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Greek Seas Under Threat of IUU: What Can Be Done?

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Key points

This policy brief outlines the causes of illegal fishing and its consequences. If this issue has not been resolved in the near future, many marine species may extinct and a considerable amount of profit will continue getting lost. This policy brief suggests four recommendations:

- Increase of the personnel and equipment in the Greek Port Authorities
- A database containing all the professional fishermen and amateurs registered
- The creation of a tracking system concerning the movement, identity and cargo of the vessels
- Stricter punishments and higher fines.

As a tool in the above recommendations it is suggested the contribution of EMFF.

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Introduction

Recently, more and more violations in the Greek seas are being noticed. With various ways such as dynamites, electronic monitoring systems, nets etc., the illegal fishers are managing to fish a vast amount of marine products and to sell them in the market without any vouchers. So the consequences of this problem are being visible in the marine environment and the Greek economy, as the fish stocks have been reduced dramatically and there is hazard of distinction.



Moreover, the phenomenon of the Illegal Unreported and Unregulated Fishing is very significant, because our country is a coastal one, a considerable number of its citizens are engaged to the fishing sector and more and more people consume fish products which creates a need for more of them.

This problem mainly concerns the Greek professional fishers and their families as the majority of the fishing businesses are family ones. Last but not least, this issue concerns the Greek economy as our state gets a significant profit by the exports of fishing products.

Finally, according to the “COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1005/2008 of 29 September 2008 establishing a Community system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, amending Regulations (EEC) No 2847/93, (EC) No 1936/2001 and (EC) No 601/2004 and repealing Regulations (EC) No 1093/94 and (EC) No 1447/1999”, Chapter 1”General Provisions” Article 1 “ Subject matter and scope”, Paragraph 2 “Each Member State shall take appropriate measures, in accordance with Community law, to ensure the effectiveness of that system. It shall place sufficient means at the disposal of its competent authorities to enable them to perform their tasks as laid down in this Regulation.”¹

So, it is the duty of the Greek state to check if every boat and fisherman has the necessary papers and the products are legal in order to protect the fishermen who obey the rules and are financially depended on it. Although this issue is very important, no substantially tackling measures have been taken.

Causes & Consequences

Before proceeding to the various consequences of the issue of IUU Fishing, it is important to examine in depth the aspects of the problem in order to understand why this kind of violations occur.

Firstly, Port Authorities deprive from sufficient personnel and therefore not enough controls are conducted in our seas. In spite of the existed legislation, there is also discrepancy between the Port Authorities as far as the identification of a single policy for the marine patrols is concerned. This lack of the sea monitoring and those disagreements boost illegal actions like fishing through the period of reproduction or in protected zones, enables amateurs to disobey the legislation and to fish like professionals.

Secondly, the statistical figures for illegal fishing are inadequate, as the Fisheries Data-Collection National Program either does not function at all, either does not work systematically. Also there is no organized and updated fishermen’s registry. Therefore, a

¹ COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1005/2008 of 29 September 2008. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32008R1005&from=EL>



conclusion on the situation cannot be reached in order to diminish effectively the problem, to arrest easily the delinquents and protect the professionals, because with no evidence the issue cannot be recognized and combated.

Lastly, some fishermen resort to illegal fishing, because of their resentment towards the vast bureaucracy which impedes them from buying new equipment or generally from developing their job. The request for more and more papers in order to obtain a subsidy leads sometimes fishers to gain profit by the illegal way.

In 2017, 1.410 acts were published and fines of total value of 938.960 euros were imposed as much in professionals as in amateurs. Additionally, the Surveillance Center of Fishery has recorded 442 identified violations. For a country which occupies almost 24.759 fishers and comes 2nd in EU rankings concerning the employment on the fisheries sector (Table1), has 285 fishing ports and it has the biggest fleet in EU, these numbers are of a great importance and the state should take them into consideration as this issue has a variety of dimensions.

First and foremost, the national legislation prohibits amateur fishermen from using professional fishery tools and selling their catches in fish markets or taverns. However, many of them are using their “hobby” in order to be financially profited by it. As a consequence, the market gets saturated, the professional fishers have nowhere to sell their products and lot of tonnage of high quality fishes are thrown away. It should be underlined that these actions of unfair competition affect negatively legal fishers and their families who are financially depended on fishery. The saturation of the market with illegal fish products makes legal professionals depriving from a vital for them income.

This problem has also not only financial, but also environmental impacts on our country. On the one hand, the state does not gather any taxes from the illegal fish sales and from the authorized permission to practice the profession. On the other hand, the throwing of fishes aggravates the already burdened by the overfishing situation. We have to underline also the fact that in the Nome of Aitolokarnania exists the 42% of Greece’s lagoons where rare and sole marine species are developed and due to the illegal fishing tend to distinct. So our country will automatically lose the comparative advantage of exporting them.

