



Commission notifies the Republic of Ecuador over the need to step up action to fight illegal fishing

Brussels, 30 October 2019

The European Commission continues its action to fight illegal fishing worldwide by notifying the Republic of Ecuador that it needs to step up its actions (yellow card) in the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Karmenu **Vella**, said: *"Ecuador is a major trade partner for fishery products. We have a huge responsibility towards the EU consumers to make sure that the imports from this country only stem from legal fishing activities. The European Commission has detected shortcomings that hinder the capacity of Ecuador to provide this assurance. We invite the Ecuadorian authorities to step up their efforts and implement the necessary reforms to fight against IUU fishing. We stand ready to work closely with Ecuador to tackle the identified issues and raise the standards of fisheries management. Fighting illegal fishing has been an integral part of the EU's action to improve ocean governance over the last ten years, and it will remain high on the political agenda also under the incoming Commission".*

Today's decision is based on identified shortcomings about the country's ability to comply with agreed standards under international law of the sea as flag, port and market state. Ecuador is encouraged to step up its actions to ensure that fish entering its market do not stem from IUU fishing. In particular, it should develop an enforcement and sanctioning system to address IUU fishing activities. Moreover, an adequate control of the activity of processing plants – especially those exporting to the EU – is paramount. The Commission has also identified limitations in the fisheries legal framework.

At this stage, the decision does not entail any measures affecting trade. The yellow card is a warning and offers Ecuador the chance to react and take measures to rectify the situation within a reasonable time. The mechanism to address IUU provides that in cases of continued non-compliance countries can ultimately face exclusion of their fish exports from the EU market (red card). The EU stands ready to continue working side by side with Ecuador, including through technical assistance where needed, to implement the necessary reforms.

Background

The global value of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) is estimated at 10-20 billion euros per year. Every year, between 11 and 26 million tonnes of fish, i.e. at least 15% of world catches, are caught illegally. The EU is the world's biggest importer of fisheries products and cannot accept such products into its market.

Fighting IUU fishing is part of the EU's commitment to achieve the [Sustainable Development Goal](#) 14.4 - i.e. end illegal fishing and ensure sustainable use of the sea and its resources. It is also an important pillar of the EU's ocean governance strategy, aiming to improve the international governance of the oceans.

Commission actions are based on the EU's '[IUU Regulation](#)', which entered into force in 2010. Pursuant to its provisions, only fisheries products that have been certified as legal, can access the EU market. The Regulation also provides for specific dialogue mechanisms with the countries that are not complying with their obligations as flag, coastal, port and market State under international law. The prime objective of these dialogues is to rectify the existing shortcomings, through appropriate support to the third countries concerned. Hence, they often lead to having new and committed partners in the fight against IUU fishing.

Since November 2012, the Commission entered in formal dialogues with 25 third countries, i.e. officially warned them of the need to take effective action to fight IUU fishing (yellow card). In most cases, significant progress was observed and therefore the Commission could satisfactorily close the formal dialogue phase and give them a green card. Only a few countries have not shown the necessary commitment to reforms until now. As a result, fisheries products caught by their vessels cannot be imported into the EU (red card).

For More Information

[MEMO on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing in general and in Ecuador](#)

[Overview of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing procedures with third countries](#)

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