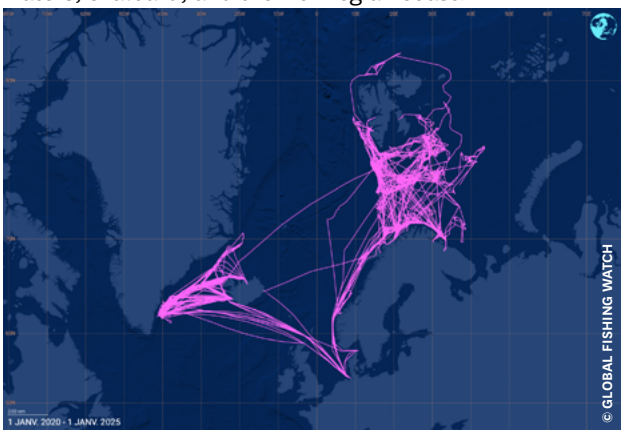


Figure 19: *The trawlers Berlin and Cuxhaven mainly fish for whitefish and shrimp in the Barents Sea and around Greenland*

Activities in Poland and around the world through Atlantex and Batterfisa

Alda Seafood operates a **fleet of long-distance pelagic trawlers through joint ventures with P&P.** These operations include:

- The Taurus and Lokys, Latvian-flagged vessels owned by Batterfisa
- The Polish-flagged factory trawlers Alina and Annelies Ilena, operated by Atlantex. Notably, the Annelies Ilena, recognised as the world's largest trawler.



Figure 20*: The Poland-flagged vessels Alina and Annelies Ilena, and Latvian flagged vessels Taurus and Lokys fish globally, e.g. in South America, Western Africa and Arctic waters*

47 https://www.aldaholding.com/about-us/investments/dffu/

Controversy over Fishrot

The international activities of Samherji are under scrutiny due to **a corruption scandal in Namibia between 2012 and 2019.** The scandal, known as **the Fishrot affair**, was exposed by whistleblower Jóhannes Stefánsson, who leaked internal documents — now known as the Fishrot Files — alleging that Samherji paid bribes to high-level Namibian officials in exchange for preferential access to fishing quotas.[48] One of the key vessels implicated in the scheme was **the freezer trawler Saga, which was operated by the Polish company Atlantex.** At the time, Atlantex was fully owned by Samherji. A leaked business plan revealed that **Atlantex imposed a 15% surcharge on operating costs, a mechanism used to shift profits from Namibia to Poland and thereby reduce taxable income in Namibia.**

In 2018, P&P acquired a 50% stake in Atlantex for only €50,000, further entangling the company in the scandal.[49] In 2018, Saga was flagged in Namibia. **To continue to fish the Polish quota, P&P sold its largest ship, Annelies Ilena, to Atlantex** for €60 million, a price experts deemed significantly above market value. This transaction is viewed as a strategic move to assist Samherji in retaining EU fishing quotas amid the scandal. P&P has denied managing the Saga after acquiring shares in Atlantex. However, in the ship register, Atlantex was listed as manager of Saga until July 2020.



Annelies Ilena: Factory ship co-owned by P&P and Alda Seafood

Legal cases are still ongoing in both Namibia and Iceland. Icelandic media suggest that the transfer of Samherji's international activities to a Dutch company with a new name is also a way for the next generation to continue with a clean slate.[50]

At that time, Samherji's main shareholder was Baldvin Thorsteinsson. He is currently the CEO of Alda Seafood. Under the umbrella of Alda Seafood, **there are around 15 subsidiaries in Cyprus and Namibia that are implicated in the Fishrot scandal**[51]. Notably, a significant portion of Alda Seafood's activities consist of joint ventures with Parlevliet & Van der Plas, whose headquarters is close to that of Alda Seafood.

Alda Seafood has made an effort to be transparent as a company. Their annual 'sustainability reports' contain more information than those of other big operators. For example, they include information on fuel consumption for a part of Alda Seafood's fleet, as well as memberships of lobbying organisations.

