Question and Answers on the EU’s fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing

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Why has the Commission decided to identify the Comoros and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and pre-identify Liberia as non-cooperating countries today?

The Comoros is a typical flag of convenience, i.e. registering a ship in a sovereign state different from that of the ship's owners. Registration is partly outsourced to natural and legal persons outside the Comoros. Most of the Comorian fleet operates in breach of the Comorian law and requirements in the eastern Atlantic (approximately 20 vessels). The Commission has also collected evidence of suspected illegal at-sea transhipments and joint operations. The Comoros has failed to address its problems in reviewing the management of its fishing and fishing-related register; adopt an adequate legal framework and robust registration and licensing procedures; take appropriate measures against its vessels operating illegally; reinforce its Monitoring Control and Surveillance capacities; effectively cooperate with the Commission and the States in whose territorial waters Comorian vessels operate; and address the issue of lack of cooperation between national bodies in charge of registration of vessels and those in charge of fisheries. The decision to identify the country as a non-cooperating third country will not have trade impacts as Comoros do not export fisheries products to the EU.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is a typical flag of convenience. Registration procedure is under the mandate of the Maritime and Fisheries Divisions (Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries), while the competent authority for the conservation of marine resources has no control over this registry. The distant water fleet (approximately 33 vessels) operates in ICCAT area and lands or tranships its catches in the ports of Trinidad and Tobago, where we know controls are weak. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has failed to address its flaws with regards to control and monitoring of its long distance fleet; update its legal framework and it does not cooperate with RFMOs or third countries. Finally there are causes for concern in the areas of registration and traceability. Notably, two vessels flying the flag of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are on RFMO IUU "black list". The decision to identify the country as a non-cooperating third country will not have trade impacts as Saint Vincent and the Grenadines do not export fisheries products to the EU.

The Commission engaged in a dialogue with the Republic of Liberia in 2014 to evaluate implementation of the IUU Regulation. A number of shortcomings were identified, in particular the complete lack of control over the activities of Liberian-flagged fishing vessels; an outdated legal framework and problems with compliance to Regional Fisheries Management Organisation rules. In particular a Liberian-flagged vessel was identified by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (IUU) in 2016 and listed on its IUU blacklist in November 2016. In April 2017 the President of Liberia signed an Executive Order, placing the Bureau of National Fisheries
The Executive Order raises concerns as it introduces measures – such as the reduction of the protected inshore zone (IEZ) from 6 to 3 m – that compromise the conservation and sustainable management of fish stocks. The decision to pre-identify Liberia aims at raising the political awareness needed to achieve the necessary reforms in fisheries governance.

What is the situation with the countries that are under or have previously received "red cards"?

Following a proposal by the Commission, the Council of Ministers adopted trade restrictions against Cambodia, Guinea and Belize in March 2014 (IP/14/304) and against Sri Lanka in October 2014 (IP/14/1132) for their lack of commitment to tackling illegal fishing. Despite ongoing dialogue and the efforts put by the Commission, the situation in Cambodia remains unchanged and fisheries products caught by vessels from this country are still banned from being imported into the EU. Belize was removed from the blacklist in December 2014, Sri Lanka was removed in April 2016 and Guinea was removed in October 2016. All these countries have adopted lasting measures to address the deficiencies in their fisheries management systems.

What is happening with other countries under dialogue?

To date the Commission has pre-identified 24 countries, giving them a formal warning ("yellow card") that they need to step up their fight against IUU fishing. Of these, 10 countries have taken the necessary actions and had this status revoked ("green card"). Six countries have not done enough and were consequently identified as non-cooperating ("red card") and 4 have been black-listed by the Council. Three of these countries engaged in sustained dialogue with the Commission and have made tangible changes, leading to their delisting.

Eleven countries remain under formal dialogue today: Cambodia received a formal warning from the Commission in November 2012 ([IP/12/1215](#1)), was identified in November 2013 ([IP/13/1162](#2)) and black-listed by the Council in March 2014 ([IP/14/1132](#3)); St Kitts and Nevis, St Vincent and the Grenadines and Tuvalu were all pre-identified in December 2014 ([MEX/14/2630](#4)), St Vincent and the Grenadines has been identified today [5] and the listing will follow; Thailand was pre-identified in April 2015 ([IP/15/4806](#6)); the Comoros and Taiwan were pre-identified in October 2015 ([IP/15/5736](#7)); the Comoros has been identified today [5] and the listing will follow; Kiribati, Sierra Leone and Trinidad and Tobago were pre-identified in April 2016 ([IP/16/1457](#8)). Finally Liberia has been pre-identified today. We are working with all of these countries, helping them address their shortcomings in line with tailor-made action plans we proposed to each country. The Commission continues to monitor their progress on a bilateral basis: dialogue and cooperation are sustained and on-going.

What is the situation in Thailand?

Thailand, like all pre-identified countries, received a proposed action plan to address shortcomings identified [6].

Since Thailand received the yellow card the Commission has continued to cooperate with the Thai authorities and is monitoring their progress. This is done through regular exchanges with Thailand, including technical missions to review the situation. The last meeting took place in March 2017 in Bangkok. While the Thai authorities have demonstrated a clear and high-level commitment to redress the IUU situation, there is still a long way ahead for the full enforcement of the new legal framework and the effective control of the Thai fleet operating both in Thai waters and beyond. Currently, the status of Thailand as a pre-identified non-cooperating country remains in place and the Commission
cannot predict future developments. The granting of the green card depends in particular on the concrete cooperation of the Thai authorities at all levels and on tangible progress in implementing the established measures.

**What has been achieved so far?**

Since its entry into force in 2010, the IUU Regulation's reach and impact on the fight against IUU fishing has increased year by year. The outcomes include:

- investigations on presumed IUU vessels and the subsequent imposition of sanctions by flag states and coastal states concerned;
- refusal of imports into the EU;
- pre-identification and identification of non-cooperating countries;
- listing by the Council of non-cooperating countries;
- acceleration of international cooperation against IUU fishing in Regional Fisheries Management Organisations and at bilateral level with more than 50 countries;
- better exchange of information on IUU activities;
- acceptance of the EU catch certification system by third countries.

So far, 92 third countries have notified the Commission that they have in place the legal instruments, procedures and administrative structures to certify the catches by vessels flying their flag.

**Figures on IUU fishing**

The estimated global value of IUU fishing is approximately 10 billion euros per year. Between 11 and 26 million tonnes of fish a year are caught illegally, which corresponds to at least 15% of all world catches.

**More information:**

- IUU website [9]
- Overview of existing procedures as regards third countries [10]

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**Links**