

NGOs welcome EU move to fight illegal fishing through vessel numbering scheme

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EJF's Executive Director Steve Trent said, "This is a powerful signal by the EU that fisheries must become more transparent. Sometimes the simplest reforms can have profound impacts, and that is the case here. It is ridiculous that planes, cars and even European cows have unique numbers to enable lifetime tracking, but fishing vessels haven't. This has allowed unscrupulous operators to fish illegally in one country and then swiftly change identity and nationality and do the same elsewhere."

Until recently, a global scheme operated by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) that assigned unique numbers to vessels for their entire lives specifically excluded fishing vessels. In December 2013, the IMO partly removed the exemption, allowing fishing vessels into the scheme on a voluntary basis. The EU has now made the number mandatory for all vessels above 24 meters length fishing in EU waters and EU vessels over 15 meters fishing overseas.

While welcoming the new measure, the NGOs are calling on other states to follow the EU's lead, and for the EU to require industrial fishing vessels importing into the EU to also carry IMO numbers. Additionally, the organizations have highlighted that the vessel information associated with an IMO number needs be regularly updated, and they are calling for this information to be eventually gathered at the global level in the form of a global record of fishing vessels, to move towards effective control and tracking of fishing vessels, owners and their catch worldwide,

María José Cornax, Fisheries Campaign Director of Oceana, stated: "Today's announcement by the

EU is a key step to stop illegal fishing on a global scale. Fishing has become a globalized activity and IMO numbers are essential to effectively track the activities of a vessel wherever in the world it fishes and no matter under which name or flag. IMO numbers are an inexpensive measure that could lower the yearly loss of €19 billion that IUU fishing causes to the world's economies"

Notes to editors:

- **This Press release is available upon request also in French and Spanish**
- The EU is the largest seafood market in the world, importing more than 60 percent of the seafood it consumes.
- The EU fleet operates in throughout the world. The European Commission's proposal is amending an implementing act of Council Regulation (EC) No [1224/2009](#) establishing a Community control system for ensuring compliance with the rules of the common fisheries policy, widely known as the "Control Regulation"
- The implementing act, which amends the Control Regulation following the agreement of the European Commission and technical experts from member states, provides that from 1st January 2016, IMO numbers are mandatory for EU vessels (or vessels controlled by EU operators under chartering agreement) over 100 Gross Tonnes or 24m length overall operating exclusively in EU waters and for EU vessels over 15m length operating outside EU waters. Smaller EU vessels are not required to have an IMO number. All vessels from non-EU countries authorised to fish inside Union waters are subject to this obligation.
- The EU Fleet Register lists 2,856 vessels over 24 meters and 8,205 vessels over 15 meters (<http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/fleet/index.cfm?method=Search.menu>).

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