



Council of the
European Union

181102/EU XXVII. GP
Eingelangt am 22/04/24

Brussels, 22 April 2024
(OR. en)

9166/24

PECHE 153

COVER NOTE

From:	Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine DEPREZ, Director
To:	Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union
No. Cion doc.:	COM(2024) 171 final
Subject:	REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL on the application of Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008 establishing a community system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing (the IUU Regulation)

Delegations will find attached document COM(2024) 171 final.

Encl.: COM(2024) 171 final



EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

Brussels, 17.4.2024

COM(2024) 171 final

**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND
THE COUNCIL**

**on the application of Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008 establishing a community
system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing
(the IUU Regulation)**

REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL

**on the application of Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008 establishing a
Community system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and
unregulated fishing**

REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL.....	1
1. Introduction.....	2
2. Progress since the 2020 report	3
a) Implementation of anti-IUU measures within the EU	3
i) Changes to the legal basis - revised fisheries control system and amendments to the IUU Regulation.....	3
ii) Dissuasive sanctions	4
iii) Implementation of the EU IUU catch certification scheme	5
iv) Nationals engaging in/supporting IUU fishing	6
v) Mutual assistance	7
vi) IUU vessel list	7
b) International IUU governance framework	7
i) Bilateral cooperation with non-EU countries	7
ii) Regional and multilateral cooperation	10
c) Cooperation with stakeholders	10
3. Main challenges to implementing the IUU Regulation	11
a) Within the EU	11
b) Outside the EU	12
4. Conclusion	12

1. Introduction

This periodic report updates the European Parliament and the Council on the main achievements in the application of Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008 establishing a Community system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing ('IUU Regulation')¹. It fulfils the reporting requirement under Article 55(2) of the IUU Regulation and is based on submissions by Member States under Article 55(1)², the Commission's own observations, and its assessment of any relevant information since 2020³.

In the 14 years since the entry into force of the IUU Regulation, the EU has come to be recognised worldwide as a major player in the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. A '**zero tolerance**'⁴ approach to **IUU fishing** is operated under the EU control system of the common fisheries policy (CFP) and the EU's updated International Ocean Governance agenda⁵. The IUU Regulation contributes to efforts to eliminate IUU fishing in line with the EU's commitment to goal 14 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda⁶.

The IUU Regulation is based on two pillars: i) the **catch certification scheme**, which uses traceability to prevent fishery products stemming from IUU fishing entering the EU market, and ii) the **bilateral cooperation with non-EU countries**, which strengthens fisheries governance in non-EU countries and helps them comply more effectively with their regional and international obligations.

The EU approach to preventing, deterring and eliminating IUU fishing is embedded in international fisheries law and, in addition to the IUU Regulation, builds on the Control Regulation⁷, the Sustainable Management of External Fleets Regulation⁸ and the implementation in EU law of measures established by Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs).

This report presents the main activities which have helped meet the objectives of the EU policy to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing during the period 2020-2023. These include legislative changes during that period, efforts to strengthen available tools, and

¹ OJ L 286, 29.10.2008, p. 1.

² Information provided by Member States, covering the periods 2018-2019 and 2020-2021.

³ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the application of Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008 establishing a community system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, COM(2020) 772 of 9 December 2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0772>.

⁴ The European Green Deal, COM(2019) 640 of 11 December 2019; EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, COM(2020) 380 of 20 May 2020; A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system, COM(2020) 381 of 20 May 2020.

⁵ Setting the course for a sustainable blue planet - Joint Communication on the EU's International Ocean Governance agenda, JOINT(2022) 28 final.

⁶ https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal14#targets_and_indicators.

⁷ OJ L 343, 22.12.2009, p. 1.

⁸ OJ L 347, 28.12.2017, p. 81.

cooperation with key stakeholders. Finally, it identifies the main challenges to implementing the IUU Regulation.

