12th International Forum on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing

Event dates: 18–22 May 2020
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>artificial intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIS</td>
<td>automatic identification system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APEC</td>
<td>Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWFishNet</td>
<td>African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFI</td>
<td>Fauna &amp; Flora International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMO</td>
<td>International Maritime Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IUU</td>
<td>illegal, unreported and unregulated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>non-governmental organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSMA</td>
<td>Port State Measures Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFMO</td>
<td>regional fisheries-management organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEAFDEC</td>
<td>Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMART</td>
<td>spatial monitoring reporting tool(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNC</td>
<td>The Nature Conservancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNODC</td>
<td>UN Office on Drugs and Crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VMS</td>
<td>vessel monitoring system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWF</td>
<td>World Wide Fund for Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

The Chatham House 12th International Forum on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing took place over the week of 18–22 May 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it took the form of a series of daily webinars. The digital conference, which comprised six sessions and three keynote speeches, brought together more than 750 representatives of international organizations, governments, civil society organizations, businesses and academia – from 87 different countries – to discuss the latest initiatives, regulations and research in the areas of fisheries governance and trade in illegal fish products.

Day 1

The conference was opened by Professor Tim Benton, Research Director of Emerging Risks and Director of the Energy, Environment and Resources Programme at Chatham House. His introduction was followed by a keynote speech by the UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Ocean, Ambassador Peter Thomson, and a session on international cooperation.

Keynote speech by Peter Thomson

Ambassador Thomson highlighted that enhancing transparency, improving compliance with international agreements, and promoting cooperation are key next steps in the fight against IUU fishing. He also commented on progress made in implementing the targets of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 that relate to IUU fishing. In this context, Thomson emphasized that he believes SDG 14.6 may be achieved this year, and he specifically called for new disciplines on fisheries subsidies to be adopted at the meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO)’s General Council scheduled for December 2020.

Session 1: International cooperation to end IUU fishing

The first session of the forum, which was chaired by Peter Horn (The Pew Charitable Trusts), focused on the role of international cooperation in addressing IUU fishing. Dr Matthew Camilleri (UN Food and Agriculture Organization – FAO) initiated the discussion. He highlighted that international agreements and instruments constitute the foundation of international cooperation to address IUU fishing, but that other types of international cooperation are important too. The Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA), which entered into force in 2016 and specifically targets IUU fishing, now has 66 signatories (65 countries and the European Union - EU). Camilleri commented that enhancing information exchange constitutes an important next step when it comes to furthering the implementation of this agreement.

Camilleri, and several of the other speakers, underlined that political will to implement and adhere to international agreements and standards is key. Camilleri also stressed that implementation efforts must be supported by effective enforcement procedures and, for many countries, capacity-development interventions. Moreover, there is a need to strengthen information-sharing networks, to improve coordination between relevant agencies, and to develop international standards related to transhipment. Finally, Camilleri reflected on how international partnerships can be strengthened. In this

---

1 SDG 14.4: ‘By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics’; SDG 14.6: ‘By 2020, prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the World Trade Organization fisheries subsidies negotiation’.

2 Cooperation at regional, subregional and bilateral level; information exchange and transparency; capacity development; joint enforcement schemes; cooperation in taking action; and cooperation in trade.
context, he called for more joint programmes between relevant international organizations; a strengthened role for regional fisheries-management organizations (RFMOs) when it comes to implementing international agreements; better linkages between the RFMOs’ information systems and global information exchange systems; improved coordination between stakeholders delivering capacity-building support; and the development of bilateral and regional action plans to address IUU fishing.

Roberto Cesari (Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries within the European Commission) emphasized that the European Commission works with a range of partners – international organizations, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders – to combat IUU fishing. Bilateral cooperation with non-EU governments constitutes a cornerstone of the Commission’s work within this area, and Cesari highlighted that the bilateral dialogues that are held under the EU’s ‘IUU regulation’ are especially important. Better coordination between market states could make an important contribution to the fight against IUU fishing, according to Cesari. He also stressed the need to improve transparency, increase consumer and industry awareness of the issue of IUU fishing, and address the problem created by the utilization of flags of convenience. Finally, Cesari called on buyers and the processing industry to purchase fish only from vessels with an IMO number (identifiable vessels).

Bronwen Golder (Stanford Center for Ocean Solutions) emphasized the existence of a relatively adequate international framework for addressing IUU fishing; the key issue in 2020 is to ensure that the agreements are implemented. One way of driving implementation is for countries to come together at regional level to achieve a specific goal, and Golder mentioned the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) roadmap to combat IUU fishing as a positive example in this regard. Golder also underscored the importance of the international seafood industry which, by acting together in a coordinated manner, can put significant pressure on governments.

