Impact of Illegal Fishing on Food Security: the role of the European Union

2023/2027(INI) - 18/01/2024 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 542 votes 5, with 3 abstentions, a resolution on the impact of illegal fishing on food security – the role of the European Union.

It is difficult to estimate the extent of IUU fishing and its economic value. Studies have found that the global quantity of unreported catches to be around 28 million tonnes in 2016, with an estimated value of USD 41 billion. Illegal catches were estimated in the early 2000s, to be between 10 and 26 million tonnes of fish, with an estimated value of USD 10-23 billion. In the EU, IUU-caught products imported annually are estimated to amount to around 500 000 tonnes, at a value of EUR 1.1 billion.

IUU fishing practices have a significant impact on food security and employment opportunities for coastal communities, as well as representing a major threat to marine ecosystems and fish stocks, which poses a serious menace to the livelihood of fishers and coastal communities within the European Union and in third countries, and creates unfair competition on the fisheries products market. Products resulting from IUU fishing pose a risk to the food security of European Union citizens by menacing access to safe, affordable, high-quality, and traceable food for all.

The EU is committed to end IUU fishing by 2020, and to eliminate, to the extent possible, the importation of products stemming from IUU fishing still enter the EU market.

Parliament reaffirmed 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 size, and to promote economically, environmentally and socially sustainable fisheries with a view to combating overfishing, the destruction of marine ecosystems and unfair competition to the EU fishing sector, while ensuring food security and safeguarding public health.

According to Parliament, the fight against IUU fishing requires a holistic approach that addresses the causes of IUU fishing, such as poverty, the lack of economic alternatives and weak governance in some regions.

In this regard, the Commission is encouraged to:

- engage in capacity-building programmes and international cooperation to help address these underlying issues and promote sustainable fishing practices;

- engage in particular with third countries which are significant fishing products exporters to the EU in order to ensure that they implement measures to prevent IUU fishing, including labour and environmental regulations;

- consider sanctions or other trade measures if third countries fail to comply with international norms;

- provide technical assistance and promote capacity-building, using all possible channels in the framework of the common fisheries policy;

- allocate funding and resources for such research and to regularly update its assessments to inform evidence-based policymaking;

- provide adequate support to the national authorities responsible for the control of fisheries products imports;

- take measures to stop the use of flags of convenience;

- improve its system for identifying vessels engaged in IUU fishing;

- actively promote the establishment of more relevant regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs).

Parliament underlined that the EU IUU regulations must be implemented in a harmonised approach, ensuring the same level of implementation across all Member States, which would make it more effective when used and prevent any potential loopholes. It also stressed the importance of introducing **more import controls** to protect public health and the competitiveness of the EU fishing industry by implementing strong and timely measures and sanctions.

The resolution also encouraged the introduction of **remote electronic monitoring** measures in non-EU waters in order to tackle IUU fishing.

Moreover, Member States are urged to swiftly implement the new Fisheries Control Regulation in order to comply with their legal obligation to have effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions against IUU fishing, thereby reducing incentives to practice IUU fishing and deterring any future infringements.

The resolution called for the establishment of a comprehensive **whistleblower protection programme** within the EU to encourage individuals with knowledge of IUU fishing activities to come forward and provide crucial information. Member States are also encouraged to improve routine and timely information sharing, including on **rejected consignments**, which can enable authorities to better apply and enforce the law.

Lastly, recalling the objectives to protect at least 30 % of oceans by 2030, the Commission and the Member States are called on to ensure that effective measures are in place ahead of 2030, and to make sure that the IUU Regulation is fully implemented.