2. Progress since the 2020 report

The 2020 report announced that further work would be carried out to modernise the IUU Regulation and strengthen its effectiveness specifically by **digitalising** the previously paper-based **catch certification scheme**. The report emphasised the need to **maintain cooperation with non-EU countries** and support their commitment to tackling IUU fishing. This section outlines progress made in both areas.

In addition, this section reviews work to address the recommendations of the 2022 audit by the European Court of Auditors (ECA) on the EU action to combat illegal fishing (the 'ECA special report'). The ECA special report contains recommendations on Member States sanctions for illegal fishing and control systems for preventing the import of illegal fishery products into the EU.

a) Implementation of anti-IUU measures within the EU

i) Changes to the legal basis - revised fisheries control system and amendments to the IUU Regulation

The revision of the EU fisheries control system was successfully concluded at the end of 2023⁹. The new rules created a more **effective and harmonised fisheries control system** and modernised the control of fishing activities of both EU vessels and those fishing in EU waters.

In the context of the revision, targeted amendments to the IUU Regulation laid down a legal obligation to use digital tools to implement the catch certification scheme and strengthened import controls by improving the traceability of products imported into the EU.

Enforcement and sanctions

The revision of the EU fisheries control system contributes significantly to harmonise enforcement¹⁰. The enforcement provisions of the IUU Regulation were revised in the framework of the Control Regulation so as to include **minimum administrative financial penalties** or standard rates for certain serious infringements of the CFP. In addition, the revised rules expanded the **list of serious infringements** and introduced infringements considered serious under all circumstances. Chapter IX of the IUU Regulation was therefore amended to ensure consistency with the new enforcement provisions adopted under the Control Regulation.

Mandatory use of digital tools and enhanced traceability

The amendments to the IUU Regulation adopted in the context of the revision of the fisheries control system introduced the legal provisions requiring the **use of CATCH**, an IT system,

⁹ OJ L, 2023/2842, 20.12.2023, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202302842.

¹⁰ Articles 41-44 of the IUU Regulation.

implementing the EU catch certification scheme. EU importers and Member State authorities will be required to use CATCH from 10 January 2026, leaving some time for IT developments, trainings, promotion and testing.

CATCH is an EU-wide real-time IT system allowing all information, data and documents to be managed centrally. It is intended to **improve the effectiveness of the EU catch certification scheme** and will enable **electronic submission** of catch certificates and documents accompanying fishery products imported into the EU. This will harmonise the scheme and enhance import controls.

The amendments to the IUU Regulation also modified the content of the catch certificate and accompanying documents. The aim of the amendments was to **improve traceability and controls of fishery products** destined for the EU market by gathering additional information necessary to correctly identify fishery products, related fishing activities and trade flows.

Another important change consisted in expanding the requirement to issue a processing statement to also cover fishery products processed in the same country as the flag State of the fishing vessel. This was aimed at strengthening traceability of all consignments entering the EU and ensuring correct functioning of quantity management within CATCH.

The Commission has also been empowered to develop secondary legislation to supplement documentation requirements concerning the traceability of fishery products and their transport to the EU market.

Although the use of CATCH will be mandatory only for EU operators and Member State authorities, it will also be possible for non-EU country operators and authorities to create, validate and transfer catch certificates and related documents directly within the system.

EU risk identification criteria under the catch certification scheme

Based on the amended Article 17(3) of the IUU Regulation, all Member States **must** now apply **EU risk identification criteria** when verifying imports under the catch certification scheme. This will ensure a more consistent approach to catch certification import controls, while drawing on the benefits of automated data cross-check in CATCH. Member States had previously been able to opt for national risk identification criteria, impeding the harmonisation of import controls.

Additional measures in relation to non-cooperating countries in the fight against IUU fishing

Another amendment to the IUU Regulation concerns Article 38 on measures applying to **non-cooperating non-EU countries**, once listed in accordance with Article 33 of the IUU Regulation. In addition to prohibiting such countries from exporting marine fishery products to the EU, new measures **prevent** fishing vessels **flying the flag** of such **listed countries** from **accessing EU ports**¹¹. Moreover, **EU beneficial owners** operating or owning fishing vessels under the flag of such countries will now have to **request their deregistration**.

