

CROSSED LINES: migrant fisher experiences in Scotland

Animation (2022) (4:43mins)

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This short animation introduces the crossed lines of communication that occur around the arrival of Filipino migrants into the Scottish fishing industry. By presenting how fishing crew and skippers each perceive their situation, we expose their different interpretations of reality and how migrant fishers are vulnerable to forms of coercion and control that are unrecognised or dismissed as unimportant within the industry.

In response to rising costs and a shortage of reliable, local crew, fishing crews from non-EEA countries such as the Philippines and Ghana, have been employed on fishing vessels in North-East Scotland (operating outside 12 nautical miles) since the mid-1990s. These skilled migrant workers are generally well respected as hardworking and reliable additions to the fishing industry, but our research identified an industry blind spot that left migrant crew vulnerable to particular forms of coercion and control – practices such as withholding food, slaps, kicks, and psychological and verbal abuse of crews, that are difficult to evidence or speak out against.

These forms of abuse remain 'invisible' within the industry because the precarious conditions of employment (through transit visas and short-term contracts) makes migrant fishers reluctant to come forward. Local cultural practices also prevent recognition, because skipper-crew relationships are interpreted through a lens that dismisses behaviour as part of a difficult working environment, alpha male/old school fishing culture, or inter-cultural misunderstandings.

This animation spotlights how current protections are inadequate because they do not address how the conditions of work (transit visas/short-term contracts) make migrant crew particularly vulnerable to this type of abuse, and how local industry cultural practices can render such abuse invisible.

The dialogue for this animation was collated from interviews in North-East Scotland (2019-2021) as part of the FisherCoast Research Project.

An accompanying Research Briefing outlining recommendations and the original research article is available in the FisherCoast Study Room.