The importance of cooperation, across both geographies and sectors, was highlighted by Emily Langley (The Nature Conservancy – TNC). TNC contributes to strengthening international cooperation to address IUU fishing through, inter alia, its engagement in the EU IUU Coalition, which recently published a set of 30 criteria to assist governments in combating IUU fishing. TNC also documents examples of best practice when it comes to addressing IUU fishing worldwide, and shares this information with its partners. According to Langley, improving the exchange of information between fishing ports and flag states could support the implementation of the PSMA. She also highlighted that it would be desirable to increase alignment between import control schemes worldwide.

Day 2

Session 2: Gender and IUU fishing

The second day of the forum focused on the interlinkages between gender and IUU fishing, and the role of women in fisheries. Sarah Harper (University of British Columbia) and Editrudith Lukanga (African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network, AWFishNET) underscored that women play a key role in fisheries, but that their contribution tends to be overlooked. Women are direct producers of seafood, and it has been estimated that 2 million women catch almost 3 million tonnes of seafood annually, worldwide – with a total value around $5.6 billion – but that much of this catch goes unreported. Women dominate in post-harvest activities, such as the sale and processing of fish. Despite their important role in

---

3 Notably the FAO, the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).
4 The idea behind the IUU regulation is to close off the EU market to illegally caught fish.
fisheries, women are under-represented in decision-making within the industry, and gender inequalities hinder their access to knowledge, skills, natural resources and capital.

Harper emphasized that IUU fishing, and the actions undertaken to address it, affect all those involved – including women working onshore – and that it may worsen pre-existing issues and gender inequalities. A lack of sex-disaggregated data makes it difficult to conduct gender analyses, highlight overlooked stakeholders or identify inequalities, and this issue must be addressed – according to Harper – if the international community is to simultaneously combat IUU fishing and promote gender equality. Actions taken to address IUU fishing need to be targeted, and must integrate a gender perspective, so that the response does not have a detrimental impact on women and girls.

IUU fishing is associated with human trafficking and other forms of human rights abuses. The speakers highlighted that while the majority of victims forced to work at sea are men and boys, women and girls are trafficked and coerced into working in the processing chain and in other onshore operations. Esther Swaffield-Bray (International Justice Mission) emphasized that when men are trafficked into working at sea, the vulnerabilities of the families they leave behind may increase significantly, making these women, girls and boys the ‘invisible victims of IUU fishing’.

Vasco Becker-Weinberg (Universidade NOVA de Lisboa) noted that there are international legal instruments to protect women and girls. He emphasized, however, that some important instruments related to IUU fishing and human trafficking have not been ratified by all states, and that implementation is lacking. Becker-Weinberg also pointed to the need to increase harmonization between national and international laws, to enhance law enforcement cooperation, and to increase consumer awareness in this area.

Two of the speakers highlighted that actions taken to achieve the targets of SDG 14 should take into account other global goals, notably SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth). In this context, Harper noted that ecologically harmful fisheries subsidies could be redirected towards initiatives that ameliorate the quality of products and/or improve labour conditions, thereby potentially contributing to gender equity.

Lukanga and Harper emphasized that the challenge of overcoming IUU fishing is complex, and that women can play a key role when it comes to finding and implementing solutions. Promoting gender equality and strengthening the role of women in fisheries is thus essential. Lukanga referred specifically to the role of women’s networks, and stressed that enhancing their organizational and institutional capacity could make a significant contribution to the empowerment of women, and therefore also to the fight against IUU fishing.

Day 3

Session 3: Subsidies and IUU fishing

The discussions on the third day of the conference focused on fisheries subsidies, and the negotiations taking place within the World Trade Organization (WTO) on this topic. A presentation by Robert Arthur (MRAG) focused on how fisheries subsidies can contribute to IUU fishing, and the risks harmful fisheries subsidies pose to marine life. He noted that subsidies applied to whole fleets may contribute to IUU fishing, since it might not be known if vessels are operating illegally. Moreover, subsidies can contribute to IUU fishing if subsidized vessels do not report all their catch, or if they operate in areas where fisheries are not managed effectively. Arthur also referred to research on fisheries in West Africa, conducted by MRAG, which indicates that subsidized fleets are targeting species that are overfished or subject to overfishing.
Ambassador Santiago Wills, the current chair of the WTO Negotiating Group on Rules, highlighted that there exist already numerous international agreements, codes of conduct and regional plans related to fisheries and fisheries management, but that a critical **part of the puzzle is missing**: an international agreement to prohibit the use of harmful fisheries subsidies. Ambassador Wills noted that members of the WTO have been negotiating such an agreement for 20 years, but that the process is complex, not least given that the agreement must fit into the existing international legal architecture. He also mentioned that a lack of data, definitional issues, and the fact that WTO negotiators are not accustomed to negotiating agreements that focus on sustainability (being more used to negotiating agreements that focus on trade and trade-related issues) only add to the complexity.