¹¹ Provisions applicable from entry into force, i.e. 9 January 2024.

ii) Dissuasive sanctions

Following up on the ECA recommendations and the study on sanctioning systems, the Commission has been working with Member States on the **uniform and effective application of dissuasive sanctions** through continued checks and monitoring. Since 2022, the Commission has launched 15 EU-Pilots or other exchanges of letters¹² with Member States regarding their sanctioning systems. To address Member State shortcomings, and depending on the outcome of the EU-Pilots, the Commission may need to take remedial measures at a later stage to ensure that sanctioning systems are effective, proportionate, and dissuasive. Those remedial measures might include action plans, administrative enquiries and/or infringement proceedings.

iii) Implementation of the EU IUU catch certification scheme

As one of the world's biggest importers of fishery products, the EU has the responsibility to ensure that products stemming from IUU fishing do not reach its market.

A total of 93 non-EU countries have notified the Commission of their national authorities empowered to attest the veracity of the information set out in catch certificates issued for products exported to the EU market ('competent authorities'). Around 400 000 catch certificates and 59 000 processing statements were submitted to Member State competent authorities for imports in 2020-2021¹³. During the reporting period, a total of 93 refusals were issued for imports into the EU market of fishery products consignments under the IUU catch certification scheme¹⁴.

The ECA special report reviewed the effectiveness of control systems for preventing the import of illegal fishery products into the EU. The Commission was recommended to pursue the **digitalisation of the catch certification scheme, work towards uniform use of risk identification criteria, and monitor the scope and quality of checks applied by Member States and take necessary action**. The amended IUU Regulation addresses the recommendations on digitalisation and on the uniform use of risk identification criteria.

In the period 2020-2023, the Commission worked with Member States to improve CATCH, through additional technical developments to reflect the amendments to the IUU Regulation. Moreover, **automated alerts based on data cross-checks** were identified in cooperation with Member States and the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA), several of which have already been developed.

The revised provisions of the IUU Regulation include a reference to the **interoperability of CATCH** with the **EU Single Window Environment for Customs**, established with the Regulation (EU) 2022/2399¹⁵ to facilitate overall import procedures and import controls on fishery products. The Commission has secured funding for this objective and is currently mapping out the technical specifications for the future system. Interoperability should be

¹² In accordance with Article 96 of the Control Regulation.

¹³ Article 55(1) of the IUU Regulation.

¹⁴ Information for 2020-2021 provided by means of biennial report under Article 55 of the IUU Regulation. For the period 2022-2023, information is based on Member States reports under Article 18(5) of the IUU Regulation.

¹⁵ OJ L 317, 9.12.2022, p. 1.

achieved by 10 January 2028 and will facilitate import procedures and fishery product controls beyond the scope of the IUU policy.

In order to further facilitate risk management by Member States, the Commission will review the **EU risk identification criteria**¹⁶ before the new provisions enter into effect, taking into account the statistical features of CATCH.

As discussed with Member States and EFCA, to help all stakeholders achieve a more uniform application of the catch certification scheme, the Commission replaced the users' handbook for assisting EU operators and authorities with a set of **frequently asked questions (FAQs)** published on DG MARE's website¹⁷.

To the same end, and in cooperation with EFCA and the Member States, the Commission prepared a guidance document on a **common approach to checks and verifications under the current catch certification scheme** and has developed another guidance document which includes more information on the future compulsory use of CATCH by Member States¹⁸.

In line with the recommendation in the ECA special report to monitor the scope and quality of checks and verifications applied by Member States, the Commission revised the **questionnaire** for Member States' **biennial reports**¹⁹ on the implementation of the IUU Regulation. Moreover, the Commission has comprehensively reviewed information from Member States²⁰ on the implementation of the catch certification scheme in their recent biennial reports. Based on the information for the period 2022-2023, the Commission will consider the most appropriate follow-up actions.