48 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fishrot_Files

49 https://www.groene.nl/artikel/nederlandse-visgigant-duikt-op-in-internationaal-corruptieschandaal

50 https://heimildin.is/grein/16828/erfdu-samherja-og-hafa-hagnast-um-ruma-tiu-milljarda-a-tveimur-arum

51 https://www.bbc.com/afrique/articles/c14nvye8g8wo

W. Van Der Zwan En Zonen

Year of establishment
1888

Turnover (2023)
€89 MILLION

Balance sheet value (2023)
€91 MILLION

Headquarters
SCHEVENINGEN (THE HAGUE), THE NETHERLANDS

W. van der Zwan & Zonen is a Dutch family business that has been active in the fishing industry since 1888. The company specialises in catching, processing and distributing pelagic fish species such as mackerel, herring, horse mackerel and sardines.

The company operates **two high-sea pelagic trawlers equipped with advanced technology for fishing, catching, conserving and packaging fish.** Additionally, since 2018 **Van der Zwan is the main shareholder of Eko Fish** (formerly Quotter, a brand name seemingly no longer in use), which operates four trawlers managed by the De Boer family.[52]

Van der Zwan operates **cold stores** in the ports of Scheveningen and Velsen, in the Netherlands, for the temporary storage of high-sea fish products. Additionally, the company has built cold stores in various African countries to facilitate the storage and distribution of high-sea fish. In Peru, Van der Zwan owns **a crew recruitment agency.**

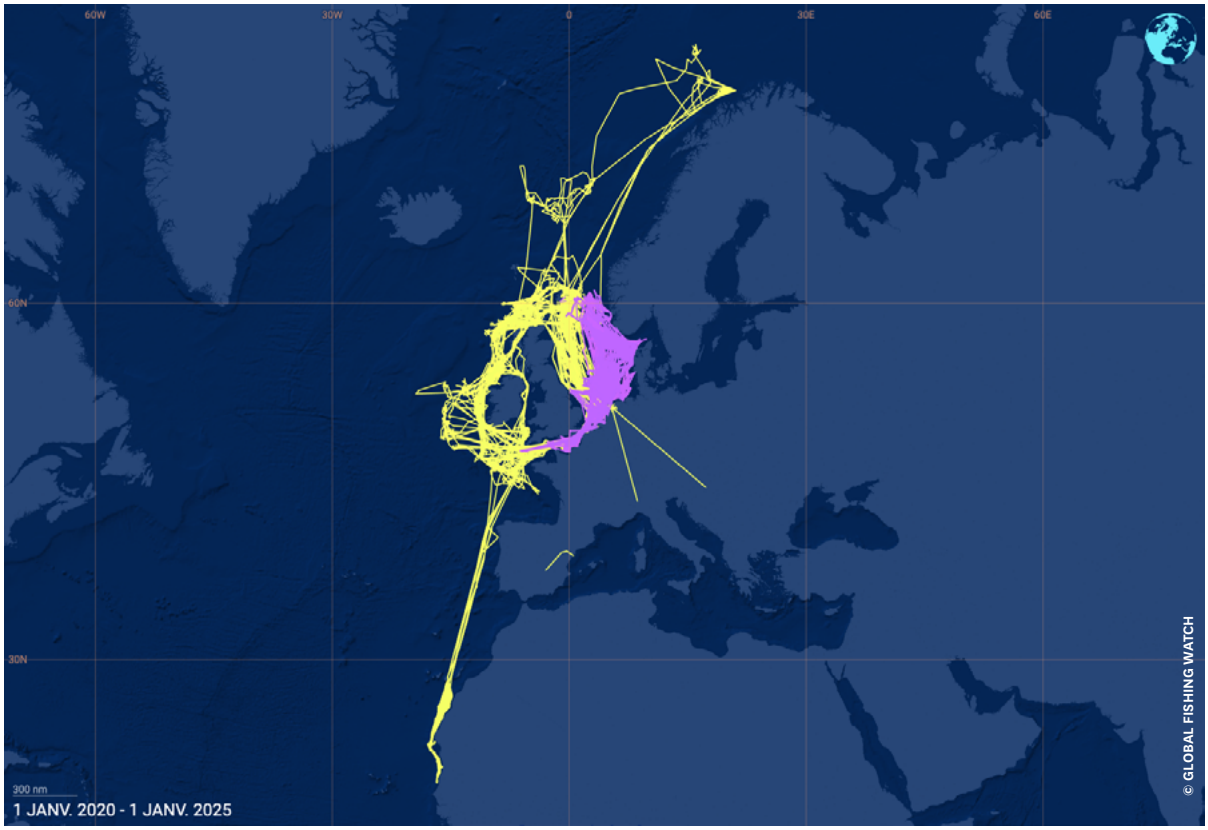


Figure 21: *Trajectories of vessels operated by Van der Zwan between 1 January 2020 and 1 January 2025*

