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EU acts on illegal fishing: Yellow card issued to Thailand while South Korea & Philippines are cleared

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The Commission has today put Thailand on formal notice that it is not taking sufficient measures in the international fight against illegal fishing.

The European Commission has today put Thailand on formal notice for not taking sufficient measures in the international fight against illegal fishing (IUU).

As a result of a thorough analysis and a series of discussions with Thai authorities since 2011, the Commission has denounced the country's shortcomings in its fisheries monitoring, control and sanctioning systems and concludes that Thailand is not doing enough.

European Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, **Karmenu Vella**, stated: *"Our EU rigorous policy on a harmful practice such as illegal fishing, together with our genuine capacity to act, is paying off. I urge Thailand to join the European Union in the fight for sustainable fisheries Failure to take strong action against illegal fishing will carry consequences."*

Today's Decision starts a formal procedure of dialogue with the Thai authorities to make them take the necessary corrective measures. They will be given six months to implement a corrective tailor-made action plan.

Should the situation not improve, the EU could resort to banning fisheries imports from Thailand. Such measure was taken in the past with Belize, Guinea, Cambodia and Sri Lanka. Imports from Belize were banned last year but due to the reforming efforts of the authorities they are now allowed.

On a more positive note, the European Commission acknowledges today that two fishing nations, Korea and the Philippines, have carried out appropriate reforms of their legal systems and are now equipped to tackle illegal fishing. It therefore stops the "identification" procedure that had started with a yellow card to Korea in November 2013 and the Philippines in June 2014.

Commissioner Vella noted that: "By using our market weight the EU is getting important players on board. Both Korea and the Philippines have taken responsible action, amended their legal systems and switched to a proactive approach against illegal fishing".

Since they were issued with warnings, both Korea and the Philippines embarked on a series of reforms to upgrade their fisheries governance. Their legal systems are now aligned to international law.

As a result of the action taken by Korea and the Philippines, the Commission has stopped formal discussions with the countries' authorities and looks forward to Korea and the Philippines becoming valuable allies on sustainable management within global and regional organisations.

Background

Between 11 and 26 million tonnes of fish, i.e. at least 15% of world catches, are caught illegally every year. This is worth between 8 and 19 billion euros. As the world's biggest fish importer, the EU does not wish to be complicit and accept such products into its market. The so-called 'IUU Regulation', which entered into force in 2010^[1], allows access onto the EU market only to fisheries products that have been certified as legal by the flag State concerned. When flag States are unable to certify their products, the Commission starts a process of cooperation and assistance with them to help improve their legal frameworks. The milestones of this process are the warnings (yellow cards), the green cards if issues are solved and the red cards if they aren't – *the latter leading to a trade ban*.

Like Korea and the Philippines, in October 2014 also Fiji, Panama, Togo and Vanuatu got a green card, as they had solved the issues identified by the Commission. Formal dialogue is still ongoing with Ghana and Curaçao, which received formal warnings in November 2013; Papua New Guinea, warned in June 2014; and Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, warned in December 2014. Most of these countries are now cooperating constructively with the Commission, making significant progress in their fisheries management systems in order to curb illegal fishing.

By contrast, fisheries products caught by vessels from Sri Lanka, Guinea and Cambodia are banned from being imported into the EU. Belize was withdrawn from the black list in December 2014, after it adopted lasting measures to address the shortcomings of its fisheries systems.

The fight against illegal fishing is part of the EU's forceful drive to ensure sustainable ocean governance and to project globally the principle of sustainability, enshrined in the Common Fisheries Policy.

More information

MEMO/15/4807

http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/illegal_fishing/index_en.htm

[1] Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008 establishing a Community system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

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