



News

Three Trawlers Arrested as Sea Shepherd and The Gambia Renew Joint Fight Against Illegal Fishing

Monday, 28 Aug, 2023

Three industrialized trawlers have been arrested by an armed detachment of law enforcement agents stationed on board the Sea Shepherd Global vessel *Age of Union* as part of a joint mission named Operation Gambian Coastal Defense, after the Ministry of Defence in the West African country of The Gambia received intelligence that the vessels had been fishing illegally in protected waters.



The trawlers—*Abo Islam*, *Sabrin* and *FK-005*—are currently detained in the port of Banjul.

The Ministry of Defense routinely receives reports of industrialized trawlers fishing in no-go zones reserved for the over 300,000 Gambians who depend on artisanal and small-scale fisheries for their livelihoods.

A renewed 5-year partnership with Sea Shepherd Global—after previous collaboration netted 22 trawlers from 2019 to 2020, and of which 14 were intercepted in prohibited areas—allowed the Ministry of Defence through The Gambia Navy to act on information that local fishers were able to see the fishing lights of trawlers from beach communities.

Industrialized trawlers take far more fish than fishers in paddle canoes can. So, to protect local communities, the government of The Gambia instituted a 9-nautical mile inshore exclusion zone that prohibits industrialized fishing, waters referred to as the Special

Management Area.

But with the economic resources of the government of The Gambia stretched, and without a permanent naval patrolling presence, the trawlers routinely cross the invisible line that separates industry from subsistence.

None of the three arrested trawlers were maintaining proper fishing log books, common practice by operators who wish to obscure both their historical tracks and data on how much fish is being taken. Neither were they transmitting their position on an automatic identification system (AIS), a mandatory transponder that shares location data with law enforcement.

Three years ago, one arrested trawler was charged with fifty-six counts of fishing in the Special Management Area. The captain was so audacious that he'd marked each position of illegal fishing in the ship's official logbook.

Another fishing vessel had hidden fifty-four shark fins on board.

Since the arrests, all other industrialized trawlers are keeping outside of the Special Management Area.

It is a role of the Ministry of Defence to secure the maritime domain including combatting illegal fishing and deterring fisheries crimes.

"It's been three years since Sea Shepherd was in The Gambia and the industrialized trawlers are back to fishing right up to the beaches along the narrow coastline of the smallest country on the African continent. Sea Shepherd is proud to support the strong action being taken by the Ministry of Defense to protect the mouth of The River Gambia, a critical spawning ground for fish in waters that up until recent years have been abundant."

Peter Hammarstedt, Sea Shepherd Global's Director of Campaigns



Catch on board arrested trawler. Photo by Mael Chausseblanche/ 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 86 vessels for illegal fishing and other fisheries crimes.

Learn more about Sea Shepherd Global's campaign fighting IUU fishing in Africa: <https://www.seashepherdglobal.org/our-campaigns/iuu-fishing/>



OPERATION GAMBIAN COASTAL DEFENSE

THREE TRAWLERS **BUSTED** IN GAMBIAN WATERS



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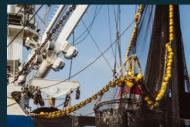
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