



Ghana gets second yellow card, risks losing EU seafood export market

The European Union has issued a second yellow card to Ghana, warning the West African country it stands to lose its access to the European seafood market unless it works more urgently to tackle the illegal fishing within its exclusive economic zone.

Ghana now has to demonstrate changes to its management practices or risk receiving a red card from the European Commission, which would result in seafood-related trade sanctions.

The E.U. is concerned that Ghana, with an estimated 448,200 metric tons of annual fishing production, has failed to tackle illegal fishing, according to a statement from European Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs, and Fisheries Virginijus Sinkevičius said.

“The Commission stands for zero tolerance for IUU fishing. Ghana plays an important role in fisheries governance in West Africa,” Sinkevičius said. “Therefore, we stand ready to work with Ghana to address the threats IUU fishing poses to the sustainability of fish stocks, coastal communities, food security, and the profits of those fishermen and -women who follow the rules. Sustainable fisheries [are] key to better ocean governance.”

Ghana was first issued with a yellow card by the E.U. in 2013, but that warning was lifted after two years when the government passed new legislation and a clear fisheries management plan. The E.U. said although Ghana promulgated well-constructed policies on illegal fishing in 2015, “they have not been implemented or enforced, allowing the situation to deteriorate and leading the European Commission to re-issue a yellow card warning.”





The country has a 536-kilometer-long coastline with a narrow continental shelf, has been plagued by illegal fishing for decades, largely attributed to Chinese companies and vessels.

The Environmental Justice Foundation, a non-governmental organization that has run a campaign publicizing IUU fishing activity in Ghana with a focus on saiko, a traditional barter system that has developed into large-scale trade between industrial trawlers operating in Ghana's waters and manned by Chinese crew and small canoes from Ghana – with the trawlers illegally transferring frozen stocks of bycatch to the canoes for sale – urged Ghana to take more drastic action.

EJF now says saiko is having “a severe impact on Ghana’s small pelagic fish populations, and sardinella is already on the brink of collapse, with landings having crashed by 80 percent over the past 20 years.”

EJF CEO and Founder Steve Trent says saiko is “precipitating a human and ecological crisis, with fish stocks on the brink of collapse and livelihoods and food security on the line.”

EJF encouraged Ghanaian Fisheries and Aquaculture Development Minister Mavis Hawa Koomson to “break with the past to enforce Ghana’s own laws and eradicate illegal fishing, while ensuring transparency across the industry that will expose illegal operators and reward those who abide by the law.”

EJF said Ghana must urgently work to eradicate illegal fishing by vessels flying its flag and operating in its waters and improve transparency of the fleet if the country is to safeguard the country’s fisheries and the livelihoods of 2.7 million Ghanaians. EJF described the lack of transparency in Ghana’s fishing





industry as “shocking,” leaving large loopholes for illegal fishers to operate with impunity within the country’s exclusive economic zone.

“The lack of transparency allows these operators to set up opaque corporate structures and work through Ghanaian ‘front’ companies to obtain licenses to fish,” EJF said.

China accounts for nearly 90 percent of the “guilty” vessels in the West African country’s industrial fishing trawling operations, according to investigations by EJF, leading to an annual loss of nearly USD 23.7 million (EUR 19.4 million) in revenue for Ghana.

Penalties imposed on illegal fishing linked to Chinese entities “do not meet Ghana’s responsibilities under international law,” according to EJF.

“Ghana’s licensing fees are also far lower than other states in the region, under the misplaced justification that they are intended for local, not foreign, vessels,” EJF said.

EJF recommended Ghana enforce immediate measures to address illegal fishing including “publishing fishing license lists and punishments for illegal fishing – where the true ‘beneficial’ owners are clear in both cases.”

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