



TEXTS ADOPTED

P9_TA(2024)0043

Impact of illegal fishing on food security – the role of the European Union

European Parliament resolution of 18 January 2024 on the impact of illegal fishing on food security – the role of the European Union (2023/2027(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea,
- having regard to the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement,
- having regard to the 1995 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Agreement to Promote Compliance with International Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High Seas,
- having regard to the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries,
- having regard to the 2001 FAO International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing,
- having regard to International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 188 on Work in Fishing Convention of 14 June 2007,
- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008 of 29 September 2008 establishing a Community system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, amending Regulations (EEC) No 2847/93, (EC) No 1936/2001 and (EC) No 601/2004 and repealing Regulations (EC) No 1093/94 and (EC) No 1447/1999¹ (the IUU Regulation),
- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009 of 20 November 2009 establishing a Community control system for ensuring compliance with the rules of the common fisheries policy, amending Regulations (EC) No 847/96, (EC) No 2371/2002, (EC) No 811/2004, (EC) No 768/2005, (EC) No 2115/2005, (EC) No 2166/2005, (EC) No 388/2006, (EC) No 509/2007, (EC) No 676/2007, (EC) No 1098/2007, (EC) No 1300/2008, (EC) No 1342/2008 and repealing Regulations (EEC) No 2847/93, (EC) No 1627/94 and (EC) No 1966/2006² (the Fisheries Control Regulation),

¹ OJ L 286, 29.10.2008, p. 1.

² OJ L 343, 22.12.2009, p. 1.

- having regard to the 2009 FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing,
- having regard to the 2012 Cape Town Agreement on the Implementation of the Provisions of the Torremolinos Protocol of 1993 relating to the Torremolinos International Convention for the Safety of Fishing Vessels, 1977,
- having regard to the 2014 FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Flag State Performance,
- having regard to Council Regulation (EU) 2020/1998 of 7 December 2020 concerning restrictive measures against serious human rights violations and abuses¹,
- having regard to the EU IUU Fishing Coalition report of December 2021 entitled ‘Seafood traceability: Aligning RFMO catch documentation schemes to combat IUU fishing’,
- having regard to the 2022 study by the Commission entitled ‘Study on the legislative frameworks and enforcement systems of Member States regarding obligations and sanctions to nationals for infringements to the rules arising from the IUU Regulation’,
- having regard to European Court of Auditors Special Report 20/2022 of 26 September 2022, entitled ‘EU action to combat illegal fishing – Control systems in place but weakened by uneven checks and sanctions by Member States’, which covers EU policy on fighting illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing,
- having regard to the 2022 FAO report entitled ‘The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022 – Towards Blue Transformation’,
- having regard to the IUU Fishing Action Alliance Pledge to stimulate ambition and action in the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, agreed on 28 June 2022,
- having regard to the 2022 World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, which prohibits harmful fisheries subsidies,
- having regard to the 2023 FAO guidance document entitled ‘Advancing end-to-end traceability – Critical tracking events and key data elements along capture fisheries and aquaculture value chains’,
- having regard to the 2023 FAO technical guideline entitled ‘Implementation of the International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing – 1. Methodologies and indicators for the estimation of the magnitude and impact of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing: 1.1 Principles and approaches’,
- having regard to the Market Advisory Council and Long Distance Advisory Council joint advice of 21 April 2023 on the need for harmonised import controls between Member States in order to prevent the products of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing from entering the European Union market,

¹ OJ L 410 I, 7.12.2020, p. 1.

