

Leading the fight against illegal fishing

The EU IUU Regulation – Making it work, together



The sustainable, equitable and well-managed exploitation of marine fish stocks is a vital component of global food and economic security.

The European Union is the biggest market for seafood products in the world, importing 60% of the fish products it consumes. This gives it an unrivalled ability and responsibility to ensure there are healthy fish stocks.

Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing has a severe impact on marine environments, livelihoods, food security and legal fishers. It is estimated that one in every five fish taken from our ocean is caught illegally, which costs up to €19 billion in lost opportunity to the global economy annually and represents up to 26 million tonnes of catch globally¹.

The EU's 2010 IUU Regulation is a world-leading piece of legislation. It aims to curb IUU fishing by shutting out imports of illegal catch and securing the lawful exploitation of fish. This ensures that fisheries products entering into the EU have been caught legally. The Regulation requires catch certificates for imports into the EU, and enables member states to deny market access for illegal fish and the EU to ban the entry of fish from third countries that fail to meet the legal minimum standards for fisheries management. Implementation of the Regulation has the effect of conserving fragile marine environments and vulnerable fishery-dependent communities around the world as well as protecting legitimate European fishing companies against unfair competition from illegal operators.

Four NGOs — The Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF), Oceana, The Pew Charitable Trusts (Pew) and WWF — have committed to work together in Europe to support the Regulation and its effective implementation. They bring a breadth of experience and fisheries expertise and share a vision: to ensure that global marine fisheries can sustain future generations.

Achievements so far

One of the Regulation's greatest achievements to date has been to motivate changes in fisheries management in third countries.

- As a direct outcome of the EU yellow and red carding process introduced in the Regulation², at least six countries – namely Belize, Fiji, Panama, Togo, South Korea and Vanuatu – have reformed their fisheries laws and introduced more sophisticated and effective vessel monitoring systems as well as sanctions for vessels involved in IUU fishing.

Since 2010, key fish-importing EU member states have undertaken substantial investment in order to implement the IUU Regulation effectively.

- As a result of these investments, more than 100 consignments of illegally caught fish have been detected at EU borders and appropriate actions have been taken in line with the IUU Regulation.

Securing the Regulation for the future

Addressing IUU fishing requires a coordinated effort that involves governments, civil society, the seafood industry and others. It is essential that the political will to guide and sustain this effort is maintained, as the next two years will be vital for full implementation of the Regulation by the EU institutions and member states, and for taking action to improve transparency in the fishing sector.

EJF, Oceana, Pew and WWF are working together to ensure this happens. The core components of the EU IUU Regulation's success will be secured by:

- Establishing and proliferating the use of electronic systems for collating and distributing catch certificates to allow accurate, harmonised cross-checking of information to prevent fraudulent abuse of the certificate system;
- Maintaining rigorous and regular assessments of the performance of third countries, and encouraging compliance with international fisheries laws through the yellow/red carding process;
- Ensuring uniform application of the Regulation across EU member states to prevent weak spots through which illegal catch can enter the market 'under the radar';
- Warranting appropriate action by member states if their nationals are engaged in IUU fishing;
- Mandating certain vessels willing to import fish into the EU, as well as EU vessels, to be identified with the 'IMO number', the unique vessel identifier granted in accordance with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) scheme;
- Strengthening the EU's Fishing Authorisation Regulation to close the loopholes that allow EU vessels to engage in IUU fishing in third countries and international waters, and;
- Engaging with other major market states to ensure similar stringent instruments are developed to drive illegal operators out of business across the globe.

The EU IUU Regulation has great potential to stop the trade in illegal fish products into the world's largest seafood market and so discourage IUU fishing worldwide, but it is critical that it is fully implemented.



Dock workers organising frozen fish into boxes in Las Palmas © EJF

The Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF), Oceana, The Pew Charitable Trusts and WWF are working together to secure the harmonised and effective implementation of the EU Regulation to end illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

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¹ <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0004570>

² As per Chapter VI of the IUU Regulation, and based on international fisheries law, the EU identifies third or non-EU countries that it considers to be non-cooperating in fighting IUU fishing.