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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**NOAA Holds Public Hearings on Proposed Rule  
To Identify and Certify Nations Whose Vessels Fish Illegally**  
*First public hearing is March 16 at International Boston Seafood Show*

NOAA will hold the first of five public hearings on Mon., March 16, in Boston, to receive comments on a proposed rule to identify and certify nations with vessels engaged in illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing or bycatch of protected species, such as marine mammals and sea turtles.

"We look forward to hearing from the seafood industry and the general public about a new rule designed to help combat the global problem of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing," said Jim Balsiger, acting NOAA assistant administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "Illegal fishing undermines legal fishing by threatening the sustainability of fish stocks. This damages the marine ecosystem as well as local and national economies."

The six public hearings are also an opportunity to learn about a number of other international measures designed to combat IUU fishing internationally. Annual global economic losses due to IUU fishing are estimated to be about \$9 billion, according to an international task force.

The hearings on the IUU rule are scheduled as follows:

- **Boston, Mar. 16:** International Boston Seafood Show, Boston Convention & Exhibition Center, 415 Summer St., Meeting room 203 (9 a.m. to 11 a.m.)
- **Silver Spring, Md., Apr. 6:** Crowne Plaza Hotel, 8777 Georgia Ave., Lincoln Ballroom (6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.)
- **La Jolla, Calif., Apr. 13:** Southwest Fisheries Science Center, 3333 N. Torrey Pines Ct., Meeting room 370 (4 p.m. to 6 p.m.)
- **Seattle, Apr. 14:** Northwest Fisheries Science Center, 2725 Montlake Blvd. East, (4 p.m. to 6 p.m.)
- **Miami, May 12:** Miami Airport Marriott, 1201 NW LeJeune Road, Caribbean Room (6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.)

Other measures that will be discussed at the public hearings include a new certification program adopted by the European Community that will require seafood imports to Europe to be certified as legally caught. The new regulation goes into effect in 2010. The hearing is also a chance to learn about the International Trade Data System designed for efficient collection of required trade data and about a petition to NOAA calling for a U.S. ban on imports of swordfish from nations that fail to effectively reduce the bycatch of marine mammals in the longline fishery.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.