Commissioned by

HIGH LEVEL PANEL *for*
A SUSTAINABLE
OCEAN ECONOMY

BLUE PAPER

Summary for Decision-makers

Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and Associated Drivers

Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing threatens the sustainability of global fisheries in both national jurisdictions and the high seas.[1] Developing countries are most at risk from illegal fishing, with total estimated catches in West Africa being 40 percent higher than reported catches. Such levels of exploitation severely hamper the sustainable management of marine ecosystems.[2]

IUU fishing is widespread,[3] **and annual global losses are valued at US$10 billion to $23.5 billion, representing 11 to 26 million tonnes of fish.**[4] The losses substantially increase when impacts across the fish value chain are considered.[5]

Much of today's IUU fishing activity takes place on an organised, systematic scale across multiple jurisdictions.[6] **It is also increasingly evident that the worst examples of IUU fishing are often connected to transnational crime, including human rights abuses, tax evasion, piracy and drugs, arms and human trafficking.**[7] These crimes are net losses to a country's economy and will result in lost economic, environmental and social opportunities, both short term and long term, and may diminish food security.[8]

IUU fishing is a major factor in several important issues in addition to sustainable fisheries; the impact is not merely a decline in fish abundance, since it extends much further into broader issues. Economic security, food security, reduced health (nutrition) and climate regulation (from fish biomass) all become a concern.

Future efforts to enhance or expand food production from the sea to feed a growing population will be undermined without decisive action across agencies, governments and international boundaries. The need to secure diminishing resources may lead to conflict. Security and governance of maritime domains are key to long-term strategies to ensure continued production and resource abundance.

The need to combat IUU fishing is increasingly recognised by high-level institutions. The United Nations has adopted a resolution on sustainable fisheries that refers regularly to the need to address IUU fishing and the importance of the policies already available to combat it.

In addition, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are pressing, with SDG 14.4 rapidly approaching its deadline of 2020 yet seeming unlikely to be implemented in time. Similarly, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), having fallen short on previous commitments, has set clear targets for 2020 relating to sustainable harvest among many CBD goals. The G7 (Charlevoix Blueprint 2018) and the G20 (Osaka Leaders' Declaration 2019) recognize that IUU fishing is a serious problem that must be addressed. In 2019 the 21 members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation adopted a roadmap to combat IUU fishing. **However, despite many official statements and reports and some positive traction, the problem remains a huge threat to future fisheries, food and social security, and healthy ocean ecosystems.**

This paper, in support of the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy,[9] acknowledges the issues and trends in IUU fishing. It highlights the ways in which it contributes to overfishing and aspects of how it impacts in coastal areas, in Economic Zones and on the high seas in areas beyond national jurisdiction. The paper identifies the major drivers of IUU fishing and suggests approaches that, in addition to those underway, are needed to overcome the problem.

Main drivers of IUU fishing include the following factors:

Weak governance at the national, regional and international level creates a regulatory patchwork that has allowed IUU fishing to flourish.

Economic incentives drive IUU fishing and other illicit activities such as bonded labour. Simply put, IUU fishing is a low-risk, high-gain activity.

Barriers to enforcement stemming from a lack of resources and the logistical difficulties of effective monitoring, control and surveillance over vast areas of the ocean undermine attempts to stop IUU fishing.

The paper identifies three high-level and decisive opportunities for action, which together offer a robust yet achievable response to the global threat of IUU fishing while ensuring ocean health, biodiversity and a sustainable ocean economy. These actions complement existing policies and directly target the key drivers of IUU fishing. These transformational actions can be delivered by governments, business, industry, private sectors, scientists and civil society.

The high-level opportunities for action include the following possibilities:

1. **Adopt global transparency in fisheries.** Technological advances in tracking methods—both for tracking fishing vessel movements and for tracking a fish catch through the value chain— offer new hope for fisheries management. This, combined with better public understanding of which vessels are authorised to transship or fish and where, will drive better compliance.
2. **Enact tighter controls at ports.** All port states should ratify and implement the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) to stop IUU-caught fish entering the market. The PSMA requires parties to place tighter controls on foreign-flagged vessels seeking to use their ports to detect and prevent the trade of IUU products.
3. **Enhance collaboration.** Because IUU fishing does not honour political boundaries, regional collaboration among nations is essential. Collaboration between government departments and governments—as well as among businesses and financial institutions, scientific establishments and the civil sector—will generate new solutions, maximise impact and lower costs.

In addition to the high-level opportunities for action, the paper presents a detailed set of actions that can be taken by various actors. Wherever possible, collaboration among the different actors is encouraged to maximise effect and rationalise costs. **Under opportunities for specific actors, the paper offers the following suggestions, among others (Table 1):**

Table 1. Opportunities for Specific Actors

FOR GOVERNMENT:
1. Address the non-uniformity of regional fisheries management organisation regulations through an international forum/mechanism, such as the UN General Assembly.
2. Flag states should exert adequate control over the vessel registry, including ensuring that the management of the registry is within the flag state (and not held by an external private company).
3. Coastal states should ensure that labor regulations are enough to facilitate the identification and investigation of forced labor, labor abuse and human trafficking cases detected on board fishing vessels. Regulations should also be enough to allow for the lawful prosecution and penalisation of perpetrators of these crimes. The Cape Town Agreement and International Labour Organization's Work in Fishing Convention should be ratified and adopted.
4. Port states should ratify and implement the PSMA.
5. Markets states should adopt regulations similar to the European Union's IUU fishing regulation.
FOR PRIVATE SECTOR:
1. Make fisheries transparency and traceability conditions of contracts.
2. Ensure the accuracy of ownership information to avoid the use of shell companies.
3. Be aware not to deal with flag states that fall short of their duties under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.
4. Place the use of PSMA-ratified ports as a condition of contracts or insurance.
5. Provide assurance to consumers on the traceability and quality of the fish products (e.g., provide such information on the packaging).
FOR SCIENCE:
1. Provide the best assessment of fish stocks globally.
2. Provide information on changes of fish behavior/migration patterns caused by climate change.
3. Promote awareness on fisheries sustainability to educate consumers to choose fish products with guaranteed traceability.

The paper makes clear that solutions should be context specific. Often, a good solution for one area may not be relevant for another. The paper encourages all readers to consider the full range of potential actions that, whether done locally, nationally, regionally or internationally, will have an impact on the IUU fishers.

The High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy

Established in September 2018, the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy (HLP) is a unique initiative of 14 serving heads of government committed to catalysing bold, pragmatic solutions for ocean health and wealth that support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and build a better future for people and the planet. The Panel consists of the heads of government from Australia, Canada, Chile, Fiji, Ghana, Indonesia, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Namibia, Norway, Palau, and Portugal, and is supported by an Expert Group, Advisory Network, and Secretariat that assist with analytical work, communications and stakeholder engagement. The Secretariat is based at World Resources Institute.

The report that this brief summarises was prepared in support of the work of the HLP. The arguments, findings, and recommendations made in the report represent the views of the authors only. The Blue Paper is an independent input to the HLP process and does not represent the thinking of the HLP, Sherpas or Secretariat.

For more information, including the full report, visit **www.oceanpanel.org**

Endnotes

1 SEAFDEC (Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center). 2015. *Asian Guidelines for Preventing the Entry of Fish and Fishery Products from IUU Fishing Activities into the Supply Chain*. Myanmar: SEAFDEC.

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8 FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations). 2000. *Expert Consultation on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing*. Sydney: FAO; Sumaila, U.R. 2018. "Illicit Trade in the Marine Resources of West Africa." *Ghanaian Journal of Economics* 6 (1): 108–16.

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