- having regard to the European Parliament position on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market (COM(2022)0453),
 - having regard to its resolution of 17 October 2023 on the implications of Chinese fishing operations on EU fisheries and the way forward¹,
 - having regard to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 14 ‘Life Below Water: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development’,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Fisheries (A9-0433/2023),
- A. whereas the EU, as a major global player in fisheries, with a fishing fleet of around 73 000 vessels, and as the world’s largest importer of fishery products, representing 34 % of total world trade in value, with almost 70 % of the fishing products consumed in the EU being imported, therefore has a central role to play in the fight against IUU fishing worldwide;
- B. whereas the fishing sector in the EU employs 124 000 fishers directly and generates EUR 6,3 billion in revenue each year;
- C. whereas it is difficult to estimate the extent of IUU fishing and its economic value; whereas studies have found that the global quantity of unreported catches to be around 28 million tonnes in 2016, with an estimated value of USD 41 billion; whereas illegal catches were estimated in the early 2000s, to be between 10 and 26 million tonnes of fish, with an estimated value of USD 10-23 billion; whereas in the EU, IUU-caught products imported annually are estimated to amount to around 500 000 tonnes, at a value of EUR 1,1 billion²;
- D. whereas IUU fishing practices have a significant impact on food security and employment opportunities for coastal communities, as well as representing a major threat to marine ecosystems and fish stocks, which poses a serious menace to the livelihood of fishers and coastal communities within the European Union and in third countries, and creates unfair competition on the fisheries products market;
- E. whereas the EU is committed to achieving Sustainable Development Goal target 14.4, to end IUU fishing by 2020, and to eliminate, to the extent possible, the importation of products stemming from IUU fishing still enter the EU market;

¹ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2023)0366.

² Briefing – ‘Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing’, European Parliament, Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services, 14 October 2022, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/614598/EPRS_BRI\(2017\)614598_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/614598/EPRS_BRI(2017)614598_EN.pdf); Temple, Andrew J. et al., ‘Illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing impacts: A systematic review of evidence and proposed future agenda’, *Marine Policy*, Volume 139, 2022, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308597X2200080X>; European Court of Auditors Special Report 20/2022.

- F. whereas the EU distant fleet is competing with certain foreign fleets that are accused of practising IUU fishing, including forced labour, labour exploitation and human trafficking, thereby undermining the livelihoods and human rights of fishers around the world and the sustainability of fish stocks, and of selling low-cost fishery products to the EU market, thereby rendering high-quality EU products non-competitive; whereas EU action against IUU contributes to ensuring a level playing field between EU and non-EU operators;
- G. whereas the EU has a robust framework of fisheries legislation, including measures to improve the monitoring, inspection, control and surveillance capacities used to combat IUU fishing;
- H. whereas according to the European Court of Auditors' Special report on EU action to combat IUU fishing, the IUU regulation has improved traceability and reinforced import control, it has proven useful and triggered positive reform in most of the countries concerned, however it concludes that control systems are weakened by uneven checks and sanctions by Member States;
- I. whereas the digitalisation of IUU catch certificates through the CATCH IT system will reduce opportunities for fraudulent imports; whereas, furthermore, the EU's catch certification scheme is the most comprehensive, in comparison to the schemes of the USA and Japan, which are the second and third largest importers in the world, respectively;
- J. whereas Article 12 of the IUU Regulation prohibits the import of fishery products obtained from IUU fishing and third countries may be identified as non-cooperating countries in accordance with the provisions in Articles 31-36 thereof; whereas the EU has a zero-tolerance policy on IUU fishing, which applies to all aspects of fishing regardless of whether it takes place inside or outside of the EU;
- K. whereas five third countries currently have a red card and eight have a yellow card; whereas, however, one major producer of seafood, the People's Republic of China, has never been subject to a procedure under the IUU Regulation, despite considerable evidence of its significant and growing involvement in IUU fishing and whereas its unregulated and opaque fishing operations pose a significant threat to the survival of global fishery resources and supply chains;
- L. whereas the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund provided support for monitoring, control and enforcement activities, with a total budget of EUR 580 million earmarked for this;
- M. whereas the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) provides important support for monitoring, control and enforcement activities, with a specific objective of 'fostering efficient fisheries control and enforcement, including fighting against IUU fishing' under Priority 1 – Fostering sustainable fisheries and the restoration and conservation of aquatic biological resources;
- N. whereas products resulting from IUU fishing pose a risk to the food security of European Union citizens by menacing access to safe, affordable, high-quality, and traceable food for all;