In addition to providing information on the catch certification scheme, the Member State biennial reports also informed the Commission of the results of **port inspections** and **direct landings** and **transhipments** of fishery products by non-EU fishing vessels²¹. During the period 2020–2021, approximately 6 000 non-EU vessels landed fishery products in EU ports, of which 1 004 were inspected by Member States.

iv) Nationals engaging in/supporting IUU fishing

The Commission has carried out a thorough analysis of the national legal frameworks and enforcement measures applicable in Member States regarding **EU nationals engaged in/supporting IUU fishing**. The analysis demonstrated that the obligations set out in Articles 39 and 40 of the IUU Regulation were not uniformly reflected in the national legal order of Member States. From 2017 to 2021, Member States had identified 51 cases of EU nationals engaging in/supporting IUU fishing, sanctioned 47 EU nationals and refused EU or public

¹⁶ Article 31 of Commission Regulation (EC)1010/2009.

¹⁷ https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/document/download/e1e6fa33-6bcb-4352-837c-9903faef6b6b_en?filename=frequently-asked-questions-iuu-regulation_en.pdf.

¹⁸ https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/document/download/4b92c8f5-9f96-46ec-babc-3bc880ff4ad3_en?filename=FAQ-amendment-IUU-Regulation_en.pdf.

¹⁹ Article 55(1) of the IUU Regulation.

²⁰ This assessment includes relevant legal provisions, guidance documents, standard operating procedures, manuals and inter-agency cooperation arrangements currently applicable at national level and which the Commission is aware of.

²¹ Article 55(1) of the IUU Regulation.

funds to 79 EU nationals.²² Furthermore, there were 96 cases where, through mutual assistance, EU nationals engaging in/supporting IUU fishing were identified and 86 cases where Member States exchanged information with non-EU countries on this subject²³.

v) Mutual assistance

The Commission maintains close cooperation with the Member States to detect, prevent and deter IUU fishing activities, including by analysing reports of suspected IUU fishing carried out by non-EU vessels in their waters²⁴.

The system of mutual assistance established under Article 51 of the IUU Regulation facilitates **cooperation between Member States, the Commission and non-EU countries**. The system helps ensure that IUU fishing is properly investigated and sanctioned. It has enabled information to be exchanged on an ongoing basis, specifically alerts, intelligence, and the results of investigations into presumed IUU fishing activities. Between 2020 and 2023, the Commission sent 61 alerts to Member States to request information, indicate areas of possible risk and provide guidance on the verifications of imports. Active use of mutual assistance has led to refusals of imports of fishery products obtained by IUU fishing.

vi) IUU vessel list

Each year, the Commission adopts the updated EU list of IUU vessels based on RFMO lists²⁵. The Commission also actively contributes to RFMO listings of IUU vessels based on intelligence, own investigations, and assessments.

b) International IUU governance framework

Given the global repercussions of IUU fishing, the EU places great emphasis on continuous cooperation and commitment to proactive and rigorous action by all partners at international, regional and national levels. IUU fishing is also one of the challenges identified in the revised EU maritime security strategy²⁶, with countermeasures set out in its accompanying action plan. During the reporting period, the Commission continued to actively cooperate with international partners, through bilateral cooperation with non-EU countries under the IUU dialogues, IUU working groups and regional and multilateral cooperation frameworks.

²² <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2771/353964>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ More than 1 300 sightings of foreign fishing vessels were reported by Member States in 2020-2021. Sightings reported by three Member States are excluded from this total for two specific reasons. In the case of one Member State, 385 sightings were reported without specifying whether these concerned non-EU country or Member State vessels. In the case of two Member States, sightings were reported that only concerned vessels from other Member States. Information based on Member State reports covering 2020-2021 in accordance with Article 55(1) of the IUU Regulation.

²⁵ OJ L 181, 18.7.2023, p. 16.

