

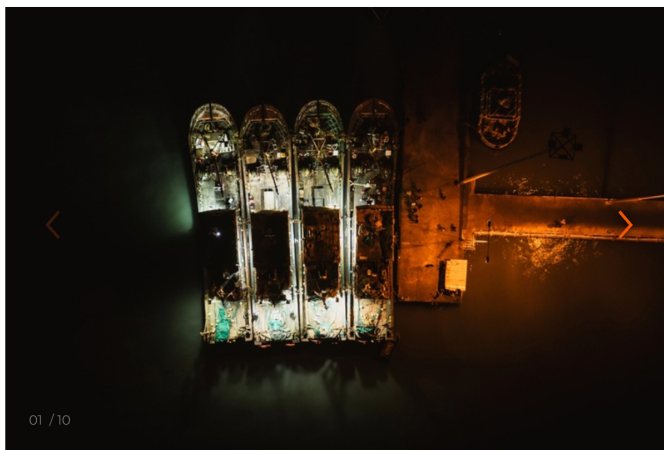
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News

Major Victory Against Illegal Fishing: The Gambia Navy Detains Eight Trawlers

Monday, 25 Mar, 2024

In a decisive strike against illegal fishing, The Gambia Navy, supported by Sea Shepherd's vessel *Age of Union*, apprehended eight industrial trawlers off the coast of The Gambia for severe violations of fisheries laws.



Four arrested trawlers in the Port of Banjul. Photo by Sea Shepherd Global.

On the 8th of March, armed maritime interdiction units with The Gambia Navy were deployed from the Sea Shepherd ship *Age of Union* in a law enforcement sweep that netted eight industrial trawlers for serious fisheries offenses ranging from fishing inside of protected waters, fishing without a valid license, using undersized mesh size and misreporting catch.

The series of arrests occurred over a 24-hour period, as Gambia Navy sailors launched a coordinated sting operation based on weeks of intelligence gathering by the [Ministry of Defense in the West African country of The Gambia](#).

Fishing vessels *Majilac 03*, *Majilac 05*, *Majilac 06*, *Majilac 07*, *Zherui 100612*, *Hao Yun 1*, *Hao Yun 2* and *Hai Hao 2* were all caught in the bust and are presently detained in the Port of Banjul.

Seven of the eight vessels were arrested for fishing inside of a Special Management Area reserved for artisanal fishermen, and where industrial fishing is outlawed. Four of the vessels were using fishing nets with undersized mesh size.

“The Gambia implements mesh size requirements to ensure that undersized and juvenile fish can escape, thereby conserving fish populations to mitigate overfishing. But at-sea patrols are needed to ensure compliance as well as deterring industrial trawlers from entering protected areas.”

Sergio Carlos, captain of Age of Union.

The waters of The Gambia are particularly rich in biodiversity as the country is positioned where the nutrient-rich Gambia River meets the Canary Current. The livelihoods of over 300,000 Gambians are directly or indirectly dependent on local fisheries while the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UN FAO) believes that more than 46% of the assessed fish populations in the Eastern Central Atlantic are experiencing overfishing.

Sardinella and other small pelagic species are of critical importance to Gambians which is why the government instituted a twelve-nautical mile Special Management Area to conserve waters frequented by artisanal fishermen. However, industrialized trawlers routinely come close to the shoreline where small-scale fishers regularly see the fishing lights from beach communities. The Ministry of Defense often receives reports from artisanal fishermen about trawlers fishing in no-go zones. Populations of sardinella are also rapidly declining due to these daily incursions as industrialized trawlers take far more fish than fishers in paddle canoes can.

None of the arrested vessels were transmitting their position using their automatic identification system, a mandatory transponder that allows law enforcement to track vessel movements.

“Sea Shepherd commends the actions of The Gambian government in taking strong action against industrial trawlers that circumvent laws, fishing in protected areas and jeopardizing the livelihoods of local communities. Since the arrests, our captain and crew are reporting that all other industrialized trawlers are keeping outside of the Special Management Area, where The Gambia Navy continues to stand watch from Age of Union.”

Peter Hammarstedt, Sea Shepherd's Director of Campaigns.



Artisanal fishing canoes in The Gambia. Photo by Sea Shepherd Global.

Operation Gambian Coastal Defense is a unique partnership with the government of The Gambia that started in 2019 to conduct joint at sea patrols to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Since 2016, Sea Shepherd has worked in partnership with the governments of Gabon, Liberia, Sierra Leone, São Tomé and Príncipe, Tanzania, Benin, Namibia and The Gambia to combat IUU fishing by providing the use of civilian offshore patrol vessels to African coastal and island States so that authorities can enforce fisheries regulations and conservation laws in their sovereign waters. To date, the unique partnerships have resulted in the arrest of 96 vessels for illegal fishing and other fisheries crimes.

Scroll down to watch the arrest video!



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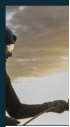
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