- O. whereas it recognises that IUU fishing disproportionately affects vulnerable and marginalised communities, both in the EU and in third countries;
- P. whereas the EU joined the IUU Fishing Action Alliance in March 2023;
 - 1. Reaffirms the need for the EU and its Member States to continue taking a zero-tolerance approach to IUU fishing, applying this approach equally to all countries, irrespective of size, and to promote economically, environmentally and socially sustainable fisheries with a view to combating overfishing, the destruction of marine ecosystems and unfair competition to the EU fishing sector, while ensuring food security and safeguarding public health;
 - 2. Notes that the fishing sector plays a crucial role in safeguarding global food and nutrition security and providing a means of livelihood for people living in coastal areas; underlines that the Union attaches great importance to the sustainable development of global fisheries and eradicating forced labour, trafficking and other forms of abuses, including in the fishing sector; recognises the commitment and compliance shown by numerous EU fishers when it comes to ensuring that fisheries resources are managed sustainably;
 - 3. Recognises that the fight against IUU fishing requires a holistic approach that addresses the causes of IUU fishing, such as poverty, the lack of economic alternatives and weak governance in some regions; encourages the Commission to engage in capacity-building programmes and international cooperation to help address these underlying issues and promote sustainable fishing practices;
 - 4. Urges the Commission to engage in particular with third countries which are significant fishing products exporters to the EU in order to ensure that they implement measures to prevent IUU fishing, including labour and environmental regulations; encourages the Commission to consider sanctions or other trade measures if third countries fail to comply with international norms;
 - 5. Calls on the Commission to provide technical assistance and promote capacity-building, using all possible channels in the framework of the common fisheries policy, in line with the EU's international ocean governance goals, to encourage and support coastal states with which the Union maintains dialogue in stepping up their fight against IUU fishing and strengthening the sustainability and transparency requirements in the conditions for accessing their exclusive economic zones;
 - 6. Welcomes the initiative of the Commission to publish, on 10 May 2023, a website containing data on the fishing authorisations granted to EU vessels fishing outside EU waters and non-EU vessels fishing in EU waters; urges the fisheries authorities of third countries and regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs) to adopt similar measures;
 - 7. Welcomes that the new Fisheries Control Regulation requires fishery products imported into the EU and caught at sea to indicate the IMO number of the fishing vessel, or another unique vessel identifier if the IMO number does not apply;
 - 8. Welcomes the IUU Fishing Action Alliance Pledge to stimulate ambition and action in the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, agreed on 28 June 2022;

welcomes the fact that the European Union recently joined the IUU Fishing Action Alliance; urges the members of the alliance to coordinate their national systems for tackling IUU fishing and, in particular, to look into the possibility of jointly issuing 'yellow cards' and 'red cards', or other similar instruments;

9. Emphasises the need to conduct rigorous scientific research and data collection to better understand the specific impacts of IUU fishing on food security, local economies and the environment; calls on the Commission to allocate funding and resources for such research and to regularly update its assessments to inform evidence-based policymaking;
10. Underlines that the EU IUU regulations must be implemented in a harmonised approach, ensuring the same level of implementation across all Member States, which would make it more effective when used and prevent any potential loopholes;
11. Requests that the Commission ensure that the EU guidelines on the implementation of the EU IUU regulations must provide guidance on how to improve the implementation of the EU IUU Regulation in Member States failing to uphold the Regulation's requirements and how best to verify the information provided in the biennial reports;
12. Underlines the importance of introducing more import controls to protect public health and the competitiveness of the EU fishing industry by implementing strong and timely measures and sanctions;
13. Points out that the Member States must allocate sufficient capacity and resources to ensure the effective implementation of import controls;
14. Encourages national authorities to ensure adequate implementation of the IUU Regulation in order to set an example of good practice for other Member States, contribute to implementing an adequate traceability system and ensure responsible fishing practices, improving the safety at sea and labour conditions on fishing vessels, and to enhance accurate reporting of catch;
15. Stresses that the Commission must provide adequate support to the national authorities responsible for the control of fisheries products imports, noting that this support may include, where available, the production of a list of the management and conservation measures applying in non-EU countries and the sharing of detailed information on shortcomings identified in the context of the implementation of the EU IUU Regulation in relation to non-EU countries;
16. Stresses that the Commission must provide, together with the European Fisheries Control Agency and in close coordination with the Member States, further support to the national authorities as regards how best to implement the IUU Regulation, with this support taking the form of guidance, exchanges of good practices, training, and similar, which will also allow national fisheries to regain their competitiveness;
17. Calls on the Member States to use the EMFAF to ensure that it provides the necessary targeted support to small-scale and artisanal fishers, who often face unique challenges in complying with IUU regulations; stresses that these fishers play a critical role in local food security and should receive the assistance they need;

