

CAPE

Coalition pour des Accords
de Pêche Équitables

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CFFA

Coalition for Fair Fisheries
Arrangements

Improving traceability for fish products imported into the EU markets to combat IUU fishing

Issues for ACP fishing communities

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Introduction

The EU as a bloc is the world's largest market for fish, accounting for 40% of global imports. The African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP) represent an important fish-trading partner for the EU. EU trade statistics¹ show that in 2006, the value of EU fish imports from ACP countries was around 1.4 billion euros, i.e. about 12% of total value of extra EU fish imports.

A 2006 study² warns about the EU's declining self sufficiency from catches in its own waters, estimated to be just 40 % in 2006³. This situation, together with the recent enlargement of the EU from 15 to 25 member states, provides ACP fishermen and exporters with significant opportunities, so long as they can comply with an increasingly complex set of standards, such as the ones that are being put in place for traceability. Traceability meets several objectives, - to ensure the origin, the sanitary quality of a product-, but it will also become a tool for the fight against IUU (Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated) fishing.

Tracking the fish "from ship to shop"?

In the fight against IUU fishing, the need to be able to track the fish from the ship to the market place has been highlighted. Controlling or otherwise monitoring that first link in the chain, - the catching of the fish-, is essential in enabling authorities and companies to exclude illegally caught fish from the market. Putting in place mechanisms that will ensure traceability from the landing site is not sufficient to ensure the legal origin of a fish product.

The declaration by African States at an FAO Technical Consultation on IUU fishing held in 2004 clearly states their problems and needs. Efficient monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) are essential in fighting IUU fishing. If it is not known who catches what, where and when, the rest of the chain will remain ignorant about the origin, legal or illegal, of the fish.

¹ Eurostat Comext statistics, via EU export Helpdesk <http://exporthelp.europa.eu/>

² http://www.globefish.org/files/White%20Fish%20Study%202006_432.pdf

³ Whilst overall EU fish supplies rely on imports to a level of 60 %, for some categories the dependency on imports is as high as 90 %, as for white fish in 2005

Ensure traceability:

Striking a balance between the human factor and the technology

All too often, high-tech solutions are being presented as “THE” way to address the loophole. Although some of these technical options have proven useful as part of a larger MCS schemes, they cannot provide the sole solution. Operators are highly adept at circumventing technical control systems with technical tricks, as in the case of VMS (Satellite Vessel Monitoring system).

Rather than putting the emphasis on expensive high-tech methods to combat IUU fishing, a more balanced approach should be adopted, that takes into account, as a matter of priority, the need to train fisheries inspection staff, providing them with an adequate status and salary, etc. Involving the artisanal fishing sector has also proven extremely efficient for combating illegal operations, such as trawlers incursions in the zone reserved for the artisanal fishing sector.

Specific issues for ACP fishing communities

ACP fishing communities suffer greatly from IUU fishing operations, particularly industrial trawlers coming, at night, to fish illegally in zones which are normally reserved for small scale fishing. Moreover, fish coming from IUU sources competes directly on the EU markets with fish caught legally, including by artisanal fishermen. Therefore, ACP small scale fishing communities agree that the trade in IUU caught fish must be halted, and that traceability could help to stop fish coming from IUU sources.

However, it is important that fishery products from the ACP fisheries sector are not prevented from accessing markets like the EU because they are not able to comply with the administrative requirements of traceability, as used to combat IUU fishing.

ACP artisanal fishing organizations⁴ have proposed that efforts are made to find ways in which traceability can be applied to fish products originating from small scale fisheries, where small quantities of fish are collected from many vessels, often from several, widespread locations. This could be achieved through the development of a model, based on pilot projects that directly involve the artisanal fishing sector stakeholders, towards establishing traceability of fishery products appropriate for the sector.

Artisanal fishing sector also want to consolidate their capacities, through information and training, so that they develop a good knowledge of the existing regulation, and are able to implement them.

As conclusion, if EU traceability norms are imposed to ACP countries, they can, in the long term, be beneficial for the artisanal fishing sector, provided the conditions for their implementation allow the sector to adjust.

4 Statement on IUU fishing issues for African coastal communities, presented at the 27th session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries, endorsed by CFFA, Greenpeace, ICSF – International Collective in Support of Fishworkers, ITF – International Transport Workers Federation, WFF – World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers, WFFP – World Forum of FisherPoeples