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NOAA Will Work With Six Identified Nations to Address Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing

NOAA today submitted the first ever report to Congress identifying nations – France, Italy, Libya, Panama, the People's Republic of China, and Tunisia – whose fishing vessels were engaged in illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing in 2007 or 2008.

This opens the way for continued consultations between the U.S. government and officials of each of the six nations to encourage them to take corrective action to stop IUU fishing by their vessels.

“Illegal fishing is a global problem that is depleting fish stocks and hurting the economies of nations and the livelihoods of people who depend on sustainable fishing,” said Dr. Jim Balsiger, NOAA acting assistant administrator for NOAA’s Fisheries Service. “Our report is part of stepped up efforts called for by Congress to work with other nations to stop illegal fishing on shared fish stocks.”

Annual global economic losses due to IUU fishing are estimated to be about \$9 billion, according to an international task force on IUU fishing.

According to NOAA’s report, the identified nations had fishing vessels that did not comply with measures agreed to under various international regional fishery management organizations. In the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea, fishing vessels of identified nations were using illegal fishing gear, fishing during a closed season, or not complying with reporting requirements. Failure to report catch and effort data to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas hampers the ability of that regional fishery management organization to conduct vital stock assessments used to manage and rebuild stocks, such as the severely depleted eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna.

In the Pacific Ocean, an identified nation had vessels that violated an international rule requiring any vessel fishing for tuna in the eastern Pacific Ocean be listed in the vessel register for the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, the regional fishery management organization that manages tuna stocks in that area.

Today’s identification of nations follows two years in which NOAA’s Fisheries Service, working with the U.S. Department of State, conducted extensive outreach at bilateral and multilateral meetings to inform fishing nations of the new international measures to combat IUU fishing under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act.

The act, signed into law in 2007, amends the High Seas Driftnet Moratorium Protection Act to require the U.S. to strengthen international fishery management organizations and address IUU-fishing and the bycatch of protected living marine resources. Specifically, the Moratorium Protection Act now requires the Secretary of Commerce to identify in a biennial report to Congress those foreign nations whose fishing vessels are engaged in IUU fishing or fishing activities or practices that result in the bycatch of protected living marine resources. The act also now requires the Secretary to certify whether these identified nations have stopped IUU fishing and the bycatch of protected resources.

Today's identification will be followed by consultations to urge nations to adopt corrective measures. Following consultations, NOAA will formally certify each of the six nations either as adopting effective measures to stop IUU fishing, or having vessels engaged in IUU fishing. If a nation is found to be engaged in IUU fishing, that nation's vessels may be denied entry into U.S. ports and the President may prohibit imports of certain fish products from that nation or take other measures.

Today's report to Congress also includes information on the status of living marine resources around the globe and multilateral efforts to improve stewardship of these resources.

NOAA has also just released a proposed rule that outlines the procedures for identifying and certifying nations for IUU fishing and bycatch of protected living marine resources. A draft environmental assessment of the rule is also now available. To read the Report to Congress, the draft rule and environmental assessment, go to <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/msa2007/intlprovisions.html>

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