

BRINGING FISHING VESSELS OUT OF THE SHADOWS

The urgent need for a Global Record of fishing vessels and a Unique Vessel Identifier

“International cooperation and commitment is necessary to address IUU fishing effectively. That is why we support the FAO’s move for the creation of a Global Record of fishing vessels complemented by a global Unique Vessel Identifier. This can act as a useful tool in the fight against IUU fishing.”

Maria Damanaki, European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

EJF is calling on the EU to demonstrate strong political leadership to support the establishment of a Global Record of fishing vessels, as part of its wider strategy to combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing around the world. A Global Record, underpinned by an International Maritime Organisation (IMO) number as a Unique Vessel Identifier (UVI), is a practical, feasible and cost-effective step to combat IUU fishing by driving transparency and traceability throughout the seafood supply chain.

This briefing draws on the evidence EJF has gathered through its work towards the eradication of IUU fishing in West Africa and suggests next steps based on EJF’s efforts engaging Governments, international organisations, the seafood industry and experts on IUU fishing.



IUU Fishing

Global losses due to Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) or “pirate” fishing are estimated to be between US\$10 billion and US\$23.5 billion per year. West African waters are deemed to have the highest levels of IUU fishing in the world, representing up to 37 percent of the region’s catch.¹ By depleting fish stocks, IUU fishing severely compromises the food security and livelihoods of coastal communities and is also a threat to marine biodiversity and the marine environment.

Ulia, previously known as “Lucky Ever”
unloading fish in Abidjan in 2013 © EJF



A Global Record

A Global Record would constitute an international database of industrial fishing vessels, which contains their UVI and information on their ownership, flag, history, characteristics and fishing authorisations. The IMO number is the only UVI in operation on the scale needed for fishing vessels. It is a one-off number applied to non-fishing commercial vessels (and companies), which stays with the vessel during its entire life, regardless of name, flag and ownership changes.

The problems of identifying boats

Records and registers are used as important tools for management and enforcement in many different fields. However, there is currently no universal record of fishing vessels, which are exempt from needing an IMO number. This complicates attempts to differentiate between boats, or track them when they change name, flag or ownership.

In West Africa, EJF has documented boats using multiple identities, and changing their flags, names and radio call-signs to avoid detection and sanctions. The lack of accessible information on fishing vessels or a mandated unique identification system makes it difficult for coastal States, port States and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMO) to ascertain whether vessels landing fish or applying for fishing licenses have engaged in IUU fishing. It also makes it difficult for seafood businesses and retailers to trace fish back to the catch vessel, and be assured of its legality.

More broadly, the lack of a record of fishing vessels impedes efforts to ascertain the size and capacity of each country’s fishing fleet, which is crucial information to inform effective fisheries management around the world.

Progress so far with a UN Global Record

There have been repeated calls for a Global Record of fishing vessels for a number of years. The 2001 FAO International Plan of Action on IUU fishing called on flag States to maintain records of fisheries vessels and in 2005, the Ministerially-led Task Force on IUU Fishing on the High Seas and the Rome Declaration on IUU fishing called for a “fishing vessel information scheme (FishVIS)” as a way of recording fishing vessels, supply vessels and refrigerated transport vessels.² In 2008, the FAO carried out an expert consultation on a Global Record, which was followed by a technical consultation in 2010.³ The FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) endorsed a Global Record in both 2011 and 2012, however there remains a lack of clarity about how it will come into existence.⁴

The IMO number as a Unique Vessel Identifier

There is already a UVI system for large-scale seagoing vessels. Resolution A.600 (15), adopted by the IMO in 1987, established a vessel numbering scheme for “propelled, seagoing vessels” over 100 Gross Tonnage (GT), which became mandatory in 1996. These vessels have a seven digit IMO number, which stays with the vessel during its lifetime, regardless of name, ownership or flag changes. IHS Fairplay (IHS-F) manages the issuance of IMO numbers, and an accompanying database which contains key information about the vessel.⁵

Crucially, A.600 (15) exempts vessels “used exclusively for fishing” from the scheme, meaning that they are not required to have a UVI.⁶ Despite this, some flag States and vessel owners have promoted the IMO number for fisheries vessels, and IHS-F has voluntarily issued IMO numbers to fishing vessels over 100 GT that have requested them. It is estimated that 26,000 fishing vessels around the world have an IMO number.⁷ However, this is less than 15 percent of the estimated 185,600 fishing vessels over 100 GT or 24m.⁸

