

New guidelines aim to strengthen the fight against illegal fishing

The recent approval of several Voluntary Guidelines of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) will enable countries to ensure that the fishing vessels registered under their flags do not engage in illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

FAO believes that the development of pirate fishing is one of the greatest threats to sustainable fisheries and related livelihoods. And it notes that although international guidelines are voluntary, its adoption by members of FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI) is a clear signal of the intention of the nations to adhere to a shared set of standards for the flag State's performance.

Although there are no exact figures, it is estimated that IUU fishing has intensified in the past 20 years, especially in the high seas.

Currently, it is estimated that it amounts to between 11 and 26 million tonnes of illegally caught fish each year, worth between USD 10,000 million and USD 23,000 million.

The decision after the meeting of Thursday June 11, represents a hugely important step in the fight against IUU fishing," said Arni M. Mathiesen, FAO's deputy director general and responsible for Fisheries and Aquaculture.

Illegal fishing "not only puts marine ecosystems at risk but it also undermines any efforts undertaken at national, regional or international level to manage fisheries sustainably," he stressed.

For the deputy general, these guidelines offer a "powerful tool" to combat IUU fishing in the coming decades.

A flag State is any nation that registers a fishing boat and authorizes it to fly its flag. Flag States are required to register their boats and hold information about their authorization to fish, including the species and the type of gear they can use.

But many vessels that are fishing illegally evade control measures by "re-flagging".

Therefore, the voluntary guidelines aim to:

- End illegal fishing by promoting greater cooperation and information exchange among the countries;
- Provide recommendations on how nations can promote the adoption of and compliance with measures against the failure of the ships to comply with them and their responsibilities as a flag State.

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