Oceana report: EU vessels unlawfully fishing in African waters

A new report released by Oceana highlights unlawful fishing* activities authorised by European countries between April 2012 and August 2015 in the waters of The Gambia and Equatorial Guinea. Based on data from Global Fishing Watch, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, in contravention of EU law, awarded private fishing authorisations, granting individual vessels access to these waters.



EvgeniT via pixabay

“Oceana’s findings show that even vessels from countries with strong legal frameworks, such as those within the EU, can engage in unlawful practices. We are happy that the EU has just passed a new regulation that will help ensure the transparency of all fishing activities outside EU waters, and which calls for the rest of the world’s flag states to follow suit, and to pass laws and control measures to ensure that the fishing activities of their fleet are sustainable and transparent,” said María José Cornax, senior policy and advocacy director at Oceana in Europe.

EU countries cannot legally issue permits for their vessels to fish in the waters of nations with dormant fishing agreements, for example with The Gambia and Equatorial Guinea. With the help of Global Fishing Watch, Oceana found that:

19 EU-flagged vessels fished unlawfully for more than 31,000 hours between April 2012 and August 2015, which included:

• 18 EU-flagged vessels from Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain fishing in the waters of The Gambia for 31,706 hours.

• 1 EU-flagged vessel from Spain fishing in the waters of Equatorial Guinea for 170 hours.

“With the help of technologies like Global Fishing Watch, we can now see what’s happening beyond the horizon,” said Beth Lowell, senior campaign director for illegal fishing and seafood fraud at Oceana. “Countries can also play their part in increasing transparency at sea by requiring vessel tracking for all fishing vessels and making all fishing agreements public.”

Governing distant water fleet fishes

EU vessels fishing on the high seas or in foreign waters contribute 28 percent of the total EU catch. It is estimated that EU Member States have awarded more than 23,000 fishing vessel authorisations to fish outside EU waters since 2008.

The EU’s distant water fleet fishes around the world. Distant water fishing under official EU access agreements (termed Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements) often occurs in developing countries’ waters, including those on the west and east African coasts.

In June 2017, the EU agreed on a new regulation governing the activities of the EU’s fishing fleet outside of its waters. The reformed law requires equal oversight of fishing vessels, regardless of where they operate or under what type of agreement. When fully implemented, the new law will significantly improve the oversight of the EU’s external fishing fleet and ensure the continued leadership of the EU in matters of global fisheries governance.

**Any and all references to “fishing” should be understood in the context of Global Fishing Watch’s fishing detection algorithm, which is a best effort to determine “apparent fishing effort” based on vessel speed and direction data from the Automatic Identification System (AIS) collected via satellites and terrestrial receivers. As AIS data varies in completeness, accuracy, and quality, it is possible that some fishing effort is not identified and conversely, that some fishing effort identified is not fishing. For these reasons, Global Fishing Watch qualifies all designations of vessel fishing effort, including synonyms of the term “fishing effort,” such as “fishing” or “fishing activity,” as “apparent,” rather than certain. Any/all Global Fishing Watch information about “apparent fishing effort” should be considered an estimate and must be relied upon solely at your own risk. Global Fishing Watch is taking steps to make sure fishing effort designations are as accurate as possible.*

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