

## One-third of US imported wild seafood comes from IUU

A new study reveals that between 20-32 per cent of wild-caught seafood imported into the United States comes from illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing. The value of these products is estimated at USD 1.3-2.1 billion annually, representing from 4 per cent to 16 per cent of the world's illegally caught seafood.

The study, which has been published online in the journal *Marine Policy*, underscores the role of the US market in fueling the global trade of illegal fish. It also stresses the need for the US government to take proactive efforts to combat it, such as the improvement of the custody chain and traceability controls, and an amendment to the US Lacey Act, among others.

“This study reinforces what the fishing industry, governments and conservationists have been saying for a long time: illegal fishing is a major global problem and threatens the long-term health of our oceans and the livelihoods they support,” stressed World Wildlife Fund (WWF) President for Marine Conservation Michele Kuruc, in a statement.

And Kuruc added that while the very nature of illegal fishing makes it difficult to quantify, this research brings new attention to the immense scope and scale of the problem.

Referring to this issue, conservation organisation Oceana points out the solution to this problem is requiring proof of legality and traceability as a condition to import into the US, ensuring that all seafood sold in the US is safe, legally caught and honestly labelled.

The organization remarks that Congress must pass the Safety and Fraud Enforcement for Seafood Act (SAFE Seafood Act), a bill that would require traceability throughout the seafood supply chain, improve inspections and provide more information to consumers at the point of purchase.

“This study unfortunately confirms what we have long suspected – that seafood from pirate fishing is getting into our markets. Illegal fishing undercuts honest fishermen and seafood businesses that play by the rules, and the U.S. should not be incentivizing pirate fishers by creating a legal market for their products,” Oceana ocean advocate Beckie Zisser stated.

According to WWF Illegal, IUU is present in all fisheries from the high seas to coastal zones. It damages ecosystems, undermines livelihoods, and is often associated with other serious problems such as drug trafficking, human slavery, organized crime and maritime security.

The global seafood supply chain is complex and often poorly regulated, enabling the origin and movements of illegal products to be concealed, making it more difficult for the fishing industry and consumers to ensure products are legally caught.

While governments, NGOs, and the fishing industry have made some progress combatting illegal fishing through government-led and voluntary programmes including Marine Stewardship Council certification, the problem is far from solved.

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