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# DRAFT REPORT

on the impact of illegal fishing on food security – the role of the European Union  
(2023/2027(INI))

Committee on Fisheries

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## CONTENTS

|  | <b>Page</b> |
|--|-------------|
| MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION..... | 3           |
| EXPLANATORY STATEMENT .....                      | 7           |

## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

### on the impact of illegal fishing on food security – the role of the European Union (2023/2027(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- 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 the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea,
- 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 UN Fish Stocks Agreement,
- 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 the 2009 FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing,
- having regard to the 2014 FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Flag State Performance,
- 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 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,
- 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 Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Fisheries (A9-0000/2023),
- A. whereas the EU is a major global player in fisheries because of both its fishing fleet (numbering around 73 000 vessels) and its position as the world’s largest importer of fishery products (almost 70 % of the seafood products consumed in the EU are imported, representing 34 % of total world trade in value), and 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 the EU was committed to achieving Sustainable Development Goal target 14.4, which was to end IUU fishing by 2020;
  - D. whereas Article 12 of the IUU Fishing Regulation<sup>1</sup> prohibits the import of fishery products obtained from IUU fishing;
  - E. whereas four 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;
  - F. 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;
  - G. 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;
  - H. whereas European Court of Auditors Special Report 20/2022 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;
  - J. whereas products resulting from illegal fishing pose a risk to the food security of European Union citizens;
  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

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<sup>1</sup> [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 1447/1999 \(OJ L 286, 29.10.2008, p. 1\).](#)

size, and to promote sustainable fisheries with a view to combating overfishing and ensuring food security;

2. Requests the application of EU guidelines to determine how best 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;
3. Encourages the Member States to allocate sufficient capacity and resources to ensure the effective implementation of import controls;
4. Stresses that the Commission must provide adequate support to the national authorities responsible for the control of seafood 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;
5. 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;
6. Encourages the Commission to continue striving for the consistent application and implementation of import control procedures across the EU, including catch certificate checks, a risk-based approach and verifications;
7. 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;
8. 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;
9. 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;
10. Welcomes the establishment of the new CATCH IT system by the revised Fisheries Control Regulation;
11. 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;

12. 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;
13. 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;
14. Urges the Member States to reinforce their control systems for preventing the import of illegal fishery products and to take the necessary action;
15. Urges the Member States to apply dissuasive sanctions against illegal fishing;
16. 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; 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 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;
17. 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;
18. Stresses that multilateral catch documentation schemes that are designed and agreed upon by the regional fisheries management organisations' 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;
19. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The European Union (EU), finds itself in a unique situation as one of the most important global players in fisheries, both due to the extensive presence of its fishing across the oceans and its position a primary importer of fishery products, with around 73,000 ships under its flag and an impressive import rate, where almost 70 % of seafood consumed comes from abroad, the EU's influence on global fishing practices cannot be underestimated. This dominant position means that the EU also bears significant responsibility in defining and advocating for sustainable practices in the sector.

As a Contracting Party to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and a signatory to several other important international agreements, the EU has always had a duty to safeguard marine resources. These provisions underscore the responsibility of all states to ensure sustainable marine management and to collaborate towards this shared goal.

Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing poses a significant threat to marine ecosystems, the socio-economic well-being of fishing-dependent communities, the global reputation of the fishing sector, and international efforts for improved ocean governance.

The enormity of economic repercussions is evident when considering the vast employment generated by the sector in coastal communities – over 124,000 direct jobs – and the remarkable revenue it brings to the EU's coffers – 6.3 billion euros annually. Introducing products from IUU fishing into the market jeopardizes this economic contribution. Not only do illegal operations deprive states of revenue, but they also necessitate increased expenses for monitoring, inspection, and control measures to combat IUU fishing.

Given its central role in the global seafood market, the European Union is uniquely positioned to shape and lead international sustainable fishing practices. The EU's commitment to sustainability in the fishing sector is not merely an economic or environmental concern; it's a matter of food security. Since the majority of seafood is imported, ensuring these imports are sustainably and legally sourced is vital for the health and well-being of its citizens.

Although the EU has robust regulatory frameworks, like the allocation of 580 million euros from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund to support monitoring and control activities, challenges persist. The European Court of Auditors, in its 2022 report, suggested inconsistent controls and sanctions by Member States, revealing cracks in the system that urgently need addressing.

For the EU, the way forward is multifaceted. Digitalizing IUU capture certificates through the CATCH IT system, for example, is a promising step in the right direction. This system aims to reduce fraudulent imports and ensure stricter compliance with EU regulations.

Moreover, fostering closer collaborations with third countries, many of which are significant seafood producers, is crucial. These partnerships will ensure imported products meet the EU's strict standards and that the bloc's stance against IUU fishing resonates globally.

Notably, the EU's card system has proven useful, with four third countries currently holding a red card and eight countries with a yellow card. However, a major seafood producer, the

People's Republic of China (PRC), has never been subject to IUU regulations, despite considerable evidence of the PRC's significant and increasing involvement in IUU fishing.

As IUU operators continuously seek loopholes in existing frameworks, it's essential for the EU to maintain a dynamic and proactive approach to safeguarding its commitment to sustainable fishing and global food security.

The EU has the responsibility to lead the fight against IUU fishing. In doing so, it can ensure not only the future of its marine ecosystems and the livelihoods they support but also consolidate its position as a global advocate for sustainable and responsible fishing practices. For this to happen, it is crucial for the EU and Member States to continue implementing and especially promoting worldwide several measures:

- Promote zero tolerance towards illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, ensuring equal treatment for all countries, regardless of size, and champion sustainable fishing, combat overfishing, and guarantee food security.
- Implement harmonized import controls among Member States to prevent the entry of IUU fishing products into the EU market.
- Urge the Commission to ensure that the CATCH IT system is fully operational and that Member State national authorities are thoroughly familiar with its use, two years after the revised fishing control regulation's implementation.
- Ensure sufficient human resources to promote faster and more efficient implementation of the CATCH IT computer system in Member States.
- Increase the number of staff at DG MARE for ocean governance and IUU fishing.
- Strengthen control systems and necessary measures adopted by Member States to prevent importing products from illegal fishing.
- Urge Member States to apply deterrent sanctions against illegal fishing.
- Alert the Commission and Member States to refrain from granting preferential market access to nations linked to IUU fishing and serious labour violations.
- Encourage Member States to improve routine and timely information sharing, including rejected shipments, allowing authorities to enforce legislation more effectively; emphasize that the Port State Measures Agreement can assist in this area.
- Emphasize that the capture certification schemes (CDS), designed and agreed upon by Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMO), which require critical shipment information to be recorded and transferred throughout the supply chain, are proven tools to improve traceability and aid the fight against IUU fishing.