52 https://www.visserijnieuws.nl/nieuws/algemeen/20344/w-van-der-zwan-neemt-belang-in-ekofish-group

Van der Zwan's fleet: a small number of ships with a large footprint

Vessel name	IMO	Length	Type	Flag	Yr built	Tonnage
Willem van der Zwan	9187306	142.5 m	Pelagic Trawler	NL	2000	9494
Alida	8224418	100 m	Pelagic Trawler	NL	1986	3274
Spes Nova	9843479	32 m	Demersal seiner	NL	2019	489
Polar	9851361	32 m	Demersal seiner	NL	2018	339
Mikkel Louise	9841574	29 m	Demersal seiner	UK	2020	364
Lub Senior	9599731	26 m	Demersal seiner	NL	2010	339

TABLE 5

Owned by Van der Zwan (100%)

Co-owned with De Boer

Overall, **Van der Zwan appears to be diversifying away from the fishing industry. The family's wealth, accumulated over the years, is being invested in real estate.** For instance, Van der Zwan is the owner of a major new construction project in the port of Scheveningen and a residence in the centre of The Hague.

Pelagic fleet activities

In recent years, Van der Zwan's pelagic vessels have mainly been active in the **North Sea, the eastern Atlantic Ocean and off the coast of West Africa.** Both the vessels Willem van der Zwan and Alida have MSC-certification for their herring fisheries. In addition, three of their four demersal vessels are engaged in MSC-certified fishing.



Figure 22: *Trajectories of Van der Zwan's pelagic trawlers Van der Zwan and Alida*

Demersal seiner activities

The demersal seiners of Van der Zwan and De Boer mainly fish in **the North Sea and the Channel.** Le Havre, Dieppe, Boulogne, Vlissingen, Harlingen and Thyborøn are the most important ports of call.

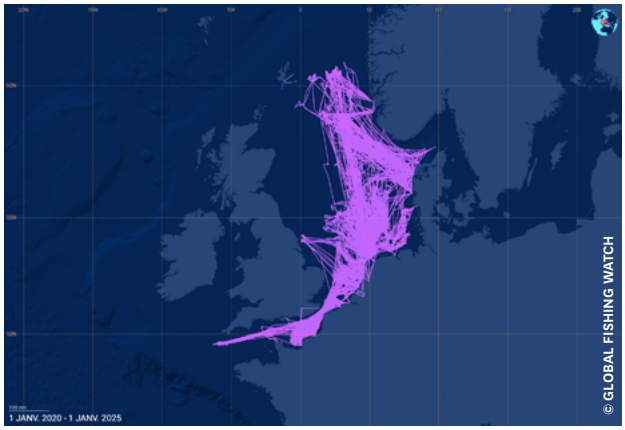


Figure 23: *Van der Zwan co-owns four demersal seiners with De Boer*

Controversy

In 2024, the vessel Mikkel Louise, owned by Eko Fish, was fined by Norwegian authorities for **fishing with nets with mesh sizes that were too small.**[53] In 2011, the Franziska, a Van der Zwan factory vessel at the time, was the subject of controversy because it was transporting fish **for which it did not have a catch certificate. It attempted to obtain this certificate in Peru, even though the fish did not come from Peruvian waters.**[54]

53 https://www.schuttevaer.nl/nieuws/actueel/2024/03/25/vlagkotter-pd-344-krijgt-forse-boete-van-noorse-autoriteiten/

54 https://www.groene.nl/artikel/ze-zijn-hard-op-weg-de-zee-leeg-te-plunderen

De Boer

Year of establishment
1930

Turnover
UNKNOWN

Balance sheet value (2023)[55]
€58 MILLION

Residency
URK, THE NETHERLANDS

The De Boer family is probably the most active in the demersal fishing sector in the Netherlands.[56] However, the structure of the company is completely different from that of the other four holding companies that make up the Big Five. Instead of a classic model with a holding company and numerous subsidiaries, **the De Boer is structured as a network of different companies, with each family member owning shares through their own company.** This makes it difficult to establish accurate figures regarding profits, balance sheet value or turnover. As small companies are not required to publish their turnover in the Netherlands, it is impossible to provide an accurate estimate.

