

Water owners' attitudes towards ringed seal conservation in Lake Saimaa

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Introduction

By-catch mortality of Saimaa ringed seals caught in fishing gears forms a major challenge to seal conservation. Water owners play a crucial role in implementation of conservation strategies because they manage fisheries in private waters. We studied water owners' attitudes towards ringed seal conservation from three perspectives: Is the Saimaa ringed seal an endangered species? Is the estimate of the number of seals correct? And is the seal population threatened by fishing?

Methods

A postal questionnaire was sent to 1 700 water owners in main distribution area of ringed seal. 60 % of them answered. Attitudes were studied in relation to fishing activity, age, sex, place of residence and participation in activities of local shareholders' fishery associations.

Results

Most young, female water owners, as well as respondents, who lived outside the Saimaa area and those who never participated in water owners' activities, considered the ringed seal to be an endangered species.

A majority of all respondents did not have an opinion of the official seal population estimate. Only those who were active in local shareholders' fishery associations did not believe in the population estimate.

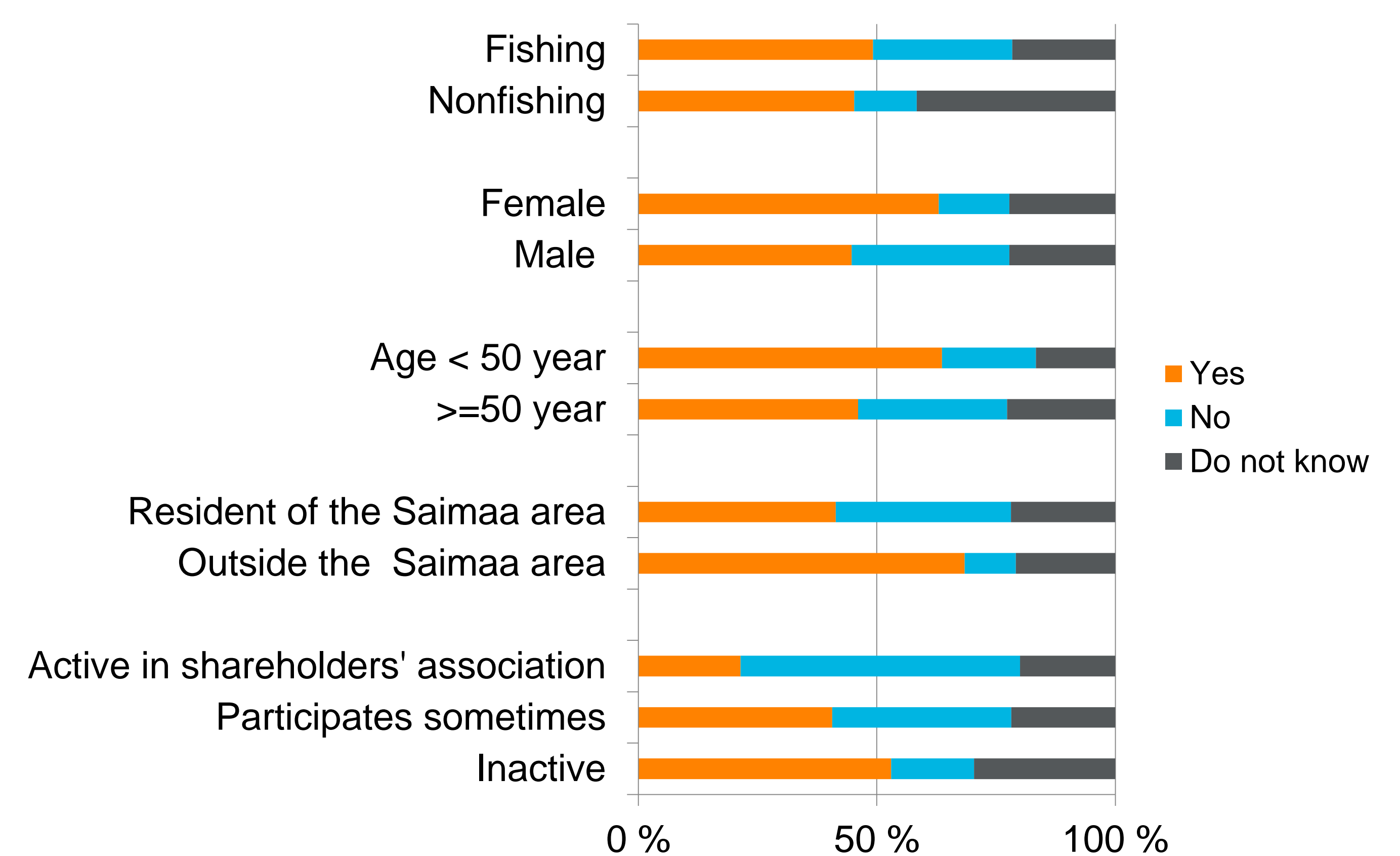
A majority of water owners who themselves fished, used mostly gill nets when fishing, lived in the Saimaa area and were at least sometimes active in local water owners' associations thought that fishing does not threaten ringed seal. Among other water owners less than one third shared this attitude.

