

Fisheries: The EU "zero tolerance" campaign against illegal fishing gets tougher

Getting away with fishing illegally will become much more difficult for fishermen, as the EU's new system for fisheries control is now fully operational. With the adoption of detailed rules on how to carry out controls throughout the market chain "from net to plate", the EU now has the means to break with the past and establish a real culture of compliance to stop overfishing and help make EU fisheries truly sustainable. The new system ensures traceability throughout the whole chain from the time when the fish is caught until it reaches the consumer. Member states' authorities can spot wrongdoings at any point in the market chain, and trace them back to the culprit. Inspections will be done in the same way all over Europe. Data are collected and cross-checked electronically. And once the product reaches the stores, the consumer will know it has been fished legally. If someone breaks the law, they will face equally severe sanctions wherever they are and whatever their nationality. And if they are repeatedly caught fishing illegally, thanks to a new point system they will end up losing their licence.

"If we can't enforce our own rules, this undermines the credibility of the whole common fisheries policy, no matter how sound it may be. We now have a comprehensive system of control and enforcement and I expect compliance with EU fishing rules to improve from now on. We can no longer allow even a small minority of fishermen to ignore the rules, and get away with it. Apart from being unfair this also undermines conservation efforts; it disrupts markets with unfair competition; it penalises law-abiding fishermen and chokes the circle of compliance; and, most importantly, it destroys fish stocks", said Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Maria Damanaki.

The adoption of implementing rules was necessary to make the 2010 Control Regulation fully applicable. The new rules:

- Allow for control "from net to plate" by covering all stages of the supply chain; the traceability system allows inspectors to detect wrongdoings at any point in the chain.
- Provide concrete mechanisms to ensure a level playing field for fishermen, other operators and Member States. Sanctions have been harmonised and a new point system ensures that serious infringements lead to similar consequences in all Member States.
- Bring about major simplification, as all applicable rules in the field of EU fisheries control, which were previously scattered across many different instruments, are now contained in one single text.
- Generalise the use of new technologies, which on the one hand reduce administrative costs for operators and authorities and on the other make data checks much easier, thus increasing efficiency.

The new Regulation also details the mechanisms that may be used by the Commission to ensure compliance by the Member States: increased powers for verification, independent inspections and audit, administrative enquiries, suspension or withdrawal of EU funds and reduction of quotas and fishing effort, whenever the control system of a Member State appears ineffective.

To ease implementation, the Commission grants financial assistance to Member States by co-financing certain types of projects, especially the ones focussing on new technologies.

Background

Fisheries rules and control systems are agreed on at EU level, but implemented and carried out by the national authorities and inspectors of EU member states.

The implementing Regulation just adopted completes an exhaustive reform of the EU's Fisheries Control Policy which was started in 2008. The new system rests on three pillars : a Regulation against illegal fishing, which will ensure that all fishery products traded to and from the EU are in full compliance with all relevant conservation and management measures; a Regulation on fishing authorisations, which provides a framework through which EU operators can be licensed to fish outside EU waters and foreign operators to fish in EU waters; and the core Control Regulation itself, which creates an entirely new legal framework for the control and enforcement of the Common Fisheries Policy.

More information

[MEMO/11/234](#)

http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/control/index_en.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/damanaki/index_en.htm