The group's origins date back to the 1930s, when Louwe de Boer began fishing for flatfish with a wooden boat in Lake IJssel (known as the South Sea at the time) and in the North Sea. His seven sons also went into fishing, forming a network of companies with a total of 21 vessels, becoming **the dominant player in Dutch demersal fishing industry. In recent years, the De Boer family has invested in new demersal seiners.**

The main brands the De Boer dynasty operates under are the Osprey Group and the Ekofish Group. **With a total of 102,810 FQA units, primarily for flatfish, the family is by far the biggest player in this sector of the UK fishing industry.** As the allocation of quotas in the Netherlands is opaque, the total amount held by the De Boer family is unknown. Since 2019, Van der Zwan has held a stake in part of the De Boer family's activities.[57]

Given that 6% of the inhabitants of the fishing town of Urk have the surname 'De Boer',[58] it is difficult to untangle all the family ties. For example, although the company Visserijbedrijf T. de Boer en Zonen is also active in the fishing industry and owns two demersal seiners registered in Boulogne-sur-Mer, it appears to have no direct connection with the other De Boer fishing companies and is therefore excluded from this report.



Figure 24:
The fishing fleet of the De Boer Group operating mainly in UK, Norwegian, Danish, Dutch, Belgian and French waters

55 Combined figures of the six companies that appear to own most of the assets: Rederij W. De Boer bv, Osprey Group bv, Wilhelmina Beheer BV, Rederij L. De Boer bv, Bohen bv and Bocorn Bv.

56 https://research4committees.blog/2019/12/31/netherlands/

57 https://www.visserijnieuws.nl/nieuws/algemeen/20344/w-van-der-zwan-neemt-belang-in-ekofish-group

58 https://www.heturkerland.nl/nieuws/algemeen/45623/een-interessante-tak-van-eenvan-de-urker-families-de-boer-deel-1-

De Boer's fleet: a British-Dutch fleet

Vessel name	IMO	Length	Type	Flag	Year built	Tonnage
Jolissa (KW14)	9316438	40 m	Beam trawler	NL	2004	484
Stellar (SL45)	9241229	28 m	Demersal seiner	NL	2001	340
Ansgar (E104)	9241994	37 m	Demersal seiner	UK	2002	435
Louwe Senior (PW447)	9242003	37 m	Demersal seiner	UK	2002	432
Henk Senior (LH357)	9795763	28 m	Demersal seiner	UK	2017	388
Jannetje Cornelis (H144)	9847255	28 m	Demersal seiner	UK	2018	397
Neeltje (PD141)	9863522	29 m	Demersal seiner	UK	2019	398
Jacoba Maria (FD157)	9850379	36 m	Demersal seiner	UK	2019	499
Good Hope (LH356)	9863534	29 m	Demersal seiner	UK	2020	398
Our Anna (PD567)	9044554	40 m	Beam trawler	UK	1992	465
Sola Fide	8822569	44 m	Beam trawler	UK	1989	527
Soli Dei Gloria (PD63)	8701428	46 m	Beam trawler	UK	1988	546
Noorderhaaks (UK195) (out of service)	9101209	44 m	Beam trawler	NL	1994	560
Annegina (PD43)	8205852	42 m	Demersal seiner (converted)	UK	1984	477
Jonge Johannes (LT295)	9848792	32 m	Demersal seiner	UK	2020	492
Spes Nova	9843479	32 m	Demersal seiner	NL	2019	489
Polar	9851361	32 m	Demersal seiner	NL	2018	339
Mikkel Louise	9841574	29 m	Demersal seiner	UK	2020	364
Lub Senior	9599731	26 m	Demersal seiner	NL	2010	339

TABLE 6

Owned by De Boer (100%)

Co-owned with Van der Zwan

A demersal seine fishing dynasty

All De Boer vessels are engaged in demersal fishing in the North Sea and the English Channel. The main ports where fish is landed are Boulogne-sur-Mer, Dieppe and Le Havre in France, Vlissingen and IJmuiden in The Netherlands, Thyborøn in Denmark and Hartlepool in the UK.

