

The Seafish Guide To **Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IUU)**



This is one of a series of guides in which Seafish explores topical issues affecting the UK seafood industry. Here we discuss the issues around IUU, the global scale of the problem, its impact on the UK fishing sector and initiatives to prevent it.

A Definition

IUU is the term used to describe any unauthorised fishing and fishing activities conducted in breach of regional, national or international rules and regulations.

Illegal fishing violates the laws of a fishery. It includes fishing out of season; harvesting prohibited species; using banned gear or techniques; catching more than a set quota and fishing without a licence.

Unreported fishing is that which is not declared (or is misreported) to the relevant authority or regional fisheries management organisation.

Unregulated fishing is conducted by vessels without nationality; flying a flag of convenience; or flying the flag of a State not party to the regional organisation which governs that particular fishing region or species. It also relates to fishing in places – or for fish stocks – where there is a lack of detailed knowledge, conservation or management measures in place (this doesn't include data deficient fisheries).

The Negative Impact Of IUU

IUU fishing contributes to overexploitation of fish stocks and is a hindrance to the recovery of fish populations and ecosystems. It damages the marine environment, distorts competition and puts those fishers who operate legally at a disadvantage. It also adversely affects the economic and social well-being of fishing communities, especially in third world countries where coastal communities may rely heavily on fish resources.

On a global scale, IUU is a big problem and one that is very difficult to quantify. It can occur in virtually any fishery, from shallow coastal or inland waters to deep remote oceans. It is a particular issue in developing countries where fisheries management strategies may be poorly developed, or where there are limited resources to enforce regulations such as landing controls, vessel inspections and patrol vessels.

Global losses from IUU fishing are estimated to be between US \$10 billion and US \$23.5 billion annually¹ – between 10 and 22% of total fisheries production¹. The EU imports approximately €15 billion of fisheries products. Conservative estimates of EU imports of IUU catches have been estimated at 500,000 tonnes or €1.1 billion².

IUU fishing anywhere is a completely unacceptable practice. It undermines legal fishing and markets and negates efforts for sustainable fisheries management.

Key Facts

In **2007**

the EU imported approximately €15 billion of fisheries products. Conservative estimates of EU imports of IUU catches have been estimated at **500,000** tonnes or €1.1 billion

IUU fishing represents a major loss of revenue, particularly to some of the poorest countries in the world where dependency on fisheries for food, livelihoods and revenues is high

Why And How IUU Occurs

Clearly the main driver for IUU fishing is economic benefit. A vessel that is fishing illegally is able to minimise operating costs in terms of licensing, regulation, use of vessel monitoring systems and documentation. IUU fishers may ignore quota levels, enter closed fishing areas, catch undersized fish or target rare or even endangered species, attracting a premium from unscrupulous buyers.

IUU takes place because of poor governance and shortcomings in national and international controls which allow it to occur. The main contributory factors include:

Flags of convenience

A loophole in international law currently allows a ship to fly the flag of a nation other than its country of ownership, making it virtually impossible for unscrupulous owners to be caught and punished for illegal fishing. At present a vessel is governed by the law of the flag state (the country in which it is registered) which means that a vessel registered to a country that hasn't signed up to fishing agreements can fish illegally at will. 'Flag-hopping' means that some states will register vessels in as little as 24 hours, with little or no check on their activities, allowing them to easily swap from one flag state to another. A key step in combating IUU fishing internationally is therefore the need to ensure greater transparency in the flagging and ownership information of fishing vessels.

Key Facts

IUU fishing is a serious global problem, one of the main impediments to the achievement of sustainable world fisheries

Insufficient monitoring at sea

IUU can thrive in areas where monitoring, control and surveillance (by patrol boats, aircraft, satellite or onboard observers) is insufficient. In many developing states, a lack of resources and the sheer size of the areas needing to be policed can allow illegal fishing to continue with impunity. Monitoring is particularly difficult on the 'High Seas' (beyond 200 miles from the coast) due to the vast areas and costs involved.

