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FAO: 'Major advances' to curb IUU fishing in the Mediterranean, Black Sea made in 10 years

5 June 2025

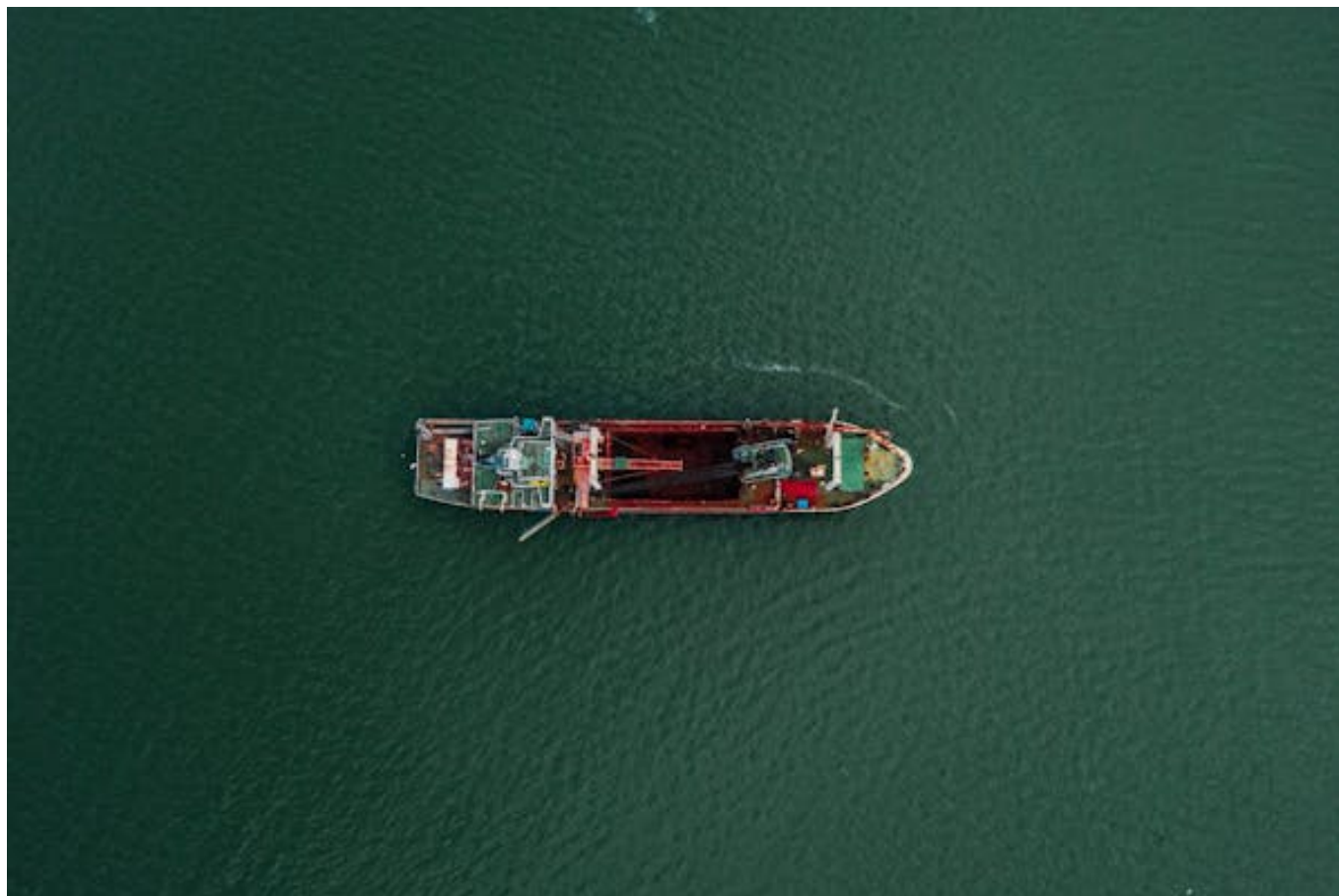
By Responsible Seafood Advocate

Digital tools, policy reforms and regional coordination help close IUU fishing enforcement gaps

Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (or IUU fishing) remains a challenge in the Mediterranean and Black Seas, but countries in the region are making progress by adopting measures to improve compliance, seafood traceability and fisheries management, according to a **[recent press release from the FAO](https://www.fao.org/gfcm/news/detail/en/c/1738542/)** (<https://www.fao.org/gfcm/news/detail/en/c/1738542/>).

From catch-reporting apps to vessel tracking systems, regional governments are using technology to close enforcement gaps. With support from the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), these efforts aim to protect fish stocks and support legal fishers.

A major development came in late 2023 with the amendment of the EU Control Regulation, which expanded the use of digital monitoring tools across member states. The update introduced mobile applications that allow fishers – commercial or recreational, regardless of vessel size – to log catches electronically, improving seafood traceability and reducing paperwork.



Countries in the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions are adopting digital tools, policy reforms and coordinated enforcement to tackle IUU fishing more effectively. Photo by [George John](https://www.pexels.com/photo/aerial-photography-of-a-fishing-boat-on-the-sea-7101643/) (<https://www.pexels.com/photo/aerial-photography-of-a-fishing-boat-on-the-sea-7101643/>).

“Over the years, the fishing sector’s responsibilities on resource conservation and inspections have increased,” said a fisheries inspector at the Maritime Fisheries Service in Malaga, Spain. “Following through has been made possible thanks to the implementation of advanced technologies for real-time control and monitoring. This translates into a sustainable future for our fishery resources.”