Some groups have been proactive and created their own UVI requirements and records. For example, the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) has required its members to only purchase seafood from vessels that have IMO numbers. Additionally, ISSF has created a proactive vessel register as a way for vessel owners to identify themselves as active participants in sustainability efforts. In terms of vessel tracking, this register includes fields such as vessel name, gear, flag, IMO numbers, and RFMO.⁹ While this proactive example is encouraging, there is a need to ensure that all fishing vessels over 100 GT follow suit and that information is recorded in one place that can be easily searched by interested stakeholders.

EJF is calling for A.600 (15) to be amended by IMO Member States, so that all fisheries vessels over 100 GT are required to have an IMO number. At the same time, EJF is calling for a Global Record database that will include important information about each vessel (over 100 GT) such as its IMO number, name, beneficial ownership, flag, and fishing authorisations. This database will then provide a crucial tool for coastal States, port States, flag States, Regional Fisheries Management Organisations and other agencies in combatting IUU fishing and sustainably managing fisheries.

A small price to pay

Adopting IMO numbers as the mandatory system for vessel identification is a cost effective method of providing a foundation to any record of fishing vessels. This is a vital step toward an effective vessel database. The cost of a Global Record of fishing vessels is estimated at less than US\$5 million per year. This is inexpensive when compared to the adverse economic, environmental, maritime security and social impacts of IUU fishing.

EJF's work alongside coastal communities in West Africa has revealed the compelling need for a Global Record and UVI.

CASE STUDY 1: 'Fugitive' Kummyeong 2

On 7th December 2011, EJF documented a vessel trawling one mile from the shore in waters less than 10 metres deep. The vessel was operating over seven miles inside the Inshore Exclusion Zone (IEZ) and is believed to have destroyed the fishing equipment of a number of local fishers. EJF subsequently identified the vessel as Kummyeong 2, a Korean-flagged vessel with accreditation to export its catch to the EU. After EJF sent an IUU Alert to the Sierra Leone Government, authorities ordered the vessel to port in order to investigate its activities. However, instead of coming to port, the vessel fled the country, leaving its Sierra Leone crew and fisheries observer stranded in Guinea.

EJF travelled to Guinea in March 2012 and identified Kummyeong 2 anchored at sea, one mile from the port of Conakry. The vessel had erased its name and painted a new name, "Conosu", on its hull. It had also changed its call sign. Subsequently, EJF has received reports of the newly-named Conosu operating inside the IEZ in Guinea, and it is believed the vessel is responsible for further destruction of the fishing nets of artisanal fishers in inshore areas. Kummyeong 2 possesses an IMO number, but it was not marked on its hull, and none of the authorities that came into contact with the boat or its fisheries products, are believed to have requested it or used it to ascertain the vessel's true identity.

CASE STUDY 2: The indeterminable identity of Lian Run

In December 2012, a fishing vessel claiming to be Lian Run 32 was arrested by a patrol boat in Sierra Leonean waters. When the Sierra Leone enforcement team went onboard, they noticed that the name and call sign had been "hurriedly and freshly written."¹⁰ The vessel did not have an IMO number.

On board, there were boxes marked Lian Run 22 and Lian Run 23, which suggests that the Lian Run 32 was transshipping fish under the identity of these vessels to take advantage of the

fishing licenses that they held. Meanwhile, another vessel, also claiming to be Lian Run 32, had presented itself in port in Freetown a few days earlier and requested a fishing license. After detailed questioning, the captain of the vessel admitted to falsifying the identity of the vessel, explaining that he had been instructed to do so by the company that owned the boat so that they could make use of another vessel's fishing license.

CASE STUDY 3: The 'Lucky' boats

Lucky Ever and Lucky 101 are two reefers owned by the Korean company Lucky Trading Co. based in Las Palmas in Spain.