²⁶ Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on the update of the EU Maritime Security Strategy and its Action Plan "An enhanced EU Maritime Security Strategy for evolving maritime threats", <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52023JC0008>.

i) **Bilateral cooperation with non-EU countries**

The Commission has continued to interact with and support a number of non-EU countries in achieving **fundamental reform** of their **fisheries control systems**. During the reporting period and despite the travel restrictions caused by the COVID19 pandemic, the Commission conducted more than 30 field visits and videoconferences with non-EU countries which enjoy active cooperation with the EU under the IUU Regulation. In addition, 17 meetings of IUU working groups were held over that period.

Political ownership of reforms has proven crucial to bringing fishery control systems into line with international and regional obligations. In general, non-EU countries with which the Commission enjoys cooperation, have demonstrated strong political will to tackle IUU fishing and remedy the shortcomings jointly identified. Experience shows that persistent political leadership and guidance can achieve lasting results in fisheries compliance.

- **IUU dialogues**

Dialogues on IUU fishing with non-EU countries is one of the pillars of the IUU Regulation. Whether the Commission decides to engage in an IUU dialogue with a non-EU country depends on a series of indicators assessing that country's compliance with its international obligations as a flag, coastal, port and market State and its exposure to IUU fishing.

The IUU Regulation establishes the a '**carding system**', empowering the Commission to notify a non-EU countries of the *risk of being identified as a non-cooperating* in the fight against IUU fishing (pre-identification or 'yellow card')²⁷. At this stage, the Commission engages in a formal IUU dialogue with the pre-identified country and establishes cooperation based on an action plan.

Since the end of 2020, one country has had its yellow card lifted following significant reforms of its fisheries sector. In the same period, two yellow cards were issued, establishing a formal dialogue to address the shortcomings identified²⁸.

In cases where a pre-identified country fails to resolve its shortcomings, thus disregarding its international obligations, the Commission *can identify it as non-cooperating* in the fight against IUU fishing ('red card')²⁹. Contrary to pre-identification, which does not entail any sanctions, this procedure leads to serious consequences, including trade bans. Member States must refuse imports of wild marine fishery products caught by vessels flying the flag of the non-cooperating country.

Once a country has been identified, the Commission will propose to the Council to include it in the list of non-cooperating non-EU countries ('listed countries'). This 'listing' entails measures beyond import bans and includes banning EU operators from purchasing fishing vessels from these countries or reflagging to such countries, banning exports of EU fishing vessels, banning private trade agreements with EU nationals and prohibiting joint fishing operations with EU vessels. Since their entry into force on 9 January 2024, these measures include a prohibition to use EU ports by fishing vessels from listed countries and a

²⁷ Article 32 of the IUU Regulation.

²⁸ https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/illegal-fishing-overview-of-existing-procedures-third-countries_en.pdf.

²⁹ Articles 31 and 33 of the IUU Regulation.

prohibition for EU nationals from owning, operating or managing fishing vessels flying the flag of these countries.

Since the end of 2020, two red cards have been issued, and the corresponding countries included in the Council's list of non-cooperating non-EU countries in the fight against IUU fishing³⁰.

The IUU dialogue process has provided a framework for countries to enhance their national legal frameworks and align them with their international obligations as flag, coastal, port and market States. In addition, the non-EU countries involved have worked towards improving their monitoring, control and surveillance systems, both with respect to vessels flying their flag and foreign vessels fishing in waters within their national jurisdiction. Effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions are also part of the reforms pursued through the IUU dialogues, which in turn have enabled non-EU countries to effectively enforce their national legislation and, subsequently, combat IUU fishing.

- **IUU working groups with non-EU countries**

Several bilateral IUU working groups have been established with major fishing countries. They meet at least once a year and are a platform for providing regular updates on new developments in fisheries control, exchange of best practices and lessons learnt when implementing national legislation. They also provide updates on catch documentation schemes, RFMOs as well as information on trade flows.

Since the last reporting period, the Commission has continued its cooperation through such working groups with the United States of America, Japan, China, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan and Thailand.

- **Impact of the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU**

On 1 January 2021, the UK became a non-EU country for the purposes of the IUU Regulation. The Commission arranged for the notification to be issued in good time to the Member State competent authorities for validating catch certificates for exports of fishery products to the UK and engaged with the UK authorities to secure continued trade flows of fishery products to and from the UK. The Commission provided regular guidance to Member States to help avoid problems with implementation.