'Trans-shipment' at sea

IUU fishing can also remain undetected because vessels 'trans-ship' their catches at sea. Some large vessels can remain at sea for months, remotely refuelling, re-supplying and rotating their crews. By also transferring catches to transport ships (reefers), they can avoid entering port with illegally caught fish. Often IUU fish is 'laundered' by mixing it with legally caught fish onboard transport vessels.

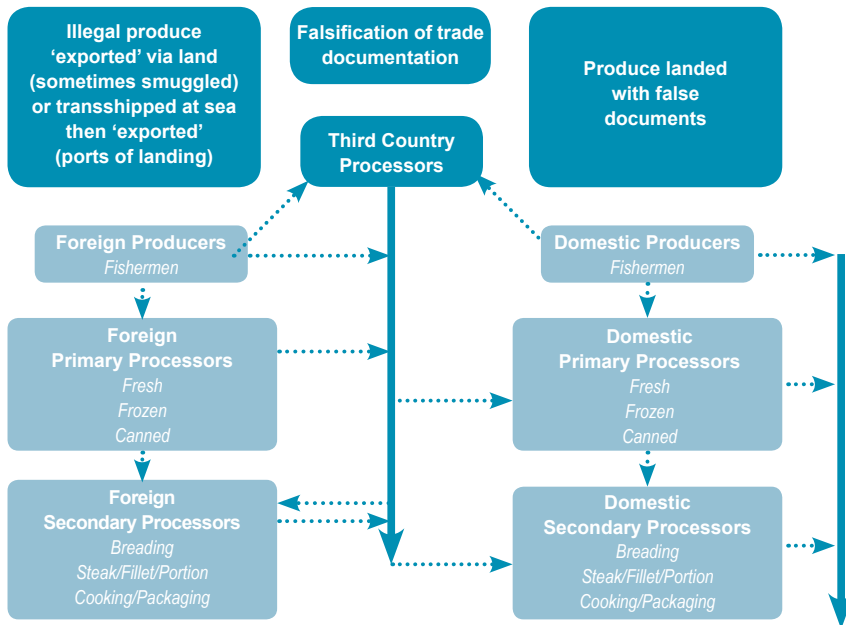
Ports of convenience

All fishing vessels must at some point visit a port and IUU vessels are no exception. So, regulating access to port facilities can be a highly effective way of controlling IUU fishing. However, some ports fail to do so and are known as 'Ports of Convenience.' Their existence is one of the major reasons that IUU fishing can continue – for instance ports providing services to IUU fleets off the coast of West Africa have been known to serve as gateways through which illegally caught fish may enter the EU market.

Penalties

Even in the unlikely event that a vessel is caught engaging in IUU activities the penalties faced by the crew, captain and vessel owner are often too small to act as an effective disincentive – maybe even regarded simply as a cost of 'doing business'. Penalties can also vary hugely between different states.

Entry of Illegal Fish into the Supply Chain



The Fight Against IUU Fishing

The key to combating IUU fishing is to fully understand where and how it is taking place and how IUU-caught fish is entering the market. There is international consensus on the need for better traceability systems – efforts are focused on preventing IUU fish from entering international trade, therefore depriving IUU fishers of financial reward. Ultimately, all fish needs to be tracked from harvest to consumption

EU Regulation And Controls³

The European Community has been involved in the fight against IUU fishing for over a decade. Overall the EC has been a valuable target for IUU operators because collectively it is the world's largest importer of fishery products, imports many high value products and is also one of the main producers and exporters worldwide with many trading partners on all continents.

