



## Advice

# Addressing Risks in Global Squid Fisheries: Strengthening EU Import Controls and Transparency

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### 1. Background

Squid is one of the fastest-growing fisheries globally. Between 2017 and 2020, global squid fishing effort increased by nearly 70%<sup>1</sup>, while annual squid landings have risen by around 45% since the early 1990s<sup>2</sup>.

The majority of global squid fishing effort occurs in the high seas and is unregulated<sup>3</sup>. The governance of these fisheries remains weak and fragmented and has not kept up with the scale and speed of their expansion. Although the high seas are covered by general international rules, there are several high seas squid fisheries that are insufficiently regulated or managed, and operate without effective, binding, species-specific conservation, management and control measures, unlike other major commercial fisheries managed through RFMOs or similar cooperative arrangements<sup>4</sup>. As a result, significant gaps persist in oversight, transparency, and enforcement.

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<sup>1</sup> [Seto, K. L., Miller, N. A., Kroodsmas, D., Hanich, Q., Miyahara, M., Saito, R., Boerder, K., Tsuda, M., Oozeki, Y., & Osvaldo Urrutia, S. \(2023\). Fishing through the cracks: The unregulated nature of global squid fisheries. \*Science Advances\*, 9\(10\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> Between 1993 and 2023. FAO (2025). FishStat: Global production by production source 1950-2023. In: FishStatJ. Available at [www.fao.org/fishery/en/statistics/software/fishstatj](http://www.fao.org/fishery/en/statistics/software/fishstatj). Licence: CC-BY-4.0. (accessed 28 March 2025).

<sup>3</sup> [Seto, K. L., Miller, N. A., Kroodsmas, D., Hanich, Q., Miyahara, M., Saito, R., Boerder, K., Tsuda, M., Oozeki, Y., & Osvaldo Urrutia, S. \(2023\). Fishing through the cracks: The unregulated nature of global squid fisheries. \*Science Advances\*, 9\(10\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> Currently, only two out of the 17 international RFMOs – the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC) and South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization (SPRFMO) – have adopted measures aimed at conserving and sustainably managing squid populations, however even these measures have serious shortcomings.

The absence of effective governance in certain areas is often accompanied by illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and labour abuses, as documented by academic studies<sup>5</sup>, investigate reporting and civil society research. Reported violations include forced labour, unsafe working conditions, and fishing in unauthorised areas<sup>6</sup>.

Fleets with significant fishing effort targeting squid in the high seas in recent years include China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan<sup>7</sup>. China's distant-water fleet has been by far the largest contributor to the surge in global squid fishing pressure. China's squid catch has increased by an estimated 150% since 2000<sup>8</sup>, making it the world's leading squid fishing nation. It now accounts for roughly one third of total global squid catches<sup>9</sup>. The rapid expansion of this fleet has also been accompanied by repeated allegations and documented cases of IUU fishing and human rights abuses at sea<sup>10</sup>. The operational characteristics of these fisheries, particularly the use of intensive light attraction and jigging gear, may also have implications for animal welfare, including stress and injury during capture.

At the same time, the European Union (EU) plays a pivotal role as a destination market. The EU is the world's largest importer of fishery and aquaculture products<sup>11</sup>, and the largest importer of

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<sup>5</sup> See [Seto et al., 2023. Fishing through the cracks: The unregulated nature of global squid fisheries. Science Advances](#), [Park et al., 2020. Illuminating dark fishing fleets in North Korea](#), and [McDonald et al., 2020. Satellites can reveal global extent of forced labour in the world's fishing fleet](#).

<sup>6</sup> See [EJF \(2025\). Bright lights, dim prospects. The urgent need to address unregulated squid fishing in the Southwest Atlantic to avert a looming environmental crisis](#); [EJF \(2026\). Unseen and unaccountable: the growing threat of China's squid fleet in the South Pacific](#).

<sup>7</sup> [Seto, Katherine L et al. "Fishing through the cracks: The unregulated nature of global squid fisheries." Science advances vol. 9,10 \(2023\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> FAO (2025). FishStat: Global production by production source 1950-2023. In: FishStatJ. Available at [www.fao.org/fishery/en/statistics/software/fishstatj](http://www.fao.org/fishery/en/statistics/software/fishstatj). Licence: CC-BY-4.0. (accessed 28 March 2025).

<sup>9</sup> [China Fisheries News \(2019\) 'My country's deep-sea squid production ranks first in the world', Fishery Machinery and Instrument Research Institute, 11 June 2019.](#)

<sup>10</sup> [EJF \(2022\) The ever-widening net: Mapping the scale, nature and corporate structures of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing by the Chinese distant-water fleet](#)

<sup>11</sup> [EUMOFA, The EU Fish Market, 2025 edition](#)



squid and cuttlefish globally, accounting for approximately 29% of global imports between 2020 and 2024, followed by China with a 21% share<sup>12</sup>.

