



Understanding Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing

IUU fishing is a global problem threatening ocean ecosystems and sustainable fisheries. Learn more about IUU fishing and NOAA's role in combating these activities.

What is illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing?

Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing activities violate both national and international fishing regulations. IUU fishing is a global problem that threatens ocean ecosystems and sustainable fisheries. It also threatens our economic security and the natural resources that are critical to global food security, and it puts law-abiding fishermen and seafood producers in the United States and abroad at a disadvantage.

Illegal fishing refers to fishing activities conducted in contravention of applicable laws and regulations, including those laws and rules adopted at the regional and international level.

Unreported fishing refers to fishing activities that are not reported or are misreported to relevant authorities in contravention of national laws and regulations or reporting procedures of a relevant [regional fisheries management organization](#).

Unregulated fishing occurs in areas or for fish stocks for which there are no applicable conservation or management measures and where such fishing activities are conducted in a manner inconsistent with State responsibilities for the conservation of living marine resources under international law. Fishing activities are also unregulated when occurring in an RFMO-managed area and conducted by vessels without nationality, or by those flying a flag of a State or fishing entity that is not party to the RFMO in a manner that is inconsistent with the conservation measures of that RFMO. [Learn more about RFMOs](#).

How does the United States work with other countries to combat IUU fishing?

The United States, as both a major consumer and major producer of seafood, is leading efforts to ensure that its high demand for imported seafood does not create incentives for IUU fishing activities. Combating IUU fishing is a top priority for our nation, and NOAA Fisheries is leading these efforts by:

- Working with other fishing nations through regional fisheries bodies and international partnerships. Together, we are strengthening enforcement and data collection programs aimed at detecting, deterring, and eliminating IUU fishing.
- Implementing measures that restrict port entry and access to port services for vessels included on the IUU lists of international fisheries organizations with U.S. membership. [Learn about the Port State Measures Agreement](#).
- Identifying countries that have fishing vessels engaged in IUU fishing activities under the [Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act](#). [Learn about the IUU Biennial Reports to Congress](#).
- Implementing reporting and recordkeeping measures to prevent IUU-caught seafood from entering the United States. [Learn more about the Seafood Monitoring Program](#).
- Supporting capacity-building and technical assistance workshops that provide the tools, resources, information, and skills to solve IUU issues, combat IUU fishing, and promote sustainable seafood practices. [Learn more about capacity building](#).

What are some examples of IUU fishing activities?

IUU fishing includes:

- Fishing without a license or quota for certain species.

- Failing to report catches or making false reports.
- Keeping undersized fish or fish that are otherwise protected by regulations.
- Fishing in closed areas or during closed seasons, and using prohibited fishing gear.
- Conducting unauthorized transshipments (e.g., transfers of fish) to cargo vessels.

Who is most affected by IUU fishing?

IUU fishing poses a direct threat to food security and socioeconomic stability in many parts of the world. Developing countries that depend on fisheries for food security and export income are most at risk from IUU fishing. For example, total catches in West Africa are estimated to be 40 percent higher than reported catches. Many crew members on IUU fishing vessels are from poor and underdeveloped parts of the world, and they often work in unsafe conditions.

What are the economic losses caused by IUU fishing?

The inherent nature of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing makes it difficult to accurately quantify the full global economic impacts resulting from these activities. But there is little disagreement that it is in the billions, or even tens of billions, of dollars each year. Various studies over the years have assessed regional levels of IUU fishing and estimated global losses, but such estimates are based on data that are now many years old. The United Nation's Food and Agricultural Organization is currently developing regional IUU estimate methodologies that can be regularly updated. Implementing the UN's action plan recommendations will help gauge the actual level of activity and impacts so that they may be appropriately addressed.

How does IUU fishing affect the seafood industry and U.S. consumers?

Fishermen and companies that engage in IUU fishing circumvent conservation and management measures, avoid the operational costs associated with sustainable fishing practices, and may derive economic benefit from exceeding harvesting limits. As a result, their illegally caught products can provide unfair competition in the marketplace for law-abiding fishermen and seafood industries.

Additionally, because the United States imports most of its seafood, IUU fishing creates an imbalance of lower quality products in the seafood market while simultaneously hindering the sustainability of global marine resources.

How can I learn more about what the United States is doing to combat IUU fishing?

The National Ocean Council's Committee on IUU Fishing and Seafood Fraud created a web portal with information on U.S. activities and the federal agencies involved with implementing the recommendations of a [2014 Presidential Task Force](#) to comprehensively prevent IUU fishing and seafood fraud from entering the U.S. marketplace.

Visit the [IUU fishing and seafood fraud web portal](#).