18. Urges the Commission to explore options for supporting affected communities in Member States; recognises that the transition to sustainable fishing practices may lead to economic disruption and job losses, and therefore calls for measures to protect the livelihoods of those dependent on the fishing industry, such as vocational training and financial transition support;
19. Highlights that it is the Commission's obligation to ensure the consistent application and implementation of import control procedures across the EU, including catch certificate checks, a risk-based approach, verifications and the initiation of infringement procedures;
20. In line with the recent agreement on the revision of the Fisheries Control Regulation, encourages the introduction of remote electronic monitoring measures in non-EU waters in order to tackle IUU fishing;
21. Expects the Commission to support innovation and research to develop monitoring, tracking, and geolocation instruments for vessels on the high seas by supporting the implementation of international initiatives designed to coordinate data systems and provide complete, precise data and transparent information on the location, origin, and activity of fishing vessels;
22. Reminds the Commission of the need to harmonise import controls across the Member States in order to prevent IUU fishing products from entering the EU market and strongly encourages the Commission to take further action in this regard; stresses that the European Union needs to improve control and enforcement to combat forced labour both in fishing and processing industries of imported products;
23. Acknowledges that the 2012 IMO Cape Town Agreement, the 2009 FAO Agreement on Port State Measures, the ILO Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) and the ILO Work in Fishing Convention (No. 188) are important instruments to ensure decent working conditions and help to prevent unacceptable forms of work for all fishers, especially forced labour, trafficking and other abuses, and to combat IUU fishing; calls on the Member States to sign and ratify, or accede to these conventions;
24. Calls on the Commission to increase awareness on the protection of human rights in the fishing sector; underlines that the fisheries sector in specific geographic areas has a higher risk of forced labour imposed by state authorities; urges that when forced labour is identified, products stemming from it should be prohibited from entering the EU market;
25. Demands that the Commission take measures to stop the use of flags of convenience; calls for easy access to information on the beneficial ownership of fishing vessels of all flags; calls on the Commission to improve its system for identifying vessels engaged in IUU fishing, as provided for in Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1184, so that a vessel's country of origin can be identified even if its flag state is unclear and so that vessels on which human rights violations have been detected are also included;
26. Welcomes that the revised Fisheries Control Regulation prohibits, in particular provisions, Union operators, including beneficial owners, from owning, operating or managing vessels registered under the flag of countries that have been issued a red card for non-cooperation in combating IUU fishing;

27. Urges the Member States to establish and maintain comprehensive databases that collect and record information on the beneficial owners of registered vessels;
28. Encourages the Member States to cooperate with the relevant authorities to ensure the accuracy of the data collected on the beneficial ownership of vessels in order to facilitate policy formation and the enforcement of the revised Fisheries Control Regulation;
29. Encourages the Commission to work swiftly to ensure that the CATCH IT system is fully operational and that Member State national authorities are fully familiarised with its use within two years from the date of application of Article 4 of the revised Fisheries Control Regulation;
30. Asks the Commission to secure sufficient human resources in order to ensure a more rapid and effective delivery of the aforementioned IT system in the Member States;
31. Strongly welcomes the establishment of the new CATCH IT system by the revised Fisheries Control Regulation;
32. Encourages the swift inclusion of more comprehensive risk criteria and data cross-checks in the next iterations of the CATCH IT system, as recommended by the Long Distance Advisory Council; considers that in order to ensure a race to the top, the Commission must make sure that the risk assessment applied in CATCH is at least as thorough as those applied in the Member States that already have an electronic system to check catch certificates; considers that in the intervening period, the Commission must ensure that there is interoperability between CATCH and national IT systems without increasing the burden on economic operators;
33. Urges the Commission to increase the number of staff working on ocean governance and IUU fishing within the Commission's Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries;
34. Encourages the Member States to ensure that the necessary procedures are put in place in preparation for the legal adoption of the CATCH IT system and to make sure that the system is ready for use as soon as possible;
35. Urges the Member States to reinforce their control systems for preventing the import of illegal fishery products and to take the necessary action; welcomes the full traceability of fresh, frozen and processed fishing products as agreed in the new Fisheries Control Regulation, which could contribute to increase of food safety in the EU and push for third countries to increase traceability to allow their fishing products to enter the Union market;
36. Highlights the importance of improved traceability for all fisheries and aquaculture food products in order for consumers to be able to make informed decisions when buying these products; believes that more specific and transparent labelling, clearly indicating products' paths from production to plate, for EU and non-EU products alike should be considered; encourages the Member States to launch appropriate promotion campaigns for seafood products, in order to raise consumers' awareness of what they are purchasing and traceability measures;

