

# EU FISHERIES CONTROL COALITION

ClientEarth®



FISHSEC  
THE FISHERIES SECRETARIAT

The Nature  
Conservancy

OCEANA

Our Fish

SCIAENA

SEAS AT RISK



## The EU must urgently halt illegal and unreported fishing by strengthening its Fisheries Control law

***Illegal and unreported fishing is not something that happens far away. Not respecting EU fisheries rules puts our ocean and our efforts to recover biodiversity at risk. The EU and its Member States must fulfil their commitment to end illegal fishing by adopting a strong Fisheries Control Regulation.***

Fishing vessels have been spotted fishing in EU marine protected areas. European fishers continue to throw tons of unwanted dead fish back to the sea, jeopardising sustainability and scientific estimates of fish populations. And, due to the lack of monitoring data and appropriate bycatch mitigation measures, hundreds of thousands of dolphins, seabirds and other protected species are dying in fishing nets in EU waters every year, seriously putting these species at risk.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. But the public will never know the extent of illegal and unsustainable fishing because Member States have the power to veto the publication of their data and they are not required to annually publish any information on their fisheries control efforts. In addition, a lot of fisheries data is currently collected through paper-based systems, which are sometimes unreliable and not required for all EU vessels. These examples show the extent to which the current Fisheries Control Regulation is not fit for purpose.

As a result, the Regulation does not currently fulfil its mission: ensuring the respect of fisheries rules, securing the long-term well-being of coastal communities, preventing bycatch during fishing operations and protecting marine biodiversity from illegal or unsustainable fishing operations. It also does not ensure fair treatment of fishers and, crucially, it risks undermining EU biodiversity action.

Lasting solutions to adapt to and mitigate climate change require a healthy and resilient ocean - and sustainable fish stocks are critical parts of that ecosystem. To protect our ocean and deliver on the European Green Deal, the EU committed itself to a zero-tolerance approach to illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

We therefore take this opportunity to publicly call on EU decision makers to adopt an ambitious reform of the EU Fisheries Control Regulation. By embracing digital tools, the EU and its Member States will ensure the most accurate reporting of catches and bycatch, while being more transparent about their activities, and promoting fairness among fishers.

“Europe must lead the way on international ocean governance”, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, told the Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, Virginijus Sinkevičius in her Mission Letter to him. President von der Leyen also reminded Commissioner Sinkevičius that “effective control and enforcement [of fisheries] (...) will remain top priorities”. The EU must now respect this pledge, and the current revision of the Fisheries Control Regulation - the set of rules which governs fisheries surveillance and enforcement in the EU - is an unmissable opportunity to act. Its outcome will shape the future of the fisheries sector and the seafood on our plates for the next 10 years.

## Our recommendations for the revision of the Fisheries Control Regulation

It is crucial to **report all catches**, without weakening the so-called “margin of tolerance” which allows vessels to underestimate large volumes of what has been caught. Means for effective fisheries control already exist and better management decisions can be adopted to ensure accurate catch reporting. To legalise misreporting of catches would be a major driver of biodiversity loss.

**Introducing reporting and tracking systems in all EU vessels** is key. The fact that 75% of the EU fleet (more than 49,000 vessels) are still not equipped with such systems jeopardises the safety of small-scale fishers, and it deprives fisheries management decisions from important data on the majority of the EU fleet.

Using **Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM)**, including privacy-friendly cameras, aboard fishing vessels is the only effective way to stop illegal discarding. It is essential to know exactly what is being harvested from our seas to keep catches within sustainable limits, and to ensure no sensitive species get caught in fishing nets. We need REM on all vessels above 12m and a percentage of those below 12m, to include those deemed at risk of non-compliance with EU fisheries rules.

**The traceability system should also be fully digitalised for all seafood products**, regardless of whether they are EU-caught or imported, fresh or processed, wild capture or aquaculture, to ensure that seafood is traceable from net to plate. The EU is the world’s largest seafood market, importing over 60% of its seafood. It therefore has a responsibility to strengthen its ability to verify that the sources of seafood available in its market are both legal and sustainable.

Finally, we need a fairer and more transparent sanctioning system. This means fishers and fishing operators who violate the rules will face an **EU sanctions regime that is efficient, standardised and equal for all**, and that **key information on control efforts (e.g. number of inspections and sanctions given) are published annually**.

