

Commission warns Vietnam over insufficient action to fight illegal fishing

Today's decision highlights that Vietnam is not doing enough to fight illegal fishing. It identifies shortcomings, such as the lack of an effective sanctioning system to deter IUU fishing activities and a lack of action to address illegal fishing activities conducted by Vietnamese vessels in waters of neighbouring countries, including Pacific Small Island Developing States. Furthermore, Vietnam has a poor system to control landings of fish that is processed locally before being exported to international markets, including the EU.

Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Karmenu **Vella**, said: *"With this action today we demonstrate our firm commitment to fight illegal fishing globally. We cannot ignore the impact that illegal activities conducted by Vietnamese vessels are having on marine ecosystems in the Pacific. We invite the Vietnamese authorities to step up their fight so we can reverse this decision quickly. We are offering them our technical support."*

The decision does not, at this stage, entail any measures affecting trade. The "yellow card" is considered as a warning and offers the possibility for Vietnam to take measures to rectify the situation within a reasonable timeframe. To this end the Commission has proposed an action plan to support the country in addressing the identified shortcomings.

The Commission decision is a result of a thorough analysis and takes into due account the level of development of the country. It follows a long period of informal discussions with Vietnamese authorities since 2012. Vietnamese authorities are now invited to engage in a formal procedure of dialogue to resolve the identified issues and implement the Action plan.

Background

Between 11 and 26 million tonnes of fish, i.e. at least 15% of world catches, are caught illegally a 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, is the key instrument in the fight against illegal fishing ensuring that only those fishery products that have been certified as legal can access the EU market. With this objective, the Commission maintains bilateral dialogues with more than 50 third countries. When third States are unable to comply with their international obligations as flag, coastal, port and market States, the Commission formalises this process of cooperation and assistance with them to help improve their legal and administrative frameworks to fight against IUU fishing. The steps in this process are first a warning ("yellow card"), a "green card" if issues are

solved or a “red card” if they aren’t. The latter leads to a listing by the Council, followed by a series of measures for the third country, including a trade ban on fishery products.

Since November 2012 the Commission has been in formal dialogues with several third countries (pre-identification or “yellow card”) that have been warned of the need to take strong action to fight IUU fishing. When significant progress is observed, the Commission can end the dialogue (lifting the pre-identification status or “green card”). A few countries have not shown the necessary commitment to reforms. As a result, fisheries products caught by vessels from these countries cannot be imported into the EU (identification and listing or “red card”). A full list of countries is available [here](#).

Fighting illegal fishing is part of the EU’s commitment to ensure the sustainable use of the sea and its resources as set out in its [International Ocean Governance Agenda](#). Sustainable fisheries and the fight against IUU were also one of the main topics discussed at the 4th international Our Ocean conference hosted by the European Union in Malta, 5-6 October 2017.