While the EU is the world's largest importer of squid, Spain functions as the primary gateway for this trade, accounting for 50% of total imports into the bloc in the period of 2020 to 2024<sup>13</sup>. According to Eurostat data, in 2024, over 80% of Spain's Argentine short fin squid (*Illex* spp.) supply originated from Spanish-flagged vessels and fleets with Spanish participation operating in Argentina and the Falkland Islands, while imports from China for this species account for less than 11%<sup>14</sup>. Notably, a significant share of imports from Argentina and the Falkland Islands is linked to Spanish joint ventures, effectively complementing the supply from Spanish-flagged vessels. Spanish fisheries and associated operations function under well-established regulatory frameworks, and Spanish authorities are widely recognised for their strict enforcement of catch certification requirements, ensuring that seafood entering the European market complies with high standards of legality, traceability, and documentation. However, some risks remain<sup>15</sup>.

In Spain, the three main commercial species are *Dosidicus gigas* (jumbo flying squid – the world largest squid fishery), *Illex* spp. (mostly Argentine shortfin squid – the second largest squid fishery), *Doryteuthis gahi* (Patagonian squid – one of the most important squid fisheries in the world). Lack of proper monitoring and conflating these species can obscure important differences in management, sustainability, legality, and labour practices. Unfortunately, the squid trade is rarely reported at the species level, making detailed trade data difficult to assess. However, species-specific information is available at the operator level, where it underpins traceability

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<sup>12</sup> COMTRADE using HS commodity code 030741, 030742, 030743, 030749 and 160554. These commodity codes include trade in both cuttlefish and squid.

<sup>13</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>14</sup> The tariff code 03074392 is used for *Illex* spp. in 2024. Data from Eurostat show that *Illex* spp. includes *Illex argentinus*, *Illex illecebrosus*, and *Illex coindetii*. The tariff code does not differentiate between species, so it is not possible to distinguish the different *Illex* species within the same code. Products from Argentina and the Falkland Islands are certainly *Illex argentinus*, while those arriving from China may be *Illex argentinus*, *Illex illecebrosus*, or *Illex coindetii*.

<sup>15</sup> [EU IUU Fishing Coalition and ClientEarth report "IUU fishing, working conditions and the Spanish seafood industry: The importance of supply chain due diligence"](#)



obligations, compliance with fisheries and consumer information regulations, and the prevention and elimination of IUU fishing, as well as enabling economically informed sourcing decisions based on product characteristics and market value. In this context, while Spain anchors the majority of its imports in regulated and traceable squid supplies, some sources may still carry potential risks that require careful oversight. Indeed, depending on their provenance, these commercially critical species may come both from well-regulated and unregulated fisheries.

Spain, however, has been at the forefront of implementation, consistently ranking among the leading Member States in the verification and scrutiny of catch certificates. At the same time, despite the major challenges faced by EU operators and importers, the recent rollout of the CATCH IT system represents a significant step forward in strengthening digital catch certification, traceability, and control across the EU. As the system continues to be refined, it is expected to further enhance consistency and effectiveness in the application of the Regulation. The EU IUU Regulation (Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008), in force since 2010, remains the most advanced import control system of its kind worldwide. However, the joint June 2025 LDAC-MAC advice<sup>16</sup> indicated that the implementation of the Regulation is still not robust or harmonised. Weaknesses in implementation by Member States may be undermining the effectiveness of the Regulation<sup>17</sup>.

Uneven enforcement and lack of effective implementation of the existing legal framework creates a distortion of the EU single market and undermines the principle of a level playing field for fishers, both Europeans and from third countries, who comply with fisheries management and labour standards, while rewarding those that externalise environmental and social costs. In the context of largely unregulated squid fisheries, weak and uneven controls risk reinforcing precisely the practices the Regulation was designed to prevent.

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<sup>16</sup> [MAC-LDAC Advice on “Urgent need for effective implementation of EU import control rules across Member States” \(27 June 2025\)](#)

<sup>17</sup> [EU IUU Fishing Coalition \(EJF, Oceana, The Nature Conservancy, The Pew Charitable Trusts and WWF\), “Beyond CATCH: Why EU import controls still fail to keep illegal seafood out of the market”](#)

Notwithstanding, a number of countries around the world have already taken steps to tackle unsustainable and opaque fishing practices in their national legal framework. Notably, Peru and Chile - both countries that rely on the jumbo flying squid fishery in the South Pacific - have enacted substantive regulations in recent years to regulate fishing effort within their national waters.

Peru has a dedicated ‘Regulation for the management of giant squid (*Dosidicus gigas*)’ enacted in 2011<sup>18</sup> and updated in 2025<sup>19</sup>. This has helped curb current fishing efforts, limit the fishery to national small-scale vessels, and introduce new fishing control measures<sup>20</sup>. Peru has also secured FIP for jumbo flying squid in 2023<sup>21</sup>, and had the fishery accepted into the Marine Stewardship Council’s Improvement Program in December 2025<sup>22</sup>.