A blue banner for Best Seafood Practices certification. On the left, there is a photo of a person in a yellow protective suit and mask handling fish. In the center, there is a photo of a fishing boat on the sea. To the right of the photos, the text reads: "A comprehensive solution for the wild seafood supply chain." Below this text are three checkmarks with the following labels: "Crew rights", "Food safety", and "Environmental responsibility". On the far right, there is the Best Seafood Practices logo, which consists of a stylized fish eye icon and the text "Best Seafood Practices". Below the logo is a button that says "LEARN MORE" with a right-pointing arrow.

(<https://bspcertification.org/>).

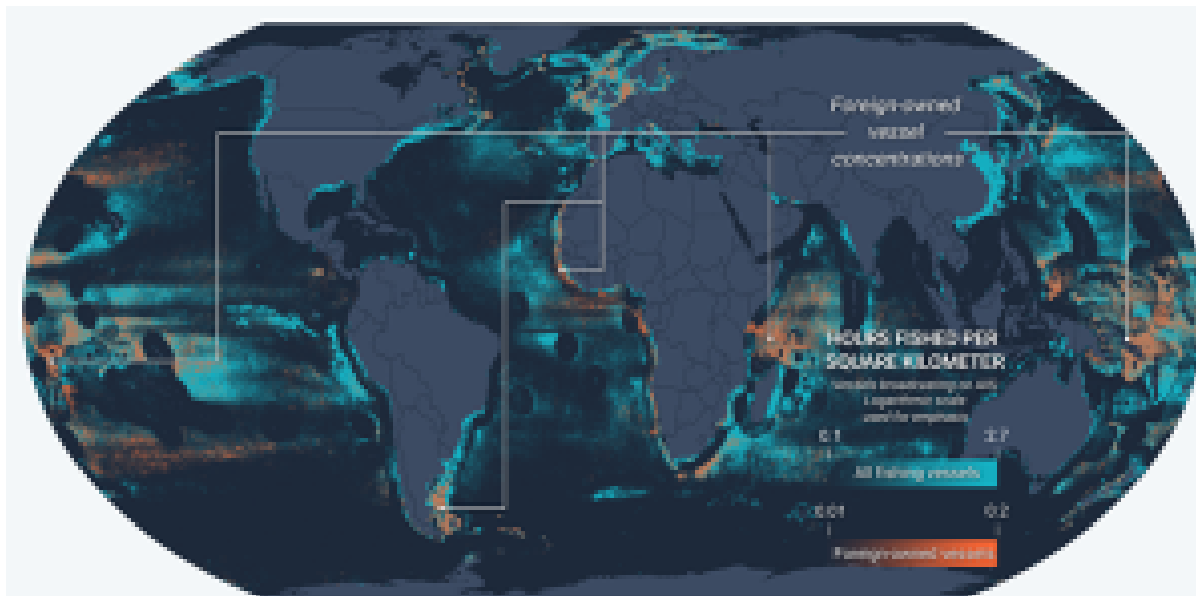
The GFCM is working to expand these tools regionwide. In 2025, Albania, Montenegro, Türkiye and Ukraine advanced their national action plans to address IUU fishing, supported by a GFCM regional toolbox of legal templates, digital solutions and best practices.

“The role of fisheries inspectors has evolved significantly, with technology and tighter regulations enhancing our capacity to detect and deter IUU fishing,” said Sadettin Doğu, Head of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Department at the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in Türkiye. “These changes not only support fairer fisheries governance but also strengthen the protection of fragile marine ecosystems. Our work today is more than enforcement – it’s a commitment to sustainability.”

New technologies are also playing a growing role in improving seafood traceability. Morocco is using radio frequency identification (RFID) technology to track seafood products and monitor small-scale fisheries.

“We fish day and night, but illegal fishing threatens our future; it depletes the fish stocks we depend on,” said El Ayachi El Gargari, an artisanal fisher from Morocco. “If the sea is empty, there’s no livelihood for my family.”

In Montenegro, a pilot program tested transponders on small-scale vessels, integrating them into the region’s vessel monitoring system (VMS). The initiative aims to improve planning, build trust with inspectors and increase safety at sea.



Fishing effort by foreign-owned fishing vessels, 2012-2020



GPS data may identify potential IUU fishing behavior

A study led by Global Fishing Watch provides new insight into potential IUU fishing behavior that could help improve fisheries management.



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“Vessel monitoring system devices are key to protecting marine resources by showing where vessels operate,” said Srećko Andričić, a fisher from the Municipality of Tivat who participated in the pilot vessel monitoring system (VMS) program. “They help detect illegal fishing and support better planning and conservation efforts.”

“I welcomed the VMS pilot on my vessel for its many benefits,” said Knežević Ivo, a fisher from Ada Bojana who also participated. “It boosts safety on our small boats and helps inspectors detect illegal fishing. The data also supports resource conservation and ensures fair use of state support like fuel aid.”

June 5 marks the International Day for the Fight Against IUU Fishing, established by the GFCM in 2015. A decade later, the FAO reports that countries in the Mediterranean and Black Sea “are no longer working in isolation” and are “sharing knowledge, coordinating actions and shifting from policy commitments to concrete actions.”

[Read more here \(https://www.fao.org/gfcm/news/detail/en/c/1738542/\)](https://www.fao.org/gfcm/news/detail/en/c/1738542/).

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