Most of the gill-net fishers considered the ringed seal to be less threatened and fishing less harmful to the seal than those who fished with other gear types. They also thought that fishing restrictions have affected their hobby, while others were more satisfied with the restrictions.

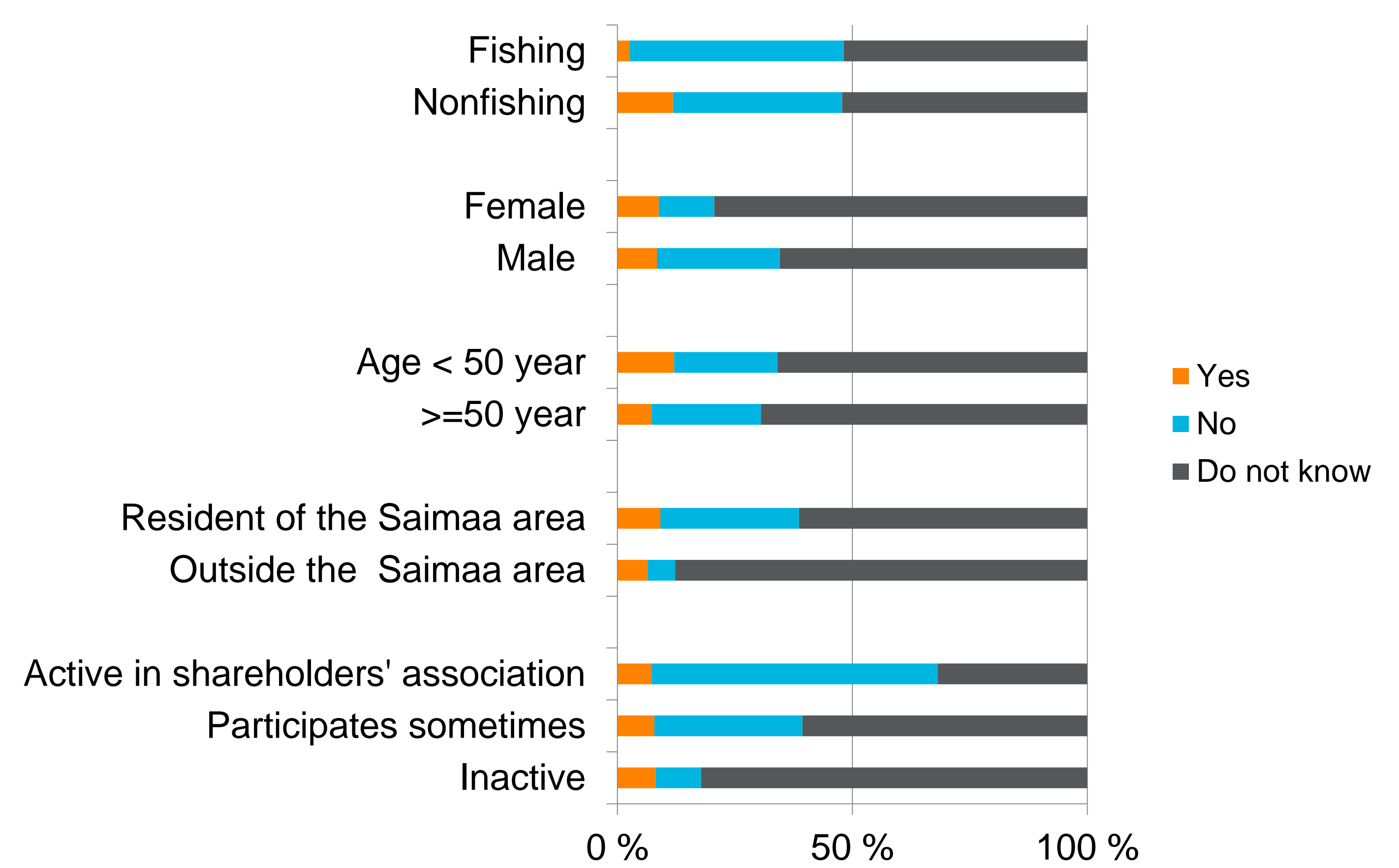
Conclusions

Attitudes varied according to fishing activity and most importantly gear type used. The attitudes of local inhabitants and especially active members in local shareholders' fishery associations differed from other water owners with regard to ringed seal conservation.

Is the Saimaa ringed seal endangered?



Is the estimate of the seal number correct?



Is the seal population threatened by fishing?