Controversies

The vessel Jolissa made headlines in Denmark for fishing while its AIS was switched off. Other beam trawlers also appear to have been fishing illegally in Danish waters, although it is unclear if these were also owned by De Boer.[59] In June 2019, Willem de Boer, captain of the E 104 Ansgar, **was fined over €75,000 for ffences regarding mesh size.**[60] In early 2025, **De Boer vessel also deliberately destroyed the nets of a French trawler, the Rose de Cascia, while at sea.**[61]

59 https://nyheder.tv2.dk/samfund/2021-09-07-saadan-snyder-hollandske-bomtrawlere-fiskerikontrollen

60 https://fishfocus.co.uk/fisheries-offences-fine/

61 https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/hauts-de-france/pas-calais/boulogne-mer/temoignage-le-patron-du-chalutier-francais-agresse-par-un-equipage-neerlandais-raconte-sa-soiree-de-cauchemar-3093490.html

CONCLUSION

TAKING BACK CONTROL OF THE BIG FIVE

The 'Big Five' have established themselves as a dominant force in global fishing. Through a sprawling network of opaque subsidiaries, a fleet of technologically over-equipped vessels, and an aggressive strategy of buyouts, these multinationals now reign unchallenged over the world's fishery resources. This hegemony is far from accidental: it is the result of deliberate political choices, permissive – if not complicit – institutional mechanisms, and a flagrant lack of transparency.

The concentration of fishing quotas in the hands of this small group of industrial players generates major economic and social inequalities. It leaves small-scale fishers to fend for themselves, even though they practise the most sustainable and methods that create the most jobs.

> **The management or ownership of resources by a handful of corporations reflects a serious drift in public policy which, instead of safeguarding common goods, promotes an extractivist logic serving short-term profitability.**

Today, these giants are investing heavily in real estate, anticipating a decline in their fishing profits – a logical consequence of sequential overexploitation. This pattern is typical of the tragedy of the commons, as demonstrated by Colin Clark in his article 'The Economics of Overexploitation', in which the extermination of wild resources is more profitable for capitalists than sustainable exploitation. This extractive logic leads to fishing until resources are depleted, in a 'scorched-earth' strategy. **If fish are reduced to the status of a temporary profit lever before a strategic repositioning of assets, then it is not only marine environments that are at risk, but also the stability of coastal territories, food sovereignty, and ultimately the livability of our planet.**

None of this is inevitable. It is the direct result of public policies that have allowed and encouraged the unchecked expansion of these companies. It is also the product of a system that is locked in opacity, where the economic interests of industrial actors outweigh the common good. In this context, **there is an urgent need to fundamentally rethink the economic and political model that governs access to marine resources today.**

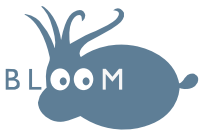
We must reclaim control of our fisheries policies, protect small-scale fishers and the ocean from industrial appropriation, and move away from an extractivist economic model to build a genuine paradigm of management rooted in social and ecological justice.

Only this level of ambition can restore hope and social justice among citizens and fishers, guarantee the resilience of marine ecosystems, and ensure future generations have sustainable access to the sea and its resources. If we do nothing, it is not only biodiversity that will disappear, but also a certain vision of the common good, sacrificed on the altar of unrestrained capitalistic greed. There is still time to act, but the window is narrowing. Action requires political courage and independence from the detrimental influence of industrial lobbies.

OUR DEMANDS

This is why BLOOM is making the following demands:

1. **The dismantling of these industrial fishing consortiums.** Under the principle of free competition, which must guarantee a plurality of actors and eliminate monopolies or oligopolies, European law prohibits agreements that restrict competition between companies, abuses of dominant positions, certain mergers and acquisitions, and certain forms of state aid. We call on the European Commission, EU Member States, and the European Parliament to take measures to dismantle the Big Five's dominant position, which has hitherto been hidden from the public.
2. **The gradual phasing out of all industrial trawlers** by 2030.
3. **A transition of all fishing fleets to environmentally friendly and socially responsible fishing** with low environmental impact and high human added value by 2030.
4. **The creation of a transparent register of fishing quotas** allocated to vessels, operated and controlled by the European Commission and accessible to citizens.
5. **The immediate and compulsory application of article 17 of the CFP** allocating quotas based on a social, environmental, and economic criteria, to ensure fairer access to fishing rights and to support fishers engaged in low-impact practices.



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