

# Illegal Fishing and Human Rights Abuses at Sea



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Our oceans are home to marine wildlife, support coastal economies, and provide millions of people with a critical source of protein. However, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing undermines efforts to responsibly manage and protect our oceans. Exceeding catch limits, falsifying documents and fishing in protected areas are all examples of IUU fishing. It is off the books, ignores domestic and international fisheries laws, and amounts to estimated losses of \$10 billion to \$23 billion per year.

IUU fishing undercuts honest fishermen and seafood businesses who are forced to compete with illegally caught fish that enter the market. IUU fishing can also be intertwined with other criminal activities like document forgery; money laundering; forced labor; and human, drug and wildlife trafficking. IUU fishing vessels are already evading laws and oversight to gain higher profits and, in some cases, are more willing to further drive down costs by exploiting workers through forced labor.

## Human Trafficking in the Seafood Industry

**Human trafficking** is the fastest growing transnational criminal enterprise in the world, generating \$150 billion annually and enslaving an estimated 21.9 million people. Human trafficking in fisheries includes the transfer and containment of persons on board vessels, where they are forced to work as crew by means of violence, threat or debt.

Victims of **forced labor** are often isolated in inhumane conditions on board fishing vessels and trapped at sea for extended periods of time. Crew members can be subjected to a range of injustices, including physical, psychological and sexual abuse; unsanitary and unsafe working conditions; 20-hour workdays; lack of pay; and even murder.

**Poor oversight, weak regulations and lack of transparency make commercial fishing a vulnerable sector for illicit activity like IUU fishing, human trafficking and forced labor.**

## Transparency at Sea

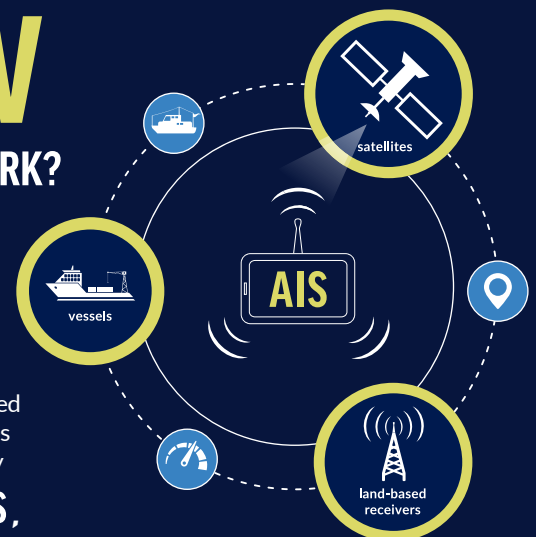
With increased transparency, we can see what is happening beyond our shores and tackle some of the threats facing our oceans.

**Automatic Identification System (AIS)** is a public tracking system that improves vessel safety at sea and can help governments and management organizations monitor and track vessel movements. Powerful tools like the Global Fishing Watch map, which uses this data to show the public when and where vessels are likely fishing worldwide, make it harder for fishing vessels to hide beyond the horizon.

## HOW DOES AIS WORK?

AIS devices automatically send a ship's **direction, speed, location and identification** information to other AIS devices, land-based receivers and satellites as frequently as every

**2-30 SECONDS,**  
**UP TO 43,200 TIMES A DAY.**



# Suspicious Activities at Sea

Detecting behaviors that are associated with IUU fishing, forced labor and human trafficking can help identify specific vessels that may warrant further investigation or inspection. AIS avoidance, port evasion and extended time at sea are generally regarded as suspicious by intergovernmental organizations, international organizations, other NGOs and researchers, and can be considered indicators of possible IUU fishing and human rights abuses at sea.

## AIS AVOIDANCE

**✱ AIS Signal Seemed to Disappear**

Data Source: Global Fishing Watch

Vessel operators can deliberately turn off their AIS device to appear invisible to public tracking systems, sometimes to conceal suspicious or illegal activities.

This vessel, which has a known history of illegal fishing and involvement in human rights abuse cases, appeared to stop transmitting its AIS 77 times over a nearly five-year period. The Argentine Coast Guard then captured the vessel for fishing illegally inside Argentina's waters.

## PORT EVASION

**Illegal Transshipment**

Data Source: Global Fishing Watch

Some vessels involved in criminal activities may avoid entering ports of countries that are known to inspect ships and enforce fishing laws, and instead target ports that are unable or unwilling to uphold these standards.

After conducting an illegal transshipment, this vessel, which was associated with human trafficking, moved from port-to-port in an apparent effort to unload its catch, which was thwarted by countries sharing information about the vessel.

## EXTENDED TIME AT SEA

**TIME AT SEA: up to 20 months**

Data Source: Global Fishing Watch

While transshipping – the exchange of items between two vessels at sea – can be legal, it enables ships to stay out at sea for extended periods and away from the scrutiny of port officials. This can facilitate overfishing, IUU fishing and human rights abuses where victims may be trapped at sea for more than a year.

A victim of alleged human trafficking perished in 2011 on this vessel, which on a later voyage, remained at sea for an extended period of up to 20 months.

## Recommendations

The lack of transparency in the fishing industry allows IUU fishing, human rights abuses and other criminal activities to continue in the dark. By requiring greater transparency of fishing practices and traceability of products, we can help stop IUU fishing, forced labor, human trafficking and other abuses at sea, leading to more responsibly managed fisheries worldwide. Oceana recommends:

- **Ban transshipment at sea:** Governments and regional fishery management organizations should require that transshipping only occurs at ports where authorities can closely monitor the exchange.
- **Expand vessel transparency:** Governments and regional fishery management organizations should require the constant use of tamper-resistant, public vessel tracking devices.
- **Increase publicly available vessel information:** Governments and regional fishery management organizations should maintain publicly available, up-to-date vessel registries that include unique vessel identification numbers, licenses and permit payments, as well as information about the vessel's managers, operators and owners.
- **Share information about vessels engaged in forced labor:** Intergovernmental organizations should create a shared list of vessels with histories of human rights abuses to help facilitate information sharing and enforcement.
- **Improve monitoring and enforcement:** Governments should monitor and enforce relevant fishing regulations for their fleets worldwide. Coastal states should monitor and control foreign vessels that they allow to fish in their national waters.