Ambassador Wills underlined that **progress has been made in the negotiations** over the past year. In July 2019, the facilitators presented draft texts to WTO member states: these have been used in the subsequent negotiations. Updated versions were circulated in April 2020. As chair of the Negotiating Group on Rules, Ambassador Wills is consolidating the revised drafts into one text, which will cover the three main pillars of the negotiations. He emphasized that **COVID-19** is affecting the process. The hope had been to conclude an agreement at the WTO Ministerial Conference in June 2020, but that meeting had to be postponed due to the pandemic. COVID-19 also makes it more difficult for delegations to coordinate with their capitals and with each other, and it influences the point at which Ambassador Wills will circulate the consolidated text. There is, however, still a possibility that an agreement will be concluded before the end of 2020. Ambassador Wills emphasized that reaching an agreement on fisheries subsidies is a common goal of all WTO member states. Such an agreement is critical not only for promoting ocean health and reversing the decline in global fish stocks; it is also essential for demonstrating that new agreements can be reached within the WTO.

Alice Tipping (International Institute for Sustainable Development) further elaborated on the WTO negotiations on fisheries subsidies, especially the parts that relate to abolishing subsidies that contribute to IUU fishing. She highlighted that the focus of the current discussions is on finding an approach that would lead to **subsidies being prohibited** once it has been determined that IUU fishing has taken place. Tipping stressed that member states need to make four key decisions related to this issue:

- Whose determinations of IUU fishing should trigger the requirement to remove subsidies?
- What due process steps should be required?
- Should the agreement clarify how the obligation is to be implemented?
- What special and differential treatment, if any, should be provided to developing countries?

**Day 4**

The fourth day of the forum featured a panel discussion on IUU fishing in Southeast Asia and a keynote speech by Ian Urbina, investigative reporter and author of *The Outlaw Ocean: Journeys Across the Last Untamed Frontier*.

**Keynote speech by Ian Urbina**

Urbina’s remarks focused on the **interlinkages** between his work *The Outlaw Ocean* and IUU fishing. He emphasized that lack of governance at sea, inadequate law enforcement, and insufficient transparency and accountability throughout seafood supply chains contribute to IUU fishing and associated labour and human rights abuses. The deployment of tools like unique vessel identifiers, onboard cameras, vessel monitoring system (VMS) and automatic identification system (AIS) software, in conjunction with the

---

6 The three pillars are: IUU fishing; fishing of overfished stocks; and overfishing and overcapacity.
scrutiny of crew manifests, would contribute to increased oversight and enable better tracking of vessels which, in turn, would help combat IUU fishing.

**Session 4: IUU fishing in Southeast Asia**

The speakers emphasized that IUU fishing in Southeast Asia has substantial economic, environmental and social consequences, and Sophie Benbow (Fauna & Flora International – FFI) noted that estimates of financial losses in the region due to IUU fishing vary between $3 billion and $20 billion per year. Benbow also mentioned that the majority of vessels in Southeast Asia are relatively small and that many do not use VMS technology, which constitutes a challenge when it comes to combating IUU fishing. FFI has assisted the government of Cambodia in creating the country’s first marine protected area, which is surveilled by community-led patrols using spatial monitoring reporting tools (also known as SMART technology). The incidence of illegal fishing has decreased in the areas covered by these patrols.

Dr Worawit Wanchana (Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center – SEAFDEC) focused on some of the initiatives that SEAFDEC and its members have launched and supported in recent years in order to combat IUU fishing. Such efforts include promoting the ASEAN Guidelines for Preventing the Entry of Fish and Fishery Products from IUU Fishing Activities into the Supply Chain, creating the Regional Fishing Vessels Record, establishing an electronic ASEAN Catch Documentation Scheme, and supporting the implementation of the PSMA.

Dr Gina Green (Tetra Tech) presented several Tetra Tech-implemented projects that have contributed to reducing IUU fishing in Southeast Asia, including the ECOFISH (Ecosystems Improved for Sustainable Fisheries) project in the Philippines, the Sustainable Ecosystems Advanced (SEA) Project in Indonesia, and the Oceans and Fisheries Partnership (OCEANS) project. For Tetra Tech and its partners, key next steps in the fight against IUU fishing in Southeast Asia include expanding the use of technologies, building market incentives, addressing gender gaps, developing machine-learning capabilities, encouraging sustainable production, and engaging and empowering communities. Green underlined the importance of adapting technological tools to local context.

**Day 5**

The last day of the conference included closing remarks on behalf of Chatham House by Professor Tim Benton, a keynote speech by Dr Manumatavai Tupou-Roosen, Director General of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, and two panel discussions: one on new technologies and one on transparency.

