



Briefing n°38: Fighting against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing (IUU): Successes from ACP countries

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COMBATting IUU FISHING IN THE CARIBBEAN

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Executive Summary

Fish stocks and other living marine resources are renewable natural assets and a potential source of sustainable wealth for Caribbean States. Caribbean fisheries and marine ecosystems are threatened by several factors including climate change, pollution, and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing conducted by local fishers and foreign national. Protection, conservation and management of the fisheries and marine ecosystems are important, not only for their preservation and long-term sustainability, but also because the people of the region are highly dependent upon these resources for their livelihoods and food security. It is vital, therefore, that policies, laws, and institutional arrangements are established and maintained to effectively regulate and control access to, and usage of these fisheries and ecosystems.

Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing poses significant challenges for long-term sustainable use of these resources in the region. The recent report by Dr. Kathleen Sullivan Sealey, of the University of Miami's Rosenstiel School of Marine Science concluded that IUU fishing is the greatest single threat to Bahamian fisheries. High-value species are often targeted by foreign poachers and local fishers who disregard and violate the laws and regulations governing access to, and conservation and sustainable management of the resources due to perceived low risk of being apprehended and sanctioned. Furthermore, IUU fishing is often associated with other illegal activities and when done by unauthorized foreign vessels, is a flagrant violation of a state's sovereignty.

An effective system for monitoring, controlling and surveillance (MCS) is therefore a vital part of the system for ensuring compliance with the rules developed to ensure long-term sustainable benefits from the fishery resources. But many CARICOM/CARIFORUM States have neither the required capacity to effectively monitor the activities of the industry, nor the hardware to conduct surveillance and enforcement at sea due to financial and human resource constraints.

However, in these difficult economic times, characterized by high levels of unemployment, under-employment, high food import bill, growing food and nutrition insecurity, rising crime and other social ills, Caribbean States are working with a renewed sense of urgency to strengthen monitoring, control and surveillance systems and to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU fishing.

The current initiative to combat IUU fishing in the region started in 2010 when the CRFM Ministerial Council approved the Castries Declaration on IUU Fishing, a regional policy

instrument built on regional cooperation to intensify and better focus the fight to combat IUU fishing in a coordinated and concerted manner.

A number of other significant initiatives have also been undertaken at the regional and national levels since then to combat IUU fishing including:

- A historic meeting in 2012 between Ministers responsible for fisheries from CARICOM / CRFM States and their counterparts from SICA / OSPESCA States in Central America that produced a MOU and Joint Action Plan addressing cooperation on IUU among other priorities;
- The conduct of a regional study through the ACP Fish II Project in 2013, and preparation of a Regional Strategy on Monitoring, Control and Surveillance to Combat IUU Fishing in the CARICOM / CARIFORUM Region;
- The preparation of a manual containing standard operating procedures for fisheries and enforcement personnel to strengthen their capacity to combat IUU fishing and related activities, and a manual containing a set of procedural guidelines, based on international best practices, for efficient and successful prosecution of fisheries offences; and
- The establishment of the CRFM/FAO/WECAFC Working Group on IUU Fishing in February 2014 to spearhead wider regional cooperation to combat IUU fisheries in the Caribbean.

Future investment is needed to address weaknesses identified including the following:

- Upgrading national legislation including sanction for IUU fishing
- Preparation of National Plans of Action to combat IUU fishing
- Development of regional agreements on the management and conservation of key species and ecosystems and cooperation on MCS.
- Improve public awareness and participation in MCS
- Improved cooperation with states and territories in the Wider Caribbean
- Capacity building of enforcement personnel and agencies.