Combating illegal fishing at the global level - the role of the EU

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The Committee on Fisheries adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Isabella LÖVIN (Greens/EFA, SE) on combating illegal fishing at the global level - the role of the EU.

Members believe that IUU fishing is one of the **most serious threats facing the biodiversity of the world's oceans**. They underline that the recent IUU and Control Regulations (Council Regulations 1005 /2008 establishing a Community system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (the 'IUU Regulation') and 1224/2009 establishing a Community control system for ensuring compliance with the rules of the common fisheries policy (the 'Control Regulation') respectively) provide the EU with powerful and ground-breaking tools to combat IUU fishing, by defining obligations and opportunities of both Member States and third countries as flag, coastal, port and market States.

The committee insists that the Commission and the control authorities in the Member States be provided with sufficient resources (human, financial, technological) enabling **them to fully implement these regulations**. Members call for the review of the common fisheries policy to be used to create incentives for legal fishing in the interests of the fish, the environment, consumers and producers in the EU.

The Commission and the Member States are invited:

- to **identify and sanction EU operators who violate EU legislation**;
- to ensure that **illegal fishing is combated at sea and in inland waters** and underlines the need to review the sufficiency of control mechanisms and their implementation;
- to cooperate with a view to the creation of a '**European coastguard**' in order to boost common monitoring and inspection capacity and to effectively combat current or future dangers at sea such as terrorism, piracy, IUU fishing, trafficking or even marine pollution;
- to amend the requirements for all kinds of financial assistance so as to apply financial sanctions and the denial of funding opportunities to the owners of vessels proven to have fished illegally to pursue and prosecute vessels, owners, firms, companies or individuals involved in IUU fishing-related activities;
- to **publish annual assessments** of the performance of each Member State in implementing the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) that identify possible weak points needing improvement, and to use all possible means, including identifying Member States when they fail in their responsibilities, to ensure their full compliance, in order to create a reliable and transparent control regime;
- to increase the resources allocated to the fight against corruption and organised crime at all levels;
- to continue its efforts to promote the **exchange of information** in order to integrate maritime surveillance, in particular information aimed at harmonising coastguard services at European level.

The report points out that the fight against illegal fishing at world level is **vital for global sustainable development** and must therefore represent an essential and explicit part of Fisheries Partnership Agreements, trade policy commitments, development cooperation policy objectives and the European Union's foreign policy priorities.

The report calls on the EU to strongly insist that **third countries** effectively combat IUU fishing, in the context of trade agreements, Fisheries Partnership Agreements and the EU's development policy.

Members stress the need to ensure that all third countries with which the EU has signed a Fisheries Partnership Agreement apply the rules of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on core labour rights, particularly those concerning social dumping caused by IUU fishing.

Members consider that **the EU should pursue the following objectives in Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) to which it belongs**:

- establishment, for all fisheries under the remit of the RFMOs, of registers of fishing vessels, including support vessels, that are authorised to fish, as well as lists of vessels that are identified as IUU (**black lists**), to be updated frequently, published widely and coordinated among RFMOs;
- establishment of appropriate at-sea inspections and observer programmes;
- bans on transhipments at sea;
- development of catch documentation schemes, beginning with the major species in each RFMO;
- compulsory use of electronic tools including VMS, electronic logbooks and other tracking devices where relevant;
- compulsory and regular evaluations of the performance of individual RFMOs with a requirement that the recommendations be acted upon.

The report fully supports the current FAO initiative to develop a **Global Record of Fishing Vessels**, which should be compulsory and include vessels above 10 GT as soon as possible. It encourages the rapid development of a system for the evaluation of flag State performance currently underway at the FAO as a means of putting pressure on States that do not meet their international legal obligations.

In this context, Members call for the **urgent adoption of measures to put an end to the use of 'flags of convenience'**. They also support the efforts of the Commission to establish a **public register** listing the identities of ship owners that have been proven to have participated in IUU fishing. The report emphasises the need to ensure that EU interests are not involved in such forms of fishing piracy.

The report emphasises that the **concept of market State responsibility must be more fully developed** as a means of closing down the markets for the products of IUU fish. It believes that the EU must urgently discuss with other major market States, including but not limited to the US, Japan and China, how to cooperate among themselves and, as rapidly as possible, to develop **international legal instruments** that could halt, prosecute and punish trade in IUU fish, in line with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules and within the framework of the United Nations system.