Based on the provisions of the Windsor Framework³¹, which forms part of the Withdrawal Agreement³², the IUU Regulation also applies to and in the United Kingdom in respect of Northern Ireland. To respond to the challenges that had emerged in implementing the Northern Ireland Protocol, the Commission and the UK reached a political agreement on a comprehensive set of joint solutions aimed at addressing the practical challenges faced by citizens and businesses in Northern Ireland, thereby providing them with lasting certainty and predictability. As a result, fishery products can move from Great Britain to Northern Ireland for end consumption subject to the new simplified certification, labelling and control requirements applicable to retail agri-food goods.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ OJ L 102, 17.4.2023, p. 87.

³² OJ C 384I, 12.11.2019, p. 1.

- **Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs)**

At the end of 2023, the EU had 20 SFPAs³³ in place with partner countries in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans, of which 14 had active protocols allowing for fishing activities. The **sectoral support** component of SFPAs **assists IUU policy objectives** through capacity-building programmes and training, and by seeking to develop control systems and ensure they function correctly. This has a positive spillover on the fight against IUU fishing.

To ensure the coherence of the external dimension of the common fisheries policy, the Commission proposes the denunciation of any SFPAs with a non-EU country listed by the Council in accordance with Article 38 of the IUU Regulation.

ii) Regional and multilateral cooperation

In line with the external dimension of the common fisheries policy, the EU plays an essential role in promoting anti-IUU measures based on EU principles and standards within **RFMOs**. Central to this are EU efforts to support, update and enforce the cross-listing of IUU vessels between RFMOs and provisions sanctioning nationals involved in IUU fishing. By its nature, the cross-listing of IUU vessels ensures *de facto* a unique global system through which vessels are impeded or prevented from illegally taking advantage of different or uncoordinated regulatory systems at the same time.

As regards the implementation of the **FAO Agreement port state measures (PSMA)**, the Commission continued to actively promote its ratification and effective implementation in all external fisheries relations, including through financial support to the FAO. The Commission also played an active role in negotiating and adopting clear **voluntary guidelines on transshipments** within the FAO. Furthermore, the Commission was pivotal in bringing the **WTO negotiations on fisheries subsidies** to a conclusion on the matter of eliminating subsidies which contribute to IUU fishing, as set out in SDG target 14.6.

During the reporting period, the EU was the principal donor to the FAO's Global Capacity Development Programme to help non-EU countries implement the PSMA. The **EU also provided support to Africa and the Indo-Pacific region to contribute to the development and management of sustainable fisheries**. This included support to build their capacity to combat IUU fishing. In particular, the EU committed EUR 35 million to **Pacific ACP** states under the Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership, EUR 28 million to the **Indian Ocean** region under the ECOFISH programme and EUR 16.5 million for **West African** nations under the Improved Regional Fisheries Governance in Western Africa Programme.

In 2023 the EU joined the **IUU Fishing Action Alliance** pledge, which provides another coordination platform among participating partners to ensure that the fight against IUU fishing remains a priority at the international political level. The Pledge reflects the main principles of the EU policy and outlines actions that the Commission can carry out based on the IUU Regulation.

³³ https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/international/agreements_en.

c) Cooperation with stakeholders

To enhance coordination and improve implementation of the IUU Regulation across the EU, the Commission organises regular technical meetings with the **Member States** authorities. These provide a forum to exchange best practices and discuss issues encountered in the application of the catch certification scheme. The purpose of the discussions is to ensure that the CATCH system is user friendly and includes all necessary features.

The Commission has continued to cooperate with the **European Parliament**, including through regular briefings to the PECH Committee on ongoing actions to tackle IUU fishing. These exchanges help ensure accountability within the EU and are conducted “*in camera*” to maintain confidentiality regarding IUU dialogues with non-EU countries.

