



# Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing

Written by Theodore Back  
theodoreback@gmail.com

## Introduction

Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is a growing problem across the world for which there is very little certainty regarding the full scope of its effects. The estimates for worldwide IUU fishing suggest a range of current annual losses ranges between US\$10 and US\$23.5 billion dollars, which represents between 11 and 26 million tonnes of fish products. The estimated cumulative worldwide catches are expected to be approximately 30% higher than reported by fisheries. In countries with poor governance, this number can increase as high as 40% as is the case in some Western African countries (Agnew, *et al* 2009).

## Recommendations

Due to the overlapping coverage of IUU fishing across national and international boundaries, many strategies on different scales could be implemented to combat it. Due to the limited scale of this policy brief, the following recommendations are made with national level governments in mind. In order to achieve observable and recordable outcomes, these recommendations would ideally be implemented in states with strong legal systems, effective methods of prosecution and realistic fines.

- Increase the strength and frequency of monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) among fisheries including efficient and transparent reporting requirements;
- Implement regional fisheries management organization (RFMOs) to reduce IUU fishing at the high seas;
- Enforce MCS among port and flag states in order to verify compliance with regulations, limit the use of flags of convenience, and limit the transfer, trade and sale of illegally obtained landings;
- Establish catch documentation schemes and trade restrictions for high value fish.

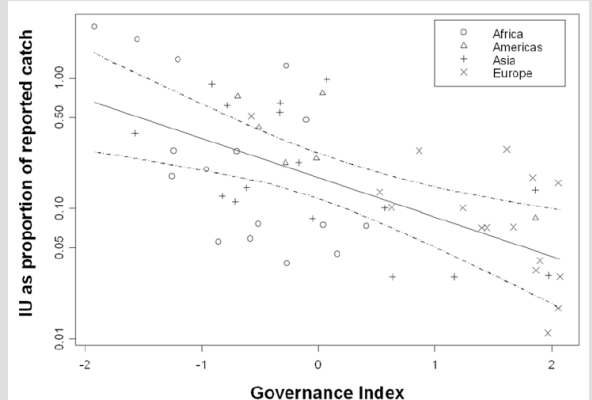
## Defining IUU Fishing

### Illegal Fishing

- is conducted by vessels in a State's national waters without the appropriate permission or indirect opposition to state laws and regulations or international obligations;
- is conducted by vessels flying a flag of States associated with a relevant RFMO but operate in violation of the conservation and management measures adopted.

### Unreported fishing

- has gone unreported or have been misreported, to the relevant national authority;
- has been undertaken in the area of managed by a relevant RFMO which have either gone unreported or have been misreported.



**Figure 1:** The relationship between governance and illegal fisheries. Based on governance indices from the World Bank, there was a correlation between poor governance and increasing IUU fishing. This suggests that developing countries with poor governance are subject to increased levels of IUU fishing (Agnew, *et al* 2009).

## Unregulated fishing

- is conducted by vessels flying flags of countries that are not parties or participants of relevant fisheries organizations (flags of convenience or FOC);
- is located in areas or for fish stocks which have no applicable conservation or management measures and where fishing activities are conducted in a manner in violation of the State responsibilities for the conservation of living marine resources under international law (FAO 2001).



**Picture 1:** IUU vessels exchanging cargo in international waters. Vessels such as these will use flags of convenience (FOC), which is also known as open registration. In this system, some states have opened up their vessel registration process to people not citizens of the state. A ship only needs to obey the domestic and international obligations of the state to which it is registered. As a result IUU vessels will often choose flags in which international fishery regulations do not apply to that state, as they have not signed onto international agreements. Some ships will have multiple FOCs in order to be able change flags repeatedly without having to go to port. Some larger vessels will stay at sea for months at a time and transport landings between other smaller vessels that will transport the landings to convenient ports in order to avoid regulations and inspections (DeSombre 2005).

## Impacts of IUU

### Economic

The direct economic consequences of IUU fishing involve financial losses associated with what a country could gain from the resources extracted through IUU. The direct losses of revenue from fees and taxes associated with landings, licenses, exports and other means can significantly reduce a countries GNP. For example a report in 2001 from Fish and Information Services had reported that Indonesia was losing US\$2 billion dollars per year to IUU fishing (Pramod *et al* 2008).

The indirect economic costs of IUU fishing include the livelihoods that are negatively affected in the local fishing industry. These effects can range beyond the actual fishers and into upstream (fishing equipment and boats) and downstream (processing, packaging and shipping) aspects of the fishing industry.

### Environmental

Due to a lack of enforcement, IUU fishing vessels have little incentive to comply with the regulations in effect and will use prohibited gear, fish in protected areas, exceed local quotas, damage sensitive ecosystems and fish for endangered species. Fish stocks are often assessed using available catch data so IUU adds uncertainty to catch data used for future management. The cumulative result is a loss of biodiversity and habitat that results in sizeable decreases in stocks for which local fishing communities are reliant.

### Social Impacts

The most significant social impact of IUU fishing is the negative affects to the livelihoods and food security of local fishing communities. However, IUU vessels have been known to use slave labour onboard and engage in other illegal activities associated with human trafficking and the illegal drug trade.

## References

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