



Commission notifies the Republic of Panama over the need to step up action to fight against illegal fishing

Brussels, 12 December 2019

The European Commission has notified the Republic of Panama about the risk of being identified as a non-cooperating country in the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

The Republic of Panama had already received a yellow card in November 2012, which was then lifted in October 2014.

Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Virginijus **Sinkevičius**, said: *"Today's decision confirms our determination to maintain the fight against IUU high on the European Commission agenda, and to ensure that results achieved under the IUU Regulation are long lasting ones. We hope that Panama authorities will swiftly step up their efforts and implement the necessary measures to demonstrate their commitment in the fight against IUU fishing. Fighting illegal fishing has been a fundamental part of the EU's action to improve ocean governance over the last ten years, and this Commission will continue our fight against IUU fishing with a zero-tolerance approach"*.

Today's decision is based on the identification of various shortcomings that constitute significant backtracking compared to improvements observed from 2012 to 2014. This undermines the country's ability to comply with its duties under international law as flag, port, coastal and market state. Panama is encouraged to step up its actions to ensure adequate control over the activities of its vessels to prevent and deter them from engaging or supporting IUU fishing. In particular, Panama should ensure an effective monitoring of the activities of its fishing and fishing related vessels and an adequate implementation of its enforcement and sanctioning system. In addition, it should also ensure adequate implementation of the 'Port State Measures Agreement' (1) in order to prevent fish stemming from IUU fishing activities from reaching its market or others, and to deter IUU fishing vessels from receiving port services. An adequate control of the activity of processing plants – especially those exporting to the EU – is of paramount importance.

The yellow card is a warning and offers Panama the chance to react and take measures to rectify the situation within a reasonable time.

Background

The global value of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) is estimated at 10-20 billion euros per year. Every year, between 11 and 26 million tonnes of fish, i.e. at least 15% of world catches, are caught illegally. The EU is the world's biggest importer of fishery products and cannot accept such products into its market.

Fighting IUU fishing is part of the EU's commitment to achieve the [Sustainable Development Goal 14.4](#) - i.e. end illegal fishing and ensure sustainable use of the sea and its resources. It is also an important pillar of the EU's ocean governance strategy, aiming to improve the international governance of the oceans.

Commission actions are based on the EU Regulation on IUU fishing, which entered into force in 2010. Pursuant to its provisions, only fishery products that have been certified as legal can access the EU market. The Regulation also provides for specific dialogue mechanisms with the countries that are not complying with their obligations as flag, coastal, port and market States under international law. The prime objective of these dialogues is to rectify the existing shortcomings, through appropriate support to the third countries concerned. Hence, they often lead to having new and committed partners in the fight against IUU fishing.

Since November 2012, the Commission entered in formal dialogues with 25 third countries, i.e. officially warned them of the need to take effective action to fight against IUU fishing (yellow card). In most cases, significant progress was observed and therefore the Commission could satisfactorily close the formal dialogue phase and give them a green card. Only a few countries have not shown the necessary commitment to reforms until now. As a result, fishery products caught by their vessels cannot be imported into the EU (red card).

For More information

[Q&A on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing in general and in Panama](#)

[Overview of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing procedures with third countries](#)

(1) Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing. Panama acceded to this Agreement on 2016.

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