

Artisanal Fishing

Fishing Methods Fact Card

What is artisanal fishing?

“Artisanal” fishing refers to the level of technology being employed by the fishermen and women, but often also includes economic and social overtones and is often equated to “Small-scale” fisheries.

In general, artisanal fishing will be family-based, employing small or no boats and simple and/or traditional methods. These can include traps, hook and line, throw nets, small gill nets, harpoons, bow and arrows, diving, and beach seines. The catch can be either for the family’s own consumption (subsistence) and/or for sale. Often a variety of species are being caught, and the family may have a variety of incomes.



Within the artisanal level of fishing there are many sub-levels – from the subsistence fisherman or woman with a bamboo stick to a commercial fisherman that has substantial ice storage, a few boats, and employees. In some more developed countries, fleets of trollers, small gill-netters, or lobster tenders are also considered artisanal (or at least ‘small-scale’).

What do artisanal fishers catch?

Artisanal fisheries can provide a large variety of species, but generally only those relatively close to shore or in fresh waters.

What are the issues?

In general, artisanal fisheries – particularly traditional fisheries – are not considered threats to the survival of fish species, though this is not always true. However, through much of the world marine artisanal fisheries are generally in competition and conflict with larger commercial fisheries. In many cases, particularly in fresh water fisheries, they are also in conflict with sports fisheries. Artisanal fishing families are often in the lower social and economic classes – though, as in Mozambique, they are a step above the real abject poverty that exists in the country.