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Minister Claims Fish Flee Drought, But Export Records Tell Different Story

In a parliamentary session on Monday, Morocco's Minister of Agriculture, Ahmed Bouari, made headlines by...

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by **Adil Faouzi** — January 21, 2025

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Fish flee from drought? Morocco's export data exposes minister's disputed claim.

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Doha – In a parliamentary session on Monday, Morocco's Minister of Agriculture, Ahmed Bouari, made headlines by attributing declining fish populations to drought conditions, suggesting that lack of rainfall causes fish to flee.

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The minister's statement came as he [addressed concerns](#) about rising fish meat and

The minister's statement came as he [answered questions](#) about rising fish, meat, and poultry prices during the weekly questions session at the House of Representatives.

Bouari emphasized the government's extensive efforts to ensure continuous market supply and control basic food prices while addressing climate challenges and multiple crises from recent years.

He detailed specific measures, including the suspension of import duties and value-added tax on cattle, sheep, goats, and camels, as well as on red meat imports from these animals, aimed at stabilizing local market supply and contributing to price reduction.

The minister reported some success in price stabilization for basic commodities, citing decreases in tomato prices by 8%, potatoes by 15%, onions by 30%, and eggs by 6% compared to January of the previous year.

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However, he acknowledged that red and white meat prices remain elevated, attributing this to increased demand for poultry as an alternative to red meat, alongside rising production and transportation costs.



Highlighting the government's ongoing efforts, Bouari mentioned that livestock and meat imports continue from more than 45 countries, adhering to strict health safety standards.

He announced an upcoming meeting with the Ministries of Interior and Trade and Industry to address price disparities between slaughterhouses and farms versus wholesale and retail markets.

The parliamentary session revealed tension over the issue, with one MP strongly criticizing the minister. "You've buried the poorest Moroccans with these prices," the MP fumed. "Have some respect for their intelligence. Shame on you!"

The criticism came as red meat prices exceeded MAD 120 (\$12) per kilogram, while poultry ranged from MAD 25 to 30 (\$2.50 to \$3).

What does science say?

Scientific research, however, provides a more complex picture of drought's impact on fish populations. According to comprehensive studies [published](#) in Reviews in Fish Biology and Fisheries, drought affects fish through three primary mechanisms: reduced habitat availability, elevated water temperatures, and oxygen depletion.

The US Geological Survey's research [has documented](#) how drought forces fish to congregate in smaller, isolated water bodies, leading to increased competition for resources and greater vulnerability to predators and diseases.

In Morocco itself, a recent study [published](#) in Scientific Reports has documented significant changes in fish distribution patterns along the Northwest African coast.



Analyzing data from 2,363 trawl samplings and 170,000 km of acoustic sea surveys between 1995 and 2015, the study found that warming sea temperatures and changing ocean currents are driving [sardines](#) northward along the coast.

The research revealed a remarkable northward shift in sardine distribution at a rate of 181 kilometers per decade since 1995, with populations increasing in subtropical waters while decreasing in intertropical regions.

This scientific evidence suggests that the relationship between drought and fish populations is more complex than simple flight behavior, involving broader environmental changes that affect entire marine ecosystems.

Maybe [fish](#) isn't fleeing – but being exported?

Official statistics shatter the minister's drought narrative. According to State Secretary for Maritime Fisheries Zakia Driouch, Morocco's fishing sector [recorded](#) massive exports worth MAD 31 billion (\$3.1 billion) in 2023, harvesting 847,000 tons of fish.

The sector has aggressively expanded both regionally and internationally, pouring investments of MAD 930 million into 2023 operations while sustaining more than 126,000 direct jobs.

Trade figures demolish the minister's drought explanation. A March 2024 European Parliament study exposed Morocco's dominance as the leading sardine exporter to the European Union among non-EU countries, commanding 93% of the EU's sardine imports from outside the bloc.

The country's fish exports to the EU hit a staggering €1.61 billion in 2022 alone.

