

# Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing activities in Ghana and the European Union seafood market

Suggestion for a potential Advice by the Market Advisory Council  
on strengthening the EU's import controls,  
using the example of Ghana

# Report

- Published July 2020
- Key findings:  
**Systemic illegal practices in Ghana's bottom trawl industry**
- **High risk of seafood caught by illegal fishing practices**  
→ *Potential to reach the EU market*
- Devastating impacts on local fishing communities

**EUROPE – A MARKET FOR ILLEGAL SEAFOOD FROM WEST AFRICA:**  
The case of Ghana's industrial trawl sector



A report produced by the Environmental Justice Foundation



# Report - Background

- **EU = Ghana's main market for fisheries exports**  
(c. 85% of the country's seafood export value in recent years)
- **2018: EU imported 33,574 tonnes of fisheries products from Ghana**  
(worth €157.3 million)
- **Ghanaian-flagged industrial trawlers** (licenced to catch demersal species) → authorised under EU health legislation to export fisheries products to the EU market
- Ghana's industrial trawl fleet: **exports between 2,000 - 3,500 tonnes of cuttlefish, octopus and squid to the EU**  
(esp. Portugal, Italy and Spain; worth c. €10 million)

# Report - Background

- **Exports from the industrial trawl fleet = less than 10%** of total seafood trade from Ghana to the EU
- Activities of these vessels = **disproportionate impact**
- Fishing vessels exporting seafood to the EU: **implicated in illegal 'saiko' trade**  
+ **other illegalities** (incursions into areas reserved for small-scale fishers)
- Research uncovered potential issues:
  - compliance of trawlers with EU health legislation
  - nationality requirements under Ghanaian law
  - legislation on foreign investment

# Key issue 1:

## Illegal trans-shipment at sea from trawlers to canoes

- Increase in the **illegal and highly destructive practice** known locally as '**saiko**'
- Saiko: demersal trawlers use mid-water trawl and under-sized mesh nets → **illegally target small pelagic species**, such as sardinella, reserved for small-scale fishers
- **Catches** (often include large numbers of juvenile fish) → **trans-shipped at sea to canoes** for onward sale to fishing communities
- **Prohibited under Ghanaian law** *but*:  
c. 100,000 t traded illegally in 2017 (value: up to US\$ 80 million)

## Key issue 2:

# Foreign beneficial ownership in breach of national law

- **72 industrial trawlers:** licensed to fish in Ghana's waters
- Vast majority (estimated 90%) = **beneficially owned by Chinese corporations**
- Use of **“front” companies**
- **Lack of transparency** around the ownership and control of vessels operating in Ghanaian waters
  - Hard to identify the beneficiaries of illegal activities
- **Sanctions imposed fail to have a deterrent effect** or go unpaid

## Key issue 3:

# Irregularities in relation to EU health requirements

- Fishing vessels authorised to export fisheries products to the EU market → in flag state's list of authorised establishments under EU health legislation
- Up to end of 2019: **9 trawlers operating under the Ghanaian flag appearing in China's list of authorised establishments**
- **Presence of Ghanaian-flagged vessels in China's list of authorised establishments:** potential 'double flagging' of these vessels to both Ghana and China
- Could mean: more products from Ghana's trawl fishery → find way to EU market as products of "Chinese", not Ghanaian origin

# Potential recommendations to the Commission

- **Cooperates with the government of Ghana through the EU-Ghana IUU Working Group** established after the lifting of the yellow card to address illegal and destructive fishing practices, with a **specific focus on ending saiko** and **improving transparency in Ghana's industrial fishing sector**.
- Is prepared to **use all tools foreseen under the EU IUU Regulation** if it is demonstrated that **Ghana has failed to discharge its duties under international law as flag, port, coastal or market state** and to remedy this situation as envisaged in Commissioner Sinkevičius' mission letter.
- **Brings, through the appropriate channels, IUU fishing risks to the attention of EU Member States, particularly Portugal, Italy and Spain, which receive the majority of cephalopod imports from Ghana, and requires them to increase scrutiny of fisheries imports stemming from Ghana's trawl sector**
- **Brings, through the appropriate channels, risks of IUU fishing and potential trade diversion to the attention of other EU Member States, such as France, Germany and the Netherlands, as well as the United Kingdom, which are major importers of tuna products from the country.**
- **Uses the information gathered from EU Member States' verifications** to best orient the actions under the auspices of the EU-Ghana IUU Working Group.



# Potential recommendations to the Commission

- **Brings IUU fishing risks to the attention of importers and other relevant seafood businesses in the EU,** particularly in the Member States mentioned above.
- **Cooperates with the governments of Ghana and China to ensure industrial trawlers exporting catches to the EU comply with EU health requirements,** as well as local laws on beneficial ownership and foreign investment.
- **Promotes the implementation of the EU IUU Regulation catch certificate IT system (CATCH) and advocates for it to become mandatory for EU Member States** as stated in the Commission's proposal for the revision of the Control Regulation.
- **Encourages the swift adoption of more comprehensive risk criteria and seamless data cross-checks during the next iterations of the CATCH IT system.**
- Ensures the application of standardised risk analysis criteria and procedures for the verification of high-risk catch certificates and inspection of consignments, taking into account best practices currently implemented in the EU.