

FISHERIES TRANSPARENCY

ENSURING **SUSTAINABLE** FISHERIES MANAGEMENT AND **PREVENTING**
ILLEGAL, UNREPORTED AND UNREGULATED FISHING



EU IUU FISHING COALITION

IUUwatch.eu

ABOUT THE EU IUU FISHING COALITION

The EU IUU Fishing Coalition —The Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF), Oceana, The Nature Conservancy, The Pew Charitable Trusts and WWF — have been working together since 2014 to promote EU leadership in improving global fisheries transparency and governance to end illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.



WHY IS FISHERIES TRANSPARENCY SO IMPORTANT TO TACKLING IUU FISHING?

Seafood is an essential source of primary protein for around 3 billion people and one of the most valuable, globally traded food commodities. Seafood supply chains are often complex and opaque, with much of the fishing industry operating in the shadows and without the necessary scrutiny to ensure its products are sustainable, legal and ethical. There is currently insufficient transparency in the fisheries sector at all levels, including between government authorities, along supply chains and within the public sector. Such opacity, coupled with complex and inconsistent international management systems, allows illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and other associated illicit activities, such as human, drug and arms trafficking, human rights violations, forced labour and corruption, to continue unchecked and for the perpetrators to go on unpunished.

Embracing global transparency policies is key to both addressing these challenges and revealing what is happening in the ocean. For instance, public and accessible information about who is catching what, where, when, how and who benefits, would enable all stakeholders, including fishers, coastal communities, seafood buyers, governments, regional organisations and civil society, to be more effective in ensuring that fishing activities are legal and carried out more sustainably. Without transparency, policy advancements and enforcement efforts are hampered, making it impossible to verify fishing activity, trace seafood along global supply chains, hold the perpetrators behind IUU fishing accountable and guarantee consumers that their seafood was caught legally.

BENEFITS OF A MORE TRANSPARENT SEAFOOD SECTOR

Fighting IUU Fishing:

- ✕ Transparency on fishing vessel movements helps to monitor, detect and prevent IUU fishing activities which lead to the depletion of fish stocks and harm marine ecosystems.
- ✕ By making fishing activities more visible, it becomes easier to identify and take action against those supporting, engaging in and profiting from IUU fishing.
- ✕ Beneficial ownership transparency enables authorities and interested stakeholders to hold the true beneficiaries of illicit activities accountable as these are often different from the fishing vessel crew or the company that directly manages a fishing vessel.



Seafood supply chain integrity:

- ✕ Transparency in fishing activities is necessary to guarantee the legality and traceability of seafood products from net to plate. It helps authorities and seafood businesses to ensure that products are not tainted with illegal catches and/or with human or labour rights abuses.
- ✕ With an increasing demand for sustainably sourced products, consumers, retailers and importers are prioritising transparent supply chains. Essential information such as the species, catch area and catch method should be available on all seafood products. This is why enhancing consumers' trust in the global seafood market can also be translated into improved profit margins for retailers. 2022 research by Planet Tracker shows that one of the ten largest food retailers in the world is generating some of its lowest seafood margins on the most overfished species compared with more sustainable seafood.
- ✕ Improved supply chain transparency and sourcing more sustainable seafood could help level the playing field internationally by encouraging other countries' industries to follow higher standards.

Sustainable resource management and biodiversity conservation:

- ✧ Transparency allows for a deeper understanding of marine ecosystems. Obtaining public and accurate data facilitates better, science-based management of fish populations. Authorities, researchers and organisations can use this information to drive best practice in sustainable fisheries management and bycatch-safe handling and release that ensure the long-term health of marine ecosystems.

Prevention of human and labour rights abuses:

- ✧ Human and labour rights abuses, such as physical violence, salary deductions, human trafficking, and forced labour, are well-documented within the fishing industry and its associated supply chains.
- ✧ Comprehensive information about fish workers and their working conditions, both onboard and ashore, is vital for authorities to identify potential human rights and labour exploitation in the fishing sector. Authorities can then act against it at the domestic level or protect their markets from indirectly supporting such practices through the importation of tainted seafood products.

Well-being of coastal and small-scale fishing communities:

- ✧ Transparency can help reduce conflicts between different user groups, such as commercial fishers and small-scale fishers and strengthen overall trust by helping hold IUU fishing perpetrators accountable. It can also create a more level playing field for small-scale fishers, allowing them to compete more effectively with larger commercial operations.

Stakeholder participation and trust:

- ✧ Transparency builds trust among stakeholders, such as fishers, coastal communities, governments, industry and civil society and facilitates more informed and collaborative decision making.
- ✧ By providing access to information, fisheries managers can involve a broader range of perspectives, leading to more inclusive and effective decision-making.
- ✧ Sufficient and/or more effective transparency allows relevant stakeholders to hold national and regional authorities to account against their commitments and legal obligations.

THE GLOBAL CHARTER FOR FISHERIES TRANSPARENCY

The Global Charter for Fisheries Transparency, developed by the Coalition for Fisheries Transparency (CFT) and endorsed by the Environmental Justice Foundation, Oceana, The Pew Charitable Trusts and WWF, establishes 10 key principles to enhance transparency in fisheries governance globally. This framework fosters collaboration on national and regional strategies, addresses gaps, and strengthens overall fisheries governance.

These principles are intended for adoption by States as law and practice. By making information about vessels and fishing activities readily available, this approach supports efforts to combat mismanagement, illegal fishing, and human rights abuses at sea.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the Global Charter for Fisheries Transparency, the EU IUU Fishing Coalition urges all States to:



1) Require unique identification numbers for all fishing vessels, including transport and supply vessels.