**Keynote speech by Manumatavai Tupou-Roosen**

Tupou-Roosen emphasized the need to address the human element of IUU fishing. She underlined that the working conditions of observers and crew must be improved, and their human rights protected. Tupou-Roosen also highlighted that although efforts made to combat IUU fishing to date have, to a large extent, been focused on vessels, it is people – not vessels – who commit fisheries offences. To effectively tackle IUU fishing, there is a need to strengthen focus on the legal and natural persons who control the vessels. Persons-of-interest profiling constitutes a valuable tool in this regard.

**Session 5: New technologies and IUU fishing**

Tony Long (Global Fishing Watch) emphasized that the application of currently available technology to fisheries can make a significant contribution to the fight against IUU fishing. He noted that scale is a problem when it comes to the monitoring, control and surveillance of fisheries, and that artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly being deployed to help overcome this challenge. AI can be used to help
track vessels, but this application of the technology only works when vessels share their position, when they transmit regularly enough to allow for patterns to be recognized, and when enough training data exists. Long also highlighted that AI can be deployed to help determine if a vessel is non-compliant (not transmitting its position) – and if it thus should be inspected – based on the vessel’s aggregate behaviour. This application of AI can make a significant contribution to the implementation of key policies like the PSMA, according to Long.

Long highlighted that there are ways of dealing with vessels that do not transmit their position (dark targets). One such way is to ensure that vessels who turn off – or manipulate – their tracker data are penalized, for instance by being denied entry into ports. Another is to use satellite technologies in combination with AI to identify boats that do not transmit at all. The fact that a large share of vessel data is proprietary – and not public – creates problems, according to Long. To combat IUU fishing, a shift to an open data system is required. Making data on vessel behaviour publicly available, and preventing non-compliant vessels from entering ports, together create a powerful incentive for vessels to transmit their position, which in turn facilitates the detection of misbehaviour.

The role of blockchain in increasing transparency and traceability throughout seafood supply chains was emphasized by Brett Haywood (Sea Quest – Fiji). Sea Quest (Fiji) is participating in a blockchain project and tags fish with a QR code upon landing, which enables consumers to ‘know the story of the fish’. This helps push illegal catch out of the market. Haywood stressed that blockchain alone cannot stop IUU fishing, but that it is a game-changing tool.

The presentation by Dyhia Belhabib, of Ecotrust Canada, focused on the new online tool, Spyglass, whose purpose is to ‘name and shame’ vessels and companies that have engaged in IUU fishing. Belhabib noted that blacklisting is a lengthy process and that most vessels which operate illegally never make it on to the official RFMO IUU lists. While the Combined IUU Vessel List (compiled and published by Trygg Mat Tracking) contains 312 entries, Spyglass currently lists 6,200 vessels (of which 2,500 are named) and 1,700 companies and individuals. According to Belhabib, the Spyglass tool, which is free of charge and easy to use, can thereby help stakeholders make better risk assessments and support the implementation of the PSMA.

**Session 6: Transparency and IUU fishing**

The speakers emphasized that the lack of transparency in the fishing industry enables IUU fishing and related crimes to thrive. Teresa Ish (Walton Family Foundation) highlighted that transparency is needed at the point of production, throughout supply chains, and in relation to government actions. Steve Trent (EJF) underlined that transparency can be improved through the mandatory use of VMS technology, as well as the mandatory use of digital logbooks, landing and licence certificates, and crew manifests and catch documentation. Publicly available vessel licence lists and a global record of fishing vessels – based on unique vessel identifiers – would also contribute significantly to achieving transparency. Trent further emphasized the necessity of ratifying and implementing key international agreements, especially the PSMA, the ILO Work in Fishing Convention and the Cape Town Agreement on fishing vessel safety standards.

The need to shed light on the onshore networks and facilitators that profit from IUU fishing was stressed by Austin Brush (C4ADS). Brush underscored that mandatory reporting of beneficial ownership by vessel owners, and the publication of any legal or administrative actions taken against vessels, would be important steps forward.

Both Trent and Brush called for the development of universal unique vessel identifiers.
Jacqui Dixon (the Hong Kong Sustainable Seafood Coalition) emphasized that the private sector has taken important steps to increase transparency over the past ten years. Examples of private-sector initiatives at international level include the Seafood Task Force, the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation and its ProActive Vessel Register, the Sea Pact, the Seafood Business for Ocean Stewardship (SeaBOS) initiative, the Ocean Disclosure Project (established by the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership – SFP), the Seafood Stewardship Index, the Global Tuna Alliance, the World Economic Forum’s Tuna 2020 Traceability Declaration, the Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability, The Pew Charitable Trusts’ IUU tool and PSMA questionnaire, and at national level, the Sustainable Seafood Coalition (UK), and the Hong Kong Sustainable Seafood Coalition, among others.