Spanish import data reveals an even more dramatic reality, with Morocco's fish exports to Spain surging 40% during Pedro Sánchez's government, skyrocketing from 91.6 million kilograms in 2018 to 130.3 million kilograms in the current year.

Officials have attributed this explosion to Morocco's abundant fish stocks and competitive pricing.

While the minister blames drought for fish scarcity, citizens' reality tells a brutal truth. Moroccans voice outrage over astronomical domestic fish prices, particularly for sardines – historically "the poor man's fish" – now commanding up to MAD 20 (\$2) per kilogram in local markets.

The paradox screams for attention: if drought truly depleted fish stocks as claimed, how does Morocco maintain record-breaking exports while its citizens can't afford basic fish products? This glaring disconnect has ignited fierce public debate over resource allocation and export priorities.

Read also: [Coastal and Artisanal Fishing Revenue Rises by 8% in 2024](#)

Public comments overflow with anger about prioritizing exports over domestic needs. "Our resources benefit others while we can't even afford sardines in our own country," one citizen thundered in response to the European Parliament's report.

Another highlighted the bitter irony of Morocco possessing "two seas" while Moroccans struggle to afford fish.

This crisis exposes fundamental questions about balancing export profits against domestic food security.

With Morocco operating 518 seafood processing units and standing as Africa's fishing powerhouse – ranked 25th globally – the gulf between export triumph and domestic hardship becomes impossible to ignore.

The chasm between the minister's drought claims and Morocco's booming fish export data demands urgent scrutiny of fish stock management and domestic market policies, as citizens watch helplessly while a once-affordable protein source slips beyond their reach.

Tags: [Ahmed El Bouari](#) [Drought in Morocco](#) [Fish Export](#) [Minister of Agriculture](#)



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Rebel Group in Mali Say They Freed Spanish National Kidnapped in Algeria

Tuareg rebels in northern Mali have announced that they freed a Spanish national kidnapped last week in Algeria.

by **Safaa Kasraoui** — January 21, 2025

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Rebel Group in Mali Say They Freed Spanish National Kidnapped in Algeria

Rabat — Tuareg rebels in northern Mali have announced that they freed a Spanish national kidnapped last week in Algeria.

AFP reported the Spanish national, who was [kidnapped](#) by ISIS-affiliated terrorists and taken to Mali, was freed thanks to the rebels' intervention. The Spanish national is under their "protection" and is "in good health," the news outlet said.

Attaye Ag Mohamed, a leader of the Tuareg group, said forces of his group, the Azawad Liberation Front (FLA), intervened to release the Spanish citizen on Monday.

The kidnapped Spanish citizen was "under the protection of FLA forces awaiting his transfer to the Algerian authorities," according to reports.

Last week, converging media said a Spanish tourist was kidnapped on January 15 in southern Algeria by armed terrorists affiliated with ISIS.

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The Algerian authorities notably remained silent about the situation, sparking concern.

The [Spanish](#) government, however, launched an investigation into the kidnapping incident.

El Pais reported that the victim was transferred to Mali, with the Spanish government warning all of its citizens in Algeria to report their movements to Spanish consulates and the Algerian gendarmerie for enhanced safety.

The kidnapping case comes as the Algerian regime continues to ignore calls for cooperation to tackle terrorism and security concerns in the Sahel.

Morocco has been calling on Algeria to engage in international efforts to manage and address security challenges shared by the international community.

In 2023, Morocco called on the Peace and Security Council of the AU to prioritize a coordinated and viable regional approach to tackle the growing threats of terrorism and violent extremism in the Sahel.

The Moroccan delegation urged the importance of creating mechanisms to combat security challenges, calling for a shared responsibility to extend support to countries in transition.

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ONMT Seeks to Turn Rabat Into Fully-Fledged Tourist Destination in Morocco

Morocco's Tourism Office's (ONMT) next goal is to turn Rabat into a "fully-fledged" tourist destination in line with the capital's rich heritage and development potential.