In 2006, EJF documented Binar 4, a Panama-flagged reefer transshipping illegally at sea off the Guinean EEZ. Binar 4 is the former name of Lucky 101, which adopted the latter name in 2009, while also changing its flag to Sierra Leone. Following desk-based research, EJF was able to identify that the Sierra Leone-flagged Lucky 101 was supporting the activities of vessels with outstanding offences in Sierra Leone by collecting their catch at sea and transporting it to ports where it could be sold. For example, EJF discovered that in January 2012, Lucky 101 received fish from Five Star, a vessel considered a "fugitive" by Sierra Leonean authorities after it breached Sierra Leone's fisheries laws. Since this incident, Lucky 101 has been sighted by an EJF member of staff in Abidjan in November 2012, operating under a Guinean flag.

Its sister vessel, Lucky Ever has been sighted in Sierra Leonean waters by the maritime authorities on a number of occasions and is believed to have carried out unauthorised transshipments. It operated under a Sierra Leone flag, however local authorities had no knowledge of it because its flag was issued by the Sierra Leone International Ship Registry (SLISR) based in Singapore.¹¹ This vessel was sighted in Abidjan in February 2013, operating under the Guinean flag, with the name Ulia. Using the IMO number written on its hull EJF was able to identify the vessel as Lucky Ever, demonstrating how UVI can be used to track the true identity and history of boats.

Kummyeong 2

Sierra Leone, 2011



Conosu

Conakry, 2012



EJF makes the following recommendations to ensure the establishment of a Global Record and implementation of the IMO number as a UVI

- The EU should require EU vessels over 100 GT, as well as those exporting or transporting fish to the EU, to have a UVI. The EU should take a global lead in promoting the Global Record and recommending viable funding mechanisms.
- IMO Member States should amend Resolution A.600 (15) to require fishing vessels over 100 GT to have an IMO number.
- A Global Record should be established that includes important information about each fishing vessel (over 100 GT) such as its IMO number, name, beneficial ownership, flag, and fishing authorisations.
- RFMOs should make an IMO number a requirement for a vessel to be placed on an authorised vessel list and allowed to operate in the RFMO convention area. Authorised vessel lists should be made available to IHS Fairplay and a Global Record.
- Seafood companies and retailers should request that fishing vessels supplying product to their supply chains possess IMO numbers, and proactively support the development of a Global Record. Once in place, seafood companies should also request IMO numbers from their suppliers for products at high risk of being from IUU sources, and check those IMO numbers against flag State fishing authorisations and blacklists to provide further assurance that the product was not illegally harvested. Suppliers should assist IHS Fairplay with data exchanges to ensure accuracy.



Crew member painting "Lian Run 14" name on the hull of a vessel, Las Palmas 2009
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- 1 Agnew DJ, Pearce J, Pramod G, Peatman T, Watson R, et al. (2009) Estimating the Worldwide Extent of Illegal Fishing. PLoS ONE 4(2): e4570. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0004570
- 2 Lugten G (2008) The FAO Global Record of Fishing Vessels, Refrigerated Vessels and Fishing Support Vessels. International Journal of Marine and Coastal Law 23. pp761–767
- 3 FAO, Mandate Global Record, accessed on 18/02/2013: <http://www.fao.org/fishery/topic/18066/en>
- 4 Report of the Thirtieth Session of the Committee on Fisheries, Rome, 9–13 July 2012. <http://www.fao.org/cofi/28868-08d89e67cab4794708d710de7bc4428cc.pdf>
- 5 IMO, IMO identification number scheme, accessed on 16/02/2013: <http://www.imo.org/ourwork/safety/implementation/pages/imo-identification-number-scheme.aspx>
- 6 IMO Resolution A.600 (15). Adopted on 19/11/1987
- 7 FAO, Unique Vessel Identified (UVI)- Global Record, accessed on 18/2/2013: <http://www.fao.org/fishery/topic/18021/en> accessed on 22/02/2013
- 8 FAO (2010). Technical consultation to identify a structure and strategy for the development and implementation of the Global Record of fishing vessels, refrigerated transport vessels and supply vessels <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/019/k8959e.pdf>
- 9 ISSF, Unique Vessel Tracking Numbers Part of Doing Business, accessed on 18/2/2013: <http://issf-foundation.org/2013/01/22/unique-vessel-tracking-numbers-now-tuna-industry-standard/> accessed on 22/02/2013
- 10 From the arrest report produced by the Sierra Leone Joint Maritime Committee boarding team
- 11 The SLISR was ordered to cease flagging foreign fishing vessels through a Sierra Leone cabinet decision in 2011

EJF's **SAVE THE SEA CAMPAIGN** HAS BEEN GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED BY:



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