



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

STATEMENT

Brussels, 14 October 2014

"Improved fisheries management thanks to robust cooperation with the EU"

During a press point presenting the results of the EU fight against IUU fishing, Maria Damanaki, European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, stated:

"Ladies and gentlemen,

Today I am pleased to announce the latest news referring to the implementation of our policy to fight illegal fishing : five countries have taken very concrete measures to eradicate illegal fishing in their waters or their fleets. These countries are: Belize, Fiji, Panama, Togo and Vanuatu, representing together more than 50 million € worth of imports each year.

*In the end, **it was EU pressure that has helped these countries moving to sustainable fisheries.***

Following our formal encouragement, Belize made concrete steps to improve its fisheries management in a lasting way. It reformed its legal framework and introduced new rules for inspection and control of vessels. To me, this is hard evidence that the context has changed. So our reaction today is that we can propose to the Council to lift the trade measures introduced in March this year and which prohibit Belize currently from exporting fisheries products to the EU.

If you remember, in 2012 four other countries had gotten a stern warning, i.e. a "yellow card", from the Commission.

Today Fiji, Panama, Togo and Vanuatu get a "green card". I welcome their cooperative attitude in the process, especially because they did not need to be subjected to a trade ban to start moving [like Belize].

Of course we will not stop being vigilant. The EU should, in my view, carry on and even intensify its enforcement action in this field.

And indeed, there is also another side of the coin.

In November 2012, we sent a warning to Sri Lanka. They were not complying with international rules on illegal fishing and their control systems were inadequate.

Two years later, not much has changed. The same problems are still there and are even getting worse. Sri Lanka is now authorizing huge vessels to fish in the Indian Ocean without marine GPS (VMS). This renders control totally impossible.

Sri Lanka is the second biggest exporter of fresh and chilled swordfish and tuna to the EU (74 million € of imports in 2013). In those circumstances we cannot tolerate not to know whether the fish they import into the EU was caught sustainably or not. EU citizens have the right to know what lands on their plate.

So today, the Commission goes to the next level: we are formally identifying Sri Lanka in the fight against illegal fishing. Fisheries products caught by vessels flagged in Sri Lanka will not be able to enter the EU market after three months' time from now. The Council will, by that time, have the possibility to confirm and extend the depth and scope of the trade measures.

Of course it doesn't end there: the Commission will continue to work closely with Sri Lanka to guide it towards a better system.

Let me conclude: Today's developments make me confident that, even if harsh, our measures are working. Over the years the EU has assisted dozens of countries in making the leap towards more responsible fishing.

My ultimate goal has always been to eradicate illegal fishing, which is detrimental to the stocks and fishermen worldwide. With all those new countries on our side, we have made another little but credible step towards sound ocean management at world level. I am proud of the journey my team and I have made, since I embarked on this boat five years ago.

Thank you."

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