

5th International Forum on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing
Keynote address delivered by Huw Irranca-Davies MP, UK Minister
for Marine and Natural Environment
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I'd like to start by thanking all of you for coming to this important event, and to Chatham House for hosting this, the fifth international forum on illegal fishing.

It promises to be a fascinating and thought-provoking couple of days, which I am sure will highlight the importance of cooperation in tackling this major global problem.

I am sorry that other commitments will mean that I will be unable to stay longer to hear the debate. But I am delighted to see the range of interests represented here today, from Governments and international institutions, to private sector companies and trade bodies, academics and civil society – all of whom have a stake in stamping out illegal fishing.

Now, when we talk about the problem of illegal fishing what immediately strikes you is the size of the numbers involved: the billions dollars it costs the world's economies every year, the millions of tonnes of illegal fish landed. Put simply, illegal fishing is the second biggest fishing "power" in the world – its catches are equivalent to around 20% of total global production.

This is a malicious, selfish and destructive trade with very real consequences. It undermines international efforts to manage our seas, at a time when half the world's fish stocks are already exploited at near unsustainable levels, and a quarter have already gone beyond that stage. It threatens marine ecosystems, endangering habitats and biodiversity, upon which the health of our oceans depends.

Moreover, it challenges the very economic foundations upon which successful fisheries need to be governed – this is of particular concern for developing countries where wealth from fisheries should be able provide an important contribution to growth, livelihoods and food security.

Let us not forget that fish makes up half the dietary protein for 400 million people in the world's poorest countries, and fifth of protein nutrition in developing countries as a whole. And it provides valuable revenues - exports of fish from developing countries are extremely important – they are worth more than exports of many other agricultural commodities combined.

Of course, the drivers behind illegal fishing lie in the huge profits to be made, easy access to markets and the relatively small chance of being caught. These are incentives that we must seek to tackle.

I am pleased to say that the UK continues to play a leading role in fighting this crime. At home, we've taken tough action against our own vessels when they flout the rules whether in our own waters or in distant fishing grounds. For example, we prosecuted a fishing vessel for contravening UK rules in waters off Gabon.

Together with the Scottish Government, we actively contribute to the enforcement and anti-IUU regime set up under the auspices of the North East Atlantic Fisheries Convention. We work with the licensing and enforcement authorities of countries as far afield as Namibia, Morocco, Senegal and Madagascar to ensure our vessels comply with the relevant laws and regulations in those countries.

Internationally, UK Ministers led the High Seas Task Force on IUU fishing. And we are actively engaged with Regional Fisheries Management Organisations to support effective action against illegal activity, notably through port state control and the operation of IUU blacklists.

We know, from our work with the High Seas Task Force that teamwork is crucial. We've got to co-operate with our neighbours to protect our shared resources.

We pioneered joint operations and bilateral cooperation with other EU Member States and with third countries including Norway, where successful international collaboration on Port State Control has led to a significant reduction in illegal catches of cod in the Barents Sea.

Joint deployment operations are now proving to be effective all over the world. Whether it be UK-French collaboration in the North Sea, or joint US-Chinese patrols in the Northern Pacific. Key to their effectiveness is the sharing of resources, satellite data and intelligence - and the deployment of enforcement officers to each other's patrol vessels. This clearly demonstrates the value of regional cooperation that is crucial to combating IUU.

On a global scale, we've been the largest supporter of the development of the FAO's proposed Global Record of Fishing Vessels. We've been supporting fisheries enforcement in developing countries through the International Monitoring Control and Surveillance Network, and have helped to quantify the extent of the global losses due to illegal fishing.

I have already alluded to the fact that the problem of IUU is particularly acute for developing countries. A combination of weak governance and control coupled with rich fisheries makes these waters particularly attractive to illegal fishers.

We have put in place a strong programme between my Department and the Department for International Development, which brings together our respective expertise in environment and fisheries and international development.

One outcome of this relationship has been a strong political commitment to supporting African fisheries. In 2008, the DFID-funded Stop Illegal Fishing Programme worked with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries to create greater awareness of IUU fishing. The resulting policy process culminated in July 2008, with 8 SADC ministers, including Minister Iyambo (Namibia), signing a Statement of Commitment to address illegal fishing in the southern Africa region. And this has had immediate impact.

Tanzania has implemented joint operations with South Africa and Mozambique leading to the arrest of 6 vessels including one - a Kenyan operated vessel with ownership in Oman by Taiwanese and Chinese nationals. And I think that demonstrates the complexity of the problem we face!

South Africa is supporting the commitment by making their new patrol vessel available regionally. But above all, the regional networking and collaborations facilitated throughout this process have created a closer cooperation and drive among States and individuals to combat IUU fishing.

Following the Ministerial Statement of Commitment we have launched new programme in Africa – the Partnership for African Fisheries - worth initially £7million over 5 years.

This will be an African led process, supported by the African Union and NEPAD, aimed at stimulating governance reform that we hope will have a major impact on illegal fishing around the continent.

And I am delighted to have been invited to a major Conference on African Fisheries to be held in the Gambia later this year, where I hope we can strengthen our collaboration to protect Africa's valuable marine resources.

Of course, I'd be the first to admit that there's no silver bullet that will stop illegal fishing in its tracks. And in the same way we depend on the efforts of a range of countries for success, we must also depend on a range of actions.

Clearly strong law enforcement is essential, but in the sea there will always be ways of avoiding detection. That is why strong market-based measures are also crucial, as these choke off the source of money for illegal activity. We've got to make sure that those who plunder our seas have nowhere to sell their fish.

The EU has a particular responsibility in this respect. We are the world's largest importer of fish products. 60% of all our fish is imported from outside the Community. That rises to 90% for white fish. But this also means we are a major target for illegal operators – it's estimated that the EU imports around €1 billion of illegal fish products every year.

The EU has therefore introduced new market-based measures to prevent the import of illegal fishery products into the Community, which are due to come into force next year.

These new rules are welcome. They have real potential to make a huge and global impact on illegal fishing profits and hence activities. Over time, we believe they will help to improve the sustainability of fisheries worldwide, by making it much more difficult for IUU fish to enter the EU market, and penalise illegal practices right through the supply chain.

We also hope they will help stimulate legal trade and enable developing countries to take advantage of their marine resources for both trade and food security.

But I also appreciate that the rules are complex, and in the short term implementation will be difficult for some countries, notably in the developing world. We therefore need to support compliance with the new rules, in order that they do not result in a barrier to trade, on which so many depend.

Next year will therefore be a chance for some real changes in the global picture. And I'm sure you will be discussing these potential impacts over the next couple of days.

So, it is clear that between us we have already achieved a lot, but there remains so much more to do. We are in no doubt that this crime, if left unchecked, will have disastrous consequences for the world's oceans and those that depend upon them.

But by working together and using all the tools at our disposal, we can fight back. By targeting the incentives that drive these illegal practices, we can put a stop to this pernicious and criminal activity. But we all need the commitment to be in it for the long haul.

Thank you.

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