The Commission also continued to cooperate with non-governmental organisations (**NGOs**) to support implementation of the IUU Regulation by sharing information on cases of IUU fishing and of information relevant to the IUU dialogues. The Commission also liaises with the **Advisory Councils** established under the CFP and provides regular updates on ongoing work to develop the CATCH system and on the IUU dialogues.

3. Main challenges to implementing the IUU Regulation

a) Within the EU

One of the main challenges facing the Commission is to lay the groundwork so that the **amended IUU Regulation** can be **implemented effectively**, in particular the mandatory use of the CATCH system, scheduled to come into effect on 10 January 2026. Work to adapt CATCH to the new legal requirements has already started and should be finalised well before that date. This should leave time to train in Member State and non-EU country competent authorities, finalise user handbook, identify non-EU country authorities interested in using CATCH, and continue working on interoperability.

To ensure consistency with the new legal provisions, Commission Regulation (EC) No 1010/2009³⁴ will need to be revised. New provisions should be adopted to lay down the rules on the functioning of the CATCH system.

In addition, the Commission has already started work on **interconnecting CATCH** with the EU **Single Window Environment for Customs** which is due to be completed by 10 January 2028. Their interconnection will help further facilitate and strengthen the consistency between IUU, customs and sanitary controls of fishery products imported into the EU.

The Commission will also follow-up cases of serious shortcomings identified in the application of controls under the catch certification scheme by the Member States and will continue to actively guide them in order to achieve greater harmonisation of import controls.

Finally, on the implementation of Articles 39 and 40 of the IUU Regulation with regard to EU nationals engaging in/supporting IUU fishing, the Commission will continue working

³⁴ OJ L 280, 27.10.2009, p. 5.

with Member States to **harmonise** and **facilitate** the procedures in place to **identify** such **nationals** and **promote consistency** in possible enforcement measures across Member States.

b) Outside the EU

The main challenge to implementing the external dimension of the IUU Regulation remains garnering sufficient **political support** in partner countries to align their national rules with international obligations and implement them effectively.

Within RFMOs, the challenge facing the Commission remains reaching **consensus** on **anti-IUU measures** among contracting and cooperating-non contracting parties, particularly as regards cross-listing IUU vessels between RFMOs. The Commission has witnessed increasing **resistance** in those organisations, whose decision-making is generally based on consensus, to strengthening the control of fishing activities and improving transparency on beneficial ownership of fishing vessels.

The use of **flags of convenience** can prevent the exercise of flag State responsibilities under international law. This issue has been at the forefront of the Commission's work with non-EU countries and has become the subject of bilateral IUU dialogues with several countries. The Commission has launched a study to identify the drivers for various economic and public actors supporting open registers. The study will also analyse the effects of open registers on the EU's objectives and international rules and frameworks in key policy areas, namely fisheries, good tax governance, safety and environmental protection, social and labour conditions, as well as evasion of EU sanctions.

4. Conclusion

The IUU Regulation has continued to provide a **comprehensive and effective framework for combating IUU fishing** within the EU. It achieves this by preventing fishery products originating from IUU fishing from entering the EU market and by boosting efforts to fight IUU fishing worldwide through the IUU bilateral dialogue mechanism and within multilateral forums.

The **carding system** under the IUU Regulation has become an **internationally recognised tool** for progressing the fight against IUU fishing and attracting more political attention to this issue around the world.

The time has now come to **digitise** the catch certification scheme and exploit its potential to prevent fishery products stemming from IUU fishing entering the EU market. CATCH can become a reference point as a digital environment for catch documentation schemes and international trade flows of fishery products due to its web-based approach and considerable interoperability potential.

To deliver on our commitments under the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 and truly operate a 'zero-tolerance' approach to IUU fishing, it is in the EU's interest to promote the catch certification scheme, the carding system and the systematic cross-listing of IUU vessels between RFMOs as strong tools in the fight against IUU fishing. Alongside this, efforts are also required to close governance gaps at national and regional levels and strengthen the capacity of non-EU countries to fight IUU fishing.