37. Urges the Member States to swiftly implement the new Fisheries Control Regulation in order to comply with their legal obligation to have effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions against IUU fishing, thereby reducing incentives to practice IUU fishing and deterring any future infringements;
38. Stresses that multilateral cooperation and a global coherent policy with regard to IUU, trade and ocean governance are key to efficiently fighting IUU fishing; calls, in this context, on the Commission to keep encouraging its partners, through its Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements, its IUU policy, in RFMOs and the WTO, and to intensify its cooperation with the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Japan and other key players in fisheries and ocean policy through diplomatic and trade instruments, and to encourage other non-EU countries to adopt robust legislation and measures to combat IUU fishing;
39. Recognises that the effective enforcement of IUU fishing regulations requires collaboration between Member States and a coordinated approach at EU level; encourages the Commission, together with European Fisheries Control Agency, to increase coordinating efforts to combat IUU fishing, share best practices and harmonise enforcement activities across the Member States;
40. Recognises the importance of fostering cooperation with civil society and community stakeholders in the fight against IUU fishing; underlines the importance of stakeholder involvement for the best possible implementation of the IUU Regulation; calls on the Commission to engage with these stakeholders in order to promote sustainable fishing practices and to ensure that the voices of affected communities are heard in the decision-making process;
41. Calls for the establishment of a comprehensive whistleblower protection programme within the EU to encourage individuals with knowledge of IUU fishing activities to come forward and provide crucial information; underlines that such a programme should include legal safeguards, anonymity and incentives for whistleblowers to report violations without fear of retaliation;
42. Calls on the Member States to promote fair trade practices in the fisheries sector to achieve a genuine level playing field between EU fisheries products and third-country fisheries products; is of the opinion that the Member States should consider implementing trade measures that take into account the environmental and labour standards of the products being imported;
43. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to refrain from granting preferential market access to nations associated with IUU fishing practices and severe labour violations, including the use of forced labour; considers that the EU should strive to establish a genuine level playing field between seafood produced in the EU and that produced in third countries; considers that specifically, the autonomous tariff quota instrument, which is indispensable in order to ensure the competitiveness of the Union processing industry and avoid jeopardising Union production of fishery products by guaranteeing an adequate supply of fishery products to the industry, should be employed exclusively in cases where the seafood supply for EU markets is insufficient and that it should not be used to import products coming from IUU fishing or to exert pressure on the prices of EU-produced goods;

44. Urges the Commission to ensure the consistent and stringent implementation of red and yellow cards, without regard to a country's size or economic and commercial influence. In this regard, as requested in European Parliament Resolution 'Implications of Chinese fishing operations for EU fisheries and the way forward' (A9-0282/2023), calls on the Commission to assess all Chinese initiatives aimed at combating IUU fishing, and in the light of such assessments, to take appropriate actions under the IUU Regulation;
45. Stresses that the available IUU databases suffer from opaqueness, i.e. unknown vessel names, origin or ownership, which causes loss of income, notably in poor countries; emphasises that the international bodies involved in the fight against IUU fishing should coordinate their IUU fishing control activities with shared electronic databases, clear strategies and structured plans that result in the lowest possible level of IUU fishing practices at international level;
46. Encourages the Member States to improve routine and timely information sharing, including on rejected consignments, which can enable authorities to better apply and enforce the law; underlines that the FAO Port State Measures Agreement can assist in this regard;
47. Notes that RFMOs have been proven to be useful in the fight against illegal fishing; calls on the Commission to actively promote the establishment of more relevant RFMOs; encourages the Member States to promote the initiatives of the FAO and of relevant RFMOs aimed at fighting IUU fishing activities and to exchange information relating to fishing vessels suspected of such activities;
48. Stresses that multilateral catch documentation schemes that are designed and agreed upon by the RFMOs' contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties, and that require critical information on a consignment to be recorded and transferred throughout the supply chain, have proven to be effective tools for improving traceability and contribute to the fight against IUU fishing;
49. Recalls the objectives to protect at least 30 % of oceans by 2030; calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that effective measures are in place ahead of 2030, and to make sure that the IUU Regulation is fully implemented;
50. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.