All fishing vessels should obtain a unique vessel identifier (UVI) that stays with them throughout their lifetime. UVIs help prevent maritime fraud and are an essential tool in the fight against illegal fishing because they help to improve monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement of fishing operations. This identifier must also be provided to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Global Record of Fishing Vessels, Refrigerated Transport Vessels and Supply Vessels, Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs), and other relevant bodies.



2) Publish comprehensive and up-to-date lists of fishing licences, authorisations, subsidies, access agreements and sanctions.

Making this information public improves accountability and allows for greater scrutiny by stakeholders, including the public, civil society and international bodies. Additionally, it can discourage potential violators, facilitate effective monitoring and enforcement by regulatory authorities, aid in identifying vessels engaged in IUU activities, and support international collaboration.



3) Collect and publish beneficial ownership information for all fishing vessels.

Collecting and publishing information about the true owners of fishing vessels, allows countries to better understand who is behind fishing operations and who benefits from them. This transparency fosters accountability, making it harder for unscrupulous actors to hide behind complex corporate structures.



4) Stop the use of “flags of convenience” by fishing vessels.

Countries considered “flags of convenience” are attractive to IUU fishing operators as they often lack the ability or inclination to monitor and control vessels. These countries also often maintain open registries with weak registration criteria, as well as a range of other practical benefits such as lower taxes, labour requirements and administrative costs, further attracting illicit operators. It is therefore important to enforce UNCLOS Article 91’s requirement for a genuine link between vessels and their flag state. The prevalence of flags of convenience means it is also important that all States have measures to deter IUU fishing by their nationals even when those nationals flag their vessel to foreign countries.



5) Require vessel position to be public (by sharing VMS, sharing other non-public systems or mandating AIS).

Making real-time vessel location information publicly accessible, especially when operating outside of their own exclusive economic zone (EEZ), enhances monitoring capabilities, allowing

stakeholders to track fishing activities and detect suspicious behaviour. The mandatory use of AIS improves safety in an incredibly dangerous profession and, combined with the appropriate disclosure of VMS data, provides a standardised approach to surveillance, marine domain awareness and facilitates fisheries-related research.



6) Closely monitor at-sea transshipments or consider banning them.

Transferring fish between boats, often away from scrutiny, allows fishing vessels to stay at sea for long periods – from months to years – potentially avoiding inspections, facilitating IUU fishing and potentially labour abuses. By banning or imposing strict monitoring of these operations, for example, by ensuring transshipment events are monitored by human observers or Electronic Monitoring (EM) and by ensuring they adhere to the newly adopted FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Transshipment, countries can reduce the risk of vessels engaging in illicit practices such as underreporting catches and exploitation of workers.



7) Mandate seafood traceability from boat to plate.

Implementing a comprehensive traceability system allows countries and industry to track seafood products from fishing vessels to consumers, verifying their legality. This enhances consumer confidence, promotes ethical choices and supports sustainable fisheries. Furthermore, it enables authorities to enforce regulations, investigate potential violations and take corrective actions. In addition, to ensure the gathering and use of reliable catch data, States should also aim to implement, or further, the mandatory use of EM onboard vessels. EM, including on-board cameras and sensors, has been proven to advance fisheries traceability and transparency and drive best practices by providing fisheries authorities with accurate information on catch, bycatch and compliance, allowing for science-based fisheries management decisions nationally, regionally and globally.



8) Implement international instruments that set standards for fishing vessels and the trade in fisheries products and prioritise international cooperation.

Such agreements provide a framework for harmonising and strengthening regulations, ensuring countries adhere to common standards in vessel operations, fishing practices and trade. Implementing these instruments through effective operational bylaws, show commitment to responsible fisheries management and encourage a collective approach to combating IUU fishing on a global scale. This also provides national authorities with the appropriate legal tools and other resources to fulfil their mission and obligations under the law. These instruments include the ILO Work in Fishing Convention (C188), the FAO Port States Measures Agreement, the IMO Cape Town Agreement on fishing vessel safety, the World Trade Organization Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies and other instruments such as the FAO Compliance Agreement, the UN Fish Stocks Agreement, the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the UN Treaty on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biodiversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (the “high seas” treaty).



9) Ensure comprehensive data collection of fishing operations and facilitate public and equitable access to this information data.

Open access to all collected fisheries data, including scientific assessments, subsidies and other administrative decisions, fosters transparency and trust. This enables scrutiny and information access to all relevant and interested stakeholders such as small-scale fishers, fish workers, indigenous communities, industry associations, civil society, journalists and others, as well as more informed decision-making for involved parties. Furthermore, such open data policies have the added benefit of enabling more informed and effective decision-making processes, including by facilitating more inclusive participation in these processes (e.g. in public consultations or surveys). Having diverse perspectives, including those of local communities and small-scale fishers, can lead to more effective and sustainable fisheries management. In addition, to foster international cooperation and align fisheries transparency measures globally, States should ensure the full and timely upload of information to the FAO Global Record by all partner countries, as this is essential for advancing fisheries

transparency and preventing IUU fishing. The Global Record is a central database of fishing vessels, providing key information on vessel identities, characteristics, and authorisation status. Timely and accurate data upload enables governments, fisheries management organisations, and the public to access reliable information for better monitoring and enforcement of fishing activities. This facilitates global efforts to combat IUU fishing and promotes responsible fisheries management to protect marine ecosystems and fishery resources.



10) Collect data on labour conditions and incidents at sea and publish them in aggregate form.

Transparent and comprehensive reporting on crew well-being and working conditions helps address human rights abuses and forced labour linked to IUU fishing. The high risk associated with fishing, resulting in approximately 100,000 fishers losing their lives annually, underscores the importance of reporting incidents at sea to inform the development of effective policies and enforcement strategies for fishing safety.



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