Chile has a dedicated “Giant Squid Law”, enacted in 2019<sup>23</sup>. This banned the use of trawl nets and went as far as to amend Chile’s General Fisheries Act to specify squid jigging as the only authorised gear to catch jumbo flying squid<sup>24</sup>. This was followed by a rebound in squid fishery productivity since 2024.

## 2. Recommendations

In light of the above, as the EU is the world’s largest market of fishery and aquaculture products, the MAC and the LDAC consider that the European Commission should:

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<sup>18</sup> [CALAMASUR \(n.d.\) The jumbo flying squid fishery](#)

<sup>19</sup> [El Peruano \(2025\) Supreme Decree approving the Fisheries Management Regulations for the Giant Squid or Pota \(\*Dosidicus gigas\*\) resource](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Vasquez, P.R. \(11th March 2025\) New fishery management regulation for the jumbo flying squid \(\*Dosidicus gigas\*\): Current status, progress, and challenges](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Daly, N. \(20th October 2023\) Peruvian jumbo squid fishery FIP demonstrates effective collaboration between industry, government, Seafood Source](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Molinari, C. \(1st December 2025\) Peru’s jumbo flying squid fishery starts path toward MSC certification, Seafood Source](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Chile Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism \(2019\) Law 21134: Amends the General Law on Fishing and Aquaculture, in order to Regulate the Catch of Squid, Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile,](#)

<sup>24</sup> [Wuest, R.G. et al \(October 2024\) Productive impact of the squid law, Universidad de Chile](#)



- a) Promote enhanced scrutiny of squid imports originating from China and high-risk fleets targeting poorly managed or unregulated stocks, undertaking additional, detailed verifications of consignments as well as audits, and investigating suspected cases of IUU fishing and forced labour;
- b) Prohibit the import of squid products found to be associated with verified environmental, labour and human rights abuses, by rejecting consignments under the EU IUU Regulation and, where applicable, enforcing the mechanisms established under the forthcoming Forced Labour Regulation;
- c) Improve transparency and accountability of squid fishing activities, including through Fisheries Improvement Projects, and the adoption of interoperable digital traceability systems (e.g., standards developed by the Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability (GDST)) to enhance data sharing, verification, and supply chain integrity;
- d) Encourage stronger monitoring, control and enforcement, including effective implementation of CATCH to verify that catch certificates are authentic as well as the use of infringement procedures, in cases where Member States have repeatedly failed to implement the EU IUU Regulation with respect to the effective implementation of import controls;
- e) Encourage and streamline Member States' biennial reporting on the implementation of the EU IUU Regulation in order to improve data submission and better hold poor-performing Member States to account, and make the reports available online;
- f) Encourage Member States, as parties to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)'s Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) and CPCs of RFMOs with effective PSMs CMMs, to ensure that vessels fishing in unregulated areas are prioritised for inspection, to ensure that IUU caught fish does not reach the market and that States implement equitably effective measures on their domestic as well as foreign vessels - this



is required under PSMA and is particularly important given the high proportion of vessels landing at domestic ports, especially Chinese vessels<sup>25</sup>;

- g) Encourage third countries, including through IUU dialogues under the EU IUU Regulation, to strengthen their flag State responsibilities by improving oversight and control of their fishing vessels targeting squid in the high seas or in their EEZs, including labour and human rights in line with IMO, ILO, and FAO instruments on maritime safety, ensuring that bad actors are held accountable;
- h) Lead the effort in stronger management measures of squid fisheries in RFMOs, including the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Organization (SPRFMO) and the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC), through well tested and proven tools such as stock assessments, harvest strategies and improved collaboration and data-sharing between the RFMO membership;
- i) Request the FAO, at the thirty-seventh session of the Committee on Fisheries, in September 2026, to initiate formal expert discussions on how to bring insufficiently regulated or managed fisheries into robust regulation;
- j) Encourage coastal Member States to proceed with the efforts to establish an RFMO in the South West Atlantic, which would contribute to the sustainability of squid fisheries and tackle uncontrolled fisheries in areas beyond national jurisdiction – the corresponding founding Treaty should explicitly state that the new RFMO does not pre-empt any loss of sovereignty by the Contracting Parties or set any precedent or concession in relation to any ongoing territorial claims or disputes;
- k) Promote the development of further research on animal welfare in cephalopod fisheries, including the assessment of capture, handling, and slaughter practices, in line with scientific evidence on cephalopod sentience<sup>26</sup>, including work undertaken by

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<sup>25</sup> The Pew Charitable Trusts (2026) [Port State Measures Agreement Implementation Improves, Reducing Opportunities for Illegally Caught Fish to Enter Market](#)

<sup>26</sup> [UK Parliament \(2022\). Animal Welfare \(Sentience\) Act 2022](#)



Market Advisory Council



Long Distance Advisory Council

international scientific bodies such as the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)'s Working Group on Aquatic Animal Welfare (WGAAW).