



Att.: Ms. Charlina VITCHEVA
Director-General
DG MARE - Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
JII99, B-1000 BRUSSELS

Madrid, [REDACTED] 2023
Ref: R-02-23/WG5

Subject: ECA special report on the EU IUU policy

Dear Director-General Vitcheva,

On 26 September 2022, the European Court of Auditors (ECA) published its special report on the EU framework, action and spending aimed at fighting illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing¹. This report was presented to the members of the Long-Distance Advisory Council (LDAC) on 27 October 2022, in presence of the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE).

On that occasion, the members of the LDAC, ECA and DG MARE exchanged views on the findings of ECA, its recommendations and the replies of the European Commission². The LDAC is grateful for this opportunity.

In May 2021, the LDAC approved and sent to the European Commission its advice on “/r/ecomendations for a level playing field for EU and non-EU fish products”³. This advice is the results of extensive discussions in the LDAC and lays out the views of its members on several fisheries-related EU policies affecting the level playing field for EU external fishing operations. The LDAC has identified numerous opportunities for the EU to progress and leverage in achieving an even level playing field.

ECA’s findings and recommendations are consistent with those the members of the LDAC outlined in their advice, in particular with those in relation to achieving an even internal level playing field in the context of the implementation of the EU IUU and control regulations.

¹ ECA, Special report 20/2022: EU action to combat illegal fishing – Control systems in place but weakened by uneven checks and sanctions by Member States, 26/09/2022, <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/Pages/DocItem.aspx?did=61941>.

² European Commission, Replies of the European Commission to the European Court of Auditors’ special report, https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECARepplies/COM-Replies-SR-22-20/COM-Replies_SR-22-20_EN.pdf.

³ LDAC, LDAC Recommendations for a Level Playing Field for EU and non-EU fish products, 25/05/2021, https://ldac.eu/images/EN_LDAC_Advice_LPF_25May2021.pdf.

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As such, the members of the LDAC support the recommendations made by ECA that the European Commission must monitor that Member States reinforce their control systems for preventing the import of illegal fishery products and ensure that they apply dissuasive sanctions against illegal fishing. The LDAC notes that the European Commission accepted ECA's recommendations and target implementation dates⁴.

Improved and better implemented controls and sanctions programs are important to consolidate the EU's credibility when pushing for sustainable fishing worldwide. In that regard, the next two to three years will be critical.

ECA also found that the "EU carding system has proven useful triggering reform in most of the third countries concerned". The LDAC has long believed that the Union's leadership in steering the global efforts to end IUU fishing owes much to the carding system.

We cannot but note that meeting the deadlines of ECA and taking up the challenges that the LDAC had previously identified add to the essential commitment of the European Commission to enhance its efforts to ensure that countries abide by their international obligations through IUU dialogues as reasserted in the recent Joint Communication on the EU's International Ocean Governance agenda and reaffirmed by the Council Conclusions on International Ocean Governance adopted on 13 December 2022⁵ and the European Parliament resolution of 6 October 2022⁶.

In a letter dated 24 January 2023⁷, DG MARE underlined the heavy workload the units in charge of the implementation of the EU's IUU and control policies are already confronted with and the limited resources available to the Directorate-General.

As such, the LDAC wishes to reiterate its support to DG MARE in implementing these policies and the other external components of the Common Fisheries Policy such as the EU's participation in regional fisheries management organisations, our sustainable fisheries partnership agreements and international ocean governance.

⁴ Monitor that Member States reinforce their control systems for preventing the import of illegal fishery products, and take necessary action: 2026; Ensure that Member States apply dissuasive sanctions against illegal fishing: 2024 and 2026.

⁵ Council of the European Union, Council conclusions on International Ocean Governance, 13/12/2022, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15973-2022-INIT/en/pdf>.

⁶ European Parliament, Resolution of 6 October 2022 on momentum for the ocean: strengthening ocean governance and biodiversity, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-10-06_EN.html#sdocta9.

⁷ European Commission, LDAC letter on DG MARE clarification on participation in LDAC's Meetings, Ares(2023)528715, 24/01/2023, https://ldac.eu/images/EC_Reply_LDAC_letter_on_MARE_participation_to_meetings_of_28_Dec_2022.pdf.

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In a context where policies adopted by other players outside the EU are a serious impediment to achieving an even level playing field, it is critical that the efforts dedicated to meeting ECA's deadlines are not at the expense of the EU's leadership in leading the global efforts to end IUU fishing through the carding system.

As such, the members of the LDAC wish to reiterate the recommendation they made in the advice on “/r/ecommandations for a level playing field for EU and non-EU fish products” to ensure the adequacy of human resources dedicated to the formulation and implementation of the EU's policy against IUU fishing in DG MARE and the European Fisheries Control Agency with the EU's ambitions for a zero-tolerance approach to IUU fishing and progressing on the implementation and delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Yours faithfully,

DRAFT