Concluding a process which began in 2002, in January 2010 the EU introduced Regulation (No 1005/2008) establishing a Community-wide system to prevent, deter and eliminate the import of IUU fishery products into the EU market. This has now effectively closed the doors to illegal fisheries products and vessels, also reducing global economic incentives for IUU fishers to continue. To counteract this very lucrative phenomenon, this Regulation provides for the limitation of access to the European

Key Facts

Globally the economic impact of IUU fishing is estimated at between US \$10bn and US \$23.5bn per year

Between **11** and **26** million tonnes

of illegally caught fisheries products is reaching the global market annually

Key Facts

The high demand for fish products within the EU makes it a profitable market for offloading IUU catch. The relatively large scale of the EU market means that successful legislation will have a considerable influence on global IUU fishing

Union (EU) market to only certified fishery products that comply with the rules. Other provisions are to reinforce the surveillance of activities at sea, to identify IUU operators, to enhance the implementation of fisheries legislation and to improve the application of sanctions in the event of infringements.

Traceability and catch certificates

All fish imported into the EU now require a 'catch certificate' – issued by the flag state of the catching vessel and demonstrating how and where it has been legally caught. EU fisheries authorities are now obliged to check the catch certificates of all landings into the EU from third country vessels and UK catch certificates are required to accompany any fish exported outside the EU.

Blacklists and whitelists

Publicly available 'blacklists' of vessels engaged in IUU fishing – such as the EU IUU vessel list⁶ – publicly expose irresponsible fishing operators and support better regulation. A worldwide database of vessel blacklists is available online via the Greenpeace⁷ website.

Broader Initiatives To Combat IUU

Regional fisheries management

The EU is not alone in driving for more effective regulations to combat IUU. There is broad international consensus on the need to adopt a comprehensive approach. Many RFMOs, such as the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC⁵ – which covers the EU plus Denmark, Iceland, Norway and the Russian Federation) are actively developing improved controls.

Key Facts

It is estimated that approximately

30% of total catches of globally

important fisheries comes from IUU fishing, and in some specific cases, IUU catches can be three times higher than legal catches

Port state measures⁴

The United Nation's General Assembly has passed a resolution on sustainable fisheries (64/72) which urges states to adopt Port State measures – closing ports to ships involved in IUU fishing. As the 2009 Agreement is adopted around the world, all fishing vessels wishing to land will be required to request permission from specially designated ports ahead of time, transmitting advance information on their activities and the fish they have on board.

UK Regulation And Control⁸

Both as a member of the EU and through its own governance and agencies, fishing is well controlled in UK waters where strict regulations are in place. The primary tools used in the UK to support the EU IUU Regulation include:

Vessel licensing

The UK vessel licensing system controls UK fishing opportunities in order that EU regulations for sustainable fisheries management can be met. All vessels fishing commercially for sea fish in the UK must be registered⁹.

Marine fisheries enforcement¹⁰

In the UK the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) co-ordinates the enforcement programme for monitoring, control and surveillance of all sea fishing activity within UK fishery limits around the coast of England, and UK vessels operating outside those waters.

It investigates and takes appropriate enforcement action (including prosecution) when breaches of the regulations are identified. This enforcement work is crucial to ensuring compliance with EU fisheries regulation both on IUU and on fishing quotas, to assist the long-term economic survival of the fishing industry and to protect a valuable natural food resource.

Registration of buyers and sellers (RBS)¹¹

This scheme has been fully operational in the UK since 2005. It requires buyers and sellers first-sale fish landed into the UK to register with the fisheries department in the country where they buy or sell. Any fish market which sells first sale fish and shellfish must also be registered as a 'designated market'. The scheme is widely acknowledged for its positive impact it has had on compliance by providing greater transparency, improved cross checking of fish landings data and a contribution to reduced levels of black landings.

About Seafish

Seafish was founded in 1981 by an Act of Parliament and aims to support all sectors of the seafood industry for a sustainable, profitable future. It is the only pan-industry body offering services to all parts of the industry, from the start of the supply chain at catching and aquaculture; through processing, importers, exporters and distributors of seafood right through to restaurants and retailers.

Other Seafish Guides

There are a number of other Seafish Guides in this series, covering different aspects of responsible seafood sourcing and fisheries management. For more details and the most up to date information consult our website at www.seafish.co.uk/media/sustainability

There is also a series of Responsible Sourcing Guides¹² outlining the individual stock status of 38 of the main species of fish consumed in the UK (about 300 stocks).

References

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Other sources

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