

EU Fisheries Control System Factsheet

Digitisation of the catch certification scheme of the IUU Regulation

Importance

One out of five wild-caught fish sold at market is stolen from the sea through illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, estimated to worth between \$10 and \$23.5 billion per year globally.¹ The EU imports over 60% of the domestic seafood consumed, and is the world's largest trader of fishery and aquaculture products in value terms, worth €24.4 billion in 2016.² Consequently, the EU has a special influence and responsibility to ensure sustainable exploitation of fish stocks and in the fight against illegal fishing.

Commission's proposal

In the framework of the revision of the European Union's (EU's) fisheries control system, the European Commission has proposed targeted amendments to the control aspects of the IUU Regulation³ (EC 1005/2008). One key element proposed by the Commission is to make the catch certification scheme (which requires that only marine fisheries products validated as legal by the competent flag state can be imported into the EU) electronic.

Approximately 250.000 paper catch certificates are processed annually across the EU. This practice for processing, verifying and recording information from incoming paper catch certificates does not allow for effective information-sharing or cross-checking among EU Member States. Indeed, each State has been responsible for establishing its own system for processing, verifying and recording catch certificates, which has led to a wide variation in these procedures. This has been counterproductive and the use of paper is proven to be open to fraud, for example by allowing the photocopying of catch certificates which in turn could be used to blur traceability. These and other issues have been identified by a wide range of stakeholders, as early as 2011.^{4,5,6,7,8,9}

¹ Estimating the Worldwide Extent of Illegal Fishing, Agnew DJ, Pearce J, Pramod G, Peatman T, Watson R, Beddington JR, et al. (2009).

² The EU Fish Market 2017 Edition, European Market Observatory for Fisheries and Aquaculture Products (2017).

³ Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008 of 29 September 2008 establishing a Community system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU Regulation)

⁴ An Independent Review of the EU Illegal Unreported and Unregulated Regulations, Institute for European Environmental Policy (2011).

⁵ Modernisation of the EU IUU Regulation Catch Certificate System, Environmental Justice Foundation, Oceana, The Pew Charitable Trusts, WWF (2016).

⁶ The EU IUU Regulation, Analysis: Implementation of EU seafood import controls, Environmental Justice Foundation, Oceana, The Pew Charitable Trusts, WWF (2017).

⁷ Improving performance in the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, Environmental Justice Foundation, Oceana, The Pew Charitable Trusts, WWF (2017).

⁸ Special Report No 08/2017: EU fisheries control: more efforts needed, European Court of Auditors (2017).

⁹ COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL On the application of Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008 establishing a Community system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (2015).

Recommendations

Apart from supporting the full digitisation of catch certificates, we also recommend to:

1. Safeguard the IUU Regulation

The EU IUU Regulation is a pioneering piece of legislation with a proven track record in bringing lasting fisheries reforms globally. Any revision to it should strictly remain within the scope that the European Commission has set and be related to the EU Fisheries Control System. Any attempt to amend other parts of the regulation could have serious consequences given the fact that normal decision-making rules have not been followed,¹⁰ and that the last evaluation deemed it fit for purpose, except for the control aspects¹¹.

2. Support the Commission's proposal on introducing a new electronic tool for catch certificates (CATCH) for Member States

The Commission's proposal (Article 4 (6), amending the IUU Regulation) introduces an electronic EU-wide database system (CATCH), which would allow for electronic submission, handling, validation and management of catch certificates, as well as Member States to share their electronic catch certificates between themselves and with the European Commission. Taking into account the various systems and processes in place by the Member States, as well as their poor record in implementing existing regulations,^{12,13} a mandated use of the new IT tools for catch certificates, together with more vigilance by the Commission when it comes to Member State implementation of the Fisheries Control System,¹⁴ would limit products caught by IUU operators coming into the EU. This new system has the potential to decisively improve fisheries controls, checks and risk assessments at EU level, harmonise Member State controls and cross-checks, as well as bring added transparency to supply chains in a cost, labour and time-efficient manner. In addition, funding from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund could be made available to Member States for the implementation of the new system.

[Read the full NGO position paper](#)

¹⁰ Please see joint NGO paper on the Inception Impact Assessment of the revision of the EU fisheries control system.

¹¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the application of Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008 establishing a Community system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (2015)..

¹² Commission warns lack of enforcement is undermining EU fisheries law, ClientEarth (2017).

¹³ Improving performance in the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, Environmental Justice Foundation, Oceana, The Pew Charitable Trusts, WWF (2017).

¹⁴ Please see NGO recommendations relevant to sanctions which include adding the following paragraph in the Commission's proposed article 1 (72) amending Control Regulation's Article 102: *5. If the Member State fails to remedy the situation and act on the shortcomings in its control system, the Commission shall start an investigation with the aim to start an infringement procedure if the Member State fails to act.*