



## TROUBLED WATERS: IUU FISHING

**Resources from fisheries are becoming increasingly important. A luxury product for some, the key to survival for others, they are the object of many desires: in 2016, the average consumption of fish exceeded 20 kilos per year and per inhabitant, twice the number fifty years ago. The pressure on marine ecosystems has never been so strong.**

Marine resources are far from being unlimited but this wasn't understood until recently. This awareness has quickly led to a regulation of the "rush to fish". New standards, conservation measures and regulations now affect fishermen ... At least those who agree to abide by them.

### OLD PRACTICES, NEW CONCEPTS

The concept of IUU fishing appeared in 1997 at a session of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). The term was designed to bring together under one umbrella any illegal fishing activity, whether unauthorised, in violation of established regulations and quotas, or just undeclared.

In 2001, FAO incorporated it into a set of tools made available to States: the "International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing". It was the first genuine institutional response to a scourge that was only intensifying. In a similar approach, the European Union adopted a Community Action Plan in 2002, the implementation of which was entrusted to the Community Fisheries Control Agency.

### A WIDESPREAD BUT SEVERELY REPRIMANDED OFFENSE

IUU fishing is a lucrative activity, accounting for between 20% and 30% of all global catches, and estimated at \$ 10-20 billion annually. In addition to economic damage, it has significant ecological impact. It is not concerned with the survival of endangered species or the protection of marine ecosystems, which are medium- and long-term challenges. It also has undesirable social effects, particularly towards coastal communities, where honest fishermen end up with fewer catches and facing more restrictive regulations.

Developing countries are generally the most affected by this stunted fishery. Several factors explain this: poverty, unemployment, ineffective national legal systems, corruption... It is practiced both by the local "small" fishermen, who have little alternative means to support themselves, and by foreign-flagged factory vessels depleting stocks under cover of agreements with failed or irresponsible governments.

### A STRUGGLE BOTH OPERATIONAL...

It is up to the French Navy to combat IUU fishing on the high seas and in the French EEZ, with the resources allocated to fisheries control, which are then part of the State Action at Sea.

The control tools are varied, from the ERF (a boat to catch fishing nets) *La Caouanne*, in Guyana, which deprives

illegal fishermen of their very expensive nets, to the resources of satellite surveillance. In maritime areas as large as the TAAF (French Southern and Antarctic Territories), the RADARSAT system has since 2004 enabled the detection of illegal fishers and their capture in a particularly effective way.

### ...AND LEGAL

The European Union, the world's largest importer of fishery products, has deployed an original weapon in controlling the access to its market. A 2008 regulation provides for genuinely dissuasive sanctions against all players involved in IUU fishing: heavy fines, proportional to the value of goods, and even closure of access to the European market for the products in question. These penalties can be extended to entire countries.

Beyond national borders, fisheries control is overseen by regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs). France (for its offshore territories) and the EU (for the 27 States) have joined many of them to give a global dimension to this fight against fraudulent fishing.

The United States and the EU are the only two major international areas to have taken repressive measures against IUU fishing. It remains widespread and devastating, but recent news show that Europe is not relaxing its efforts with the launch in March in Malta of the MEDFISH4EVER plan for sustainable fishery in the Mediterranean. There is every reason to believe that the ongoing negotiations at the United Nations on the protection of biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions ("BBNJ") will also result in solutions for cracking down on IUU fishing.



Arrest of a Chinese fishing vessel in an illegal situation by the Liberian Coast Guard. © Ministry of Defense of Liberia.