

Brussels, 31 December 2009

Fisheries: Entry into force of new system to better control fisheries and fight against illegal fishing

On 1 January 2010, a set of new, strong rules will enter into force to bolster the control system of the European Union's Common Fisheries Policy. These rules will give the EU and its Member States new and powerful tools not only to protect the resources of our seas and oceans from unscrupulous operators, but also to protect the livelihoods of honest fishermen who would otherwise be exposed to unfair competition. With no preferential treatment from one country to another and no real temptation to cheat, because offenders will not be allowed to get away scot-free, the new system will enable fishermen to ply their trade under the same conditions, thus promoting a culture of compliance throughout the fisheries sector.

The new framework comprises three separate, yet interlinked Regulations: A Regulation to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU Regulation)¹, a Regulation on fishing authorisations for the EU fleet operating outside EU waters², and a Regulation establishing a control system for ensuring compliance with the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy (Control Regulation)³.

Welcoming the entry into force of the new rules, European Commissioner for Fisheries Joe Borg said: "There was a time when an unprincipled minority of fishermen found that they could persistently bend the rules – or just break them outright – and get away with it. This new fisheries control framework puts a stop to that".

The effectiveness of any policy depends to a large extent on the way it is enforced. In the case of the Common Fisheries Policy, the enforcement system has so far been inefficient, expensive, complex, and ineffectual.

¹ Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008 of 29 September 2008 establishing a Community system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing

² Council Regulation (EC) No 1006/2008 of 29 September 2008 concerning fishing authorisations for fishing activities of Community fishing vessels outside Community waters and the access of third country vessels to Community waters, amending Regulations (EEC) No 2847/93 and (EC) No 1627/94 and repealing Regulation (EC) No 3317/9

³ Council Regulation establishing a Community control system for ensuring compliance with the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy, amending Regulations (EC) No 847/96, (EC) No 2371/2002, (EC) No 811/2004, (EC) No 768/2005, (EC) No 2115/2005, (EC) No 2166/2005, (EC) No 388/2006, (EC) No 509/2007, (EC) No 676/2007, (EC) No 1098/2007, (EC) No 1300/2008, (EC) No 1342/2008 and repealing Regulations (EEC) No 2847/93, (EC) No 1627/94 and (EC) No 1966/2006

At the same time, illegal fishing practices are worth approximately 10 billion euros a year globally, making IUU fishing the second largest source of fishery products in the world. The EU is an attractive market for IUU operators, where demand for upscale products is high and IUU catches can be easily laundered, for example through processing, because of a conspicuous lack of mechanisms to track products and identify fishing vessels.

To respond to these challenges, the Commission proposed, in 2007/2008, to totally overhaul the control system in EU fisheries and introduce rules to curb IUU fishing worldwide.

Fight against Illegal Fishing

The new IUU Regulation will put a stop to products from illicit activities entering the EU market, because all marine fishery products traded with the EU will be certified and their origin will be traceable. A comprehensive catch certification scheme will make sure that the fish caught, landed, brought to market and sold can be tracked at any stage of the process – from net to plate.

To effectively combat infringements, the Regulation also introduces a harmonised system of proportionate and deterrent sanctions. Moreover, the accountability of EU nationals has been extended so that they may be prosecuted at home, regardless of where they operate around the world.

In October, the Commission laid down detailed implementing rules⁴ that should make it easier for the parties to move to the new system. Since 2008 the Commission has been holding seminars and information sessions to help non-EU countries adapt to the new requirements.

Responsible Fishing outside the EU

The fishing authorisations Regulation, in force since October 2008, establishes a single, coherent framework for EU vessels fishing outside EU waters under fisheries partnership agreements, conventions signed within Regional Fisheries Organisations or private agreements with third countries. With this, the EU is setting a good example of sound management at international level and showing that it is serious about protecting seas and oceans throughout the world.

⁴ COMMISSION REGULATION (EC) No 1010/2009 of 22 October 2009 laying down detailed rules for the implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008 establishing a Community system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing

Stronger, more efficient fisheries controls

The new Control Regulation backs up the traceability system introduced by the IUU regulation and uses modern technologies to track fisheries products through every step of the market chain. This simpler, fairer, more effective and less costly control system will ultimately benefit all concerned, from government administrations to operators and consumers.

Hitherto, punishment for breaking the rules differed from one country to the next, leaving the fisheries sector devoid of a level playing field and allowing operators to take advantage of different penalty systems. But from now the same offence will be subject to the same sanction, wherever it takes place and whatever the fisherman's nationality or flag. Moreover, the new Regulation introduces a point system for serious infringements which can ultimately result in wrongdoers losing their licence to fish.

More information:

http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/external_relations/illegal_fishing_en.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/control_enforcement/reform_control_en.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/external_relations_en.htm

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