Furthermore, by the illegal fishing a significant amount of fishes which could be contributed to the improvement of our position in EU and our exports are leaked in the market without giving any profit to our country. Although, Greece has the biggest fleet in the EU(Table2), our total catches are 64.431 tonnes which reflects only the 1,25% of the total catches of EU and Spain (18,67%), Denmark (13,80%), UK (12,76%) and France take over the first places. With the United Kingdom leaving EU, a great opportunity window, concerning the contribution of the Member States in EU’s total catches, opens which our country has to exploit. However, this scenario could be possible, only if our country combats the IUU fishing. Moreover, in 2017, our exports were 678 million Euros,



while the imports were 590 million Euros. Although we have a surplus in this productive sector, the difference could have been bigger and the state income would have been increased through the taxes from the illegal fishers and from the fish restaurants, if the illegal catches had been reported.

The above consequences of IUU Fishing reflect the need of implementing some measures with the aim of eliminating this issue.

Employment in the fisheries, aquaculture and processing sector (measured in full-time equivalents)

MS	Fisheries	Aquaculture	Processing
	2015	2014*	2016
EL**	24.759	4.640	1.235
ES	29.322	5.946	17.693
FR	5.951	9.114	11.218
IT	21.077	1.695	4.002
PT	8.323	799	6.913
UK	8.034	2.761	13.637
* Data cover only marine aquaculture			
** Persons employed			



The fishing fleet of the Member States (2017)						
MS	Number of vessels	%	Gross tonnage	%2	Engine power in kw	%3
BE	72	0,10	13.814	0,90	45.051	0,70
BG	1.894	2,30	6.111	0,40	54.981	0,90
DK	2.222	2,70	68.625	4,40	209.689	3,30
DE	1.392	1,70	62.116	3,90	135.630	2,20
EE	1.590	1,90	14.217	0,90	45.452	0,70
IE	2.061	2,50	62.373	4,00	187.629	3,00
EL	15.057	18,10	71.313	4,50	427.912	6,80
ES	9.231	11,10	335.179	21,30	788.292	12,60
FR	6.567	7,90	174.067	11,00	974.297	15,50
HR	7.553	9,10	46.839	3,00	360.636	5,80
IT	12.275	14,80	157.274	10,00	982.597	15,70
CY	804	1,00	3.465	0,20	37.114	0,60
LV	678	0,80	30.120	1,90	50.200	0,80
LT	144	0,20	40.877	2,60	48.136	0,80
MT	927	1,10	6.384	0,40	69.157	1,10
NL	849	1,00	131.936	8,40	312.665	5,00
PL	839	1,00	25.322	1,60	73.950	1,20
PT	7.952	9,60	92.794	5,90	353.874	5,60
RO	155	0,20	1.371	0,10	6.065	0,10
SI	185	0,20	725	0,05	10.394	0,20
FI	3.197	3,80	16.426	1,00	174.117	2,80
SE	1.266	1,50	25.595	1,60	149.886	2,40
UK	6.207	7,50	189.485	12,00	768.247	12,30
EU-28	83.117	100	1.576.428	100	6.265.971	100

Source : EU fishing fleet register situation as in September 2017

Recommendations

- **Increase of the Port Authorities' personnel and of their equipment**
An increase of the Port Authorities' personnel and of their equipment such as more vessels and new computer systems, is very essential as it would result in more marine controls. The frequency of the patrols will trace the violations on time and gradually diminish them. The legal professional fishers would also feel safer and be able to work without actions of unfair competition.
- **Creation of database**
It should be created a database which would contain all the professional fishermen and amateurs registered. That information would be mutual for all Greek Port Authorities in order their cooperation and communication to be enhanced. So they could track easier the illegal fishers who are not registered in the system and identify a single policy for the marine patrols for making them more effective.
- **Creation of a tracking system**
A tracking system could be created, which will exchange digital signals between the vessels and the Port Authorities' vessel system. Through it, each vessels' movement, the identity, the cargo on the boat will be shown in the system. As a result, the Authorities could easily check vessels' legality.



➤ **Increase of the fines**

The increase of the fines is also a significant proposal with deterrent effects. By declaring stricter punishments, a considerable number of violators may make second thoughts and stop acting in an illegal way.

Conclusion

All the above proposals can become feasible because of a very helpful tool, the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.

Until 2020 the fishery sector will be sponsored a funding program of 523,4 million euros and the total contribution of the fund in Greece is 388.778 euros which is the 6,76% of the total contribution of the Fund to the member states.

Additionally, on the project in the sector of Common Fish Policy, 92.088.225 euros has been contributed by the Fund and one of the aims of this project is the support of the surveillance of fishery and of the implementation of the fishing regulation. The way how that money will be spent depends on the local authorities who have to choose in which projects and solutions want to provide the budget.

So, our country has a huge opportunity to eliminate the illegal fishing and enhance the control of our seas and provide us a long term profit by reducing the illegal actions in the seas following a sustainable fishery strategy.



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