



MAC ADVICE

Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and the European Union's Biodiversity for 2030 Strategy

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1. Introduction

The global seafood industry relies on a healthy ocean, and as such reversing biodiversity decline is of vital importance to those across the supply chain. The European Commission asserts that “some of today’s sea uses endanger food security, fishers’ livelihoods, and the fishery and seafood sectors”¹, and estimates that conserving marine stocks has the potential to increase the annual profits of the industry by upwards of €49 billion². Furthermore, fisheries management measures designed to protect biodiversity, such as fully protected marine reserves, have been linked with increasing biomass and ecosystem resilience, ultimately leading to improved yields³.

The European Union (EU) is uniquely positioned to make a significant contribution to the process of addressing marine biodiversity decline, as the largest value seafood market in the world with a globally active fishing fleet. The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 is the primary mechanism through which the bloc will contribute to global efforts to reverse both terrestrial and marine biodiversity loss. The strategy contains specific actions and commitments designed to put biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030.

¹ European Commission (2020). EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:a3c806a6-9ab3-11ea-9d2d-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

² *ibid.*

³ Dinerstein et al. (2019). A global deal for nature: guiding principles, milestones, and targets. *Science Advances*. 5(4).

Given the breadth of the issues covered in the strategy, and the remit of the MAC, this advice will focus primarily on the topic of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. The links between biodiversity decline and IUU fishing activities have to date remained underemphasised and underexplored. IUU fishing constitutes a range of behaviours and activities that fundamentally undermine the health of ocean biodiversity.

Addressing IUU fishing is a relatively low-cost effort that can aid the achievement of the broader targets of the EU biodiversity policy. Many of the required technologies and tools are readily available, and proven to be effective where in use and implemented properly. Increasing efforts to end IUU fishing would also level the playing field for the vast number of law-abiding fishing operators who lose competitive advantage through adherence to relevant conservation and management measures, which are ignored by IUU operators. It would simultaneously recoup the estimated tens of billions of euros lost annually to this illicit practice, improving the livelihoods and food security of millions globally⁴.

2. Recommendations

The rate at which marine biodiversity continues to decline is a cause of great concern, and calls for bold and urgent policy measures to be implemented globally. The EU can play a decisive role in saving ocean biodiversity and restoring ocean health through its Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Given the harm that IUU fishing inflicts on marine biodiversity, and the relatively low-cost yet effective measures that exist to address it, the MAC recommends that the European Commission:

- a) Encourage EU Member States to take a ‘zero-tolerance’ stance to IUU fishing as part of their commitments under the Biodiversity Strategy, in line with commitments made by

⁴ Agnew, D.J., Pearce, J., Pramod, G., Peatman, T., Watson, R., Beddington, J.R. and Pitcher, T.J. (2009) ‘Estimating the worldwide extent of illegal shing’, PLoS ONE 4(2).

Commissioner Sinkevičius⁵;

- b) Ensure sufficient resources are available to monitor and manage all types of European Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), as well as assist international partners with MPA management to reduce the risk of IUU-caught fish entering EU markets;
- c) Make it harder for IUU-caught products to enter the EU by continuing to develop CATCH, the digitised import database system, promote its timely adoption by EU Member States as well as by non-EU countries, and seek to enhance and refine the risk analysis of CATCH to reliably block illicitly-caught fisheries products;
- d) Actively drive innovation to reduce the harm caused by ‘ghost’ fishing gear and packaging across the seafood supply chain, to protect biodiversity and improve consumer perceptions of the seafood industry;
- e) Ensure well-enforced traceability that covers all seafood products (fresh, processed or prepared or imported), control measures and appropriate transparency mechanisms which will help protect biodiversity;
- f) Provide adequate information to allow consumers and other stakeholders to make more informed choices and simultaneously improve the accuracy of available data on fish stocks and other socio-economic factors, covering all seafood products (fresh, processed or prepared or imported);
- g) Implement mechanisms to ensure that the development and implementation of biodiversity policies at EU and Member State levels are inclusive processes and give voice to stakeholders across the supply chain at the early stage of discussions;
- h) Consider the undertaking of biodiversity impact assessments and the inclusion of biodiversity provisions within future Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements;

⁵ European Commission (2020). IUU fishing: Commissioner Sinkevičius promotes “zero-tolerance”. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/press/iuu-fishing-commissioner-sinkevicius-promotes-zero-tolerance>

- i) Consider the undertaking of biodiversity impact assessments and the inclusion of biodiversity provisions in Free Trade Agreements where relevant for the EU market of seafood products;
- j) Promote better alignment of import control schemes in major market states, such as Japan and the USA, and RFMOs, as per MAC's Advice of 28 September 2020⁶, as a means to remove potential loopholes for unscrupulous actors, create a level playing field, and allow for better interoperability between systems, enabling effective information exchange and effectively contributing to keeping IUU fishing products out of the EU market.

⁶ The mentioned advice is available on the MAC's website: <https://marketac.eu/en/commissions-reply-import-control-schemes-in-major-market-states/>