

**U.S. Interagency Working Group on IUU Fishing  
Public Listening Session  
July 15, 2021 / 3:30 pm ET**

Coordinator: Welcome and thank you for standing by. At this time, all participants' lines are in a listen-only mode until today's question and answer session. At that time you may press star 1 on your phone to ask a question.

This conference is being recorded. If you have any objections, please disconnect your line at this time. I would now like to turn the conference over to Deirdre Warner-Kramer. Thank you. You may begin.

Deirdre Warner-Kramer: Hello and good afternoon. Welcome to everybody who is joining us here for this, that is the second public listening session we've convened to share some information and ensure that we're getting good feedback and ability to connect on the key work that a bunch of U.S. agencies are doing under the auspices of the Maritime SAFE Act Interagency Working Group on IUU Fishing.

Thank you all for joining us. We're going to be focusing today in particular on the information related to the priority regions that have been determined by the working group to be consistent with the Act and a little bit on the next steps.

But before we dive into the details on that, I would like to turn the floor over to the chair of the Working Group, Paul Doremus from NOAA, to offer some welcoming comments. Paul, please.

Dr. Paul Doremus: Thank you, Deirdre. And it is wonderful to connect with all of you today. Thank you for dialing in and joining us in the discussion and providing us with some initial feedback on this really important topic that we're bringing forward here today on priority regions and flag states.

I want to start by thanking the task group that has conducted this work, which has been a substantial lift. They started off first developing a framework and whole process for how to systematically go about identifying priority regions and priority flag states and then conducting the analysis that you're going to hear about today.

And I'm particularly grateful to the Department of State and the leadership there with Conny Arvis as well as Deirdre, who have really shepherded this process over a number of months.

And this is a really significant initial step for us. I think as many of you know, this is going to focus our work. It gives us a geographic focus and a mechanism for orchestrating our efforts and our collaboration with non-governmental partners and collaborators on such areas as capacity building activities for just one example.

And we are particularly enthused to have the opportunity and look at ways that we talked about in one of our previous public sessions where we can concentrate our efforts with non-governmental groups and organizations to be more effective in our collective effort to combat IUU fishing activities.

And this listening session is a start in that direction. It's getting us launched and it is also a pretty key element of our five-year strategic plan, which we are also working on, and look forward to engaging the public on that activity as well as it gets a little bit further down the line.

But we have prioritized this particular work product. And it's a great pleasure to have the opportunity to introduce it to you here today and to hear your initial views and to take that into consideration as we further refine and focus our efforts going forward.

Before we get underway, I do want to also introduce, and provide an opportunity for any introductory remarks from, our two co-chairs. We very much operate this interagency effort as a team, and I'm very grateful for the contributions by Rear Admiral Scott Clendenin from the Coast Guard as well as Conny Arvis from the Department of State.

And I just wanted to see if they had any introductory comments too before we get underway with our formal agenda topic. So let me first turn to Admiral Clendenin.

Admiral Clendenin: Thank you, Paul. This is Scott Clendenin, U.S. Coast Guard. It's a real pleasure to join all of you for this forum and to be one of the newest co-chairs here in this effort with Commandant Admiral Schultz. Counter IUU fishing is a priority mission for the Coast Guard along with all my interagency colleagues.

And certainly he has made it a priority of my office in a response policy, essentially the operational policy, to make sure that we put our best foot forward in this mission set.

And so the work here, as Paul mentioned, the work here of the Priority Regions and Flag States Task Group is a key, crucial step. And I also know that the public-private organizations in the way we go after IUU fisheries will be absolutely critical for this mission set.

And so I very much join Paul in looking forward to hearing your perspectives on this work. So thank you, Paul.

Dr. Paul Doremus: All right. I was talking with the mute on. I do that just about every meeting. Just saying thank you, Admiral, for your comments and I wanted to turn to Conny Arvis and see if she has any additional opening comments before we get underway with our overview of Priority Region of Flag States' output. Thank you.

Conny Arvis: This is Conny Arvis. Thank you, Paul, thank you, Scott, for those introductory remarks. I am the Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Fisheries, Oceans and Polar Affairs. And I think I am the newest co-chair here for the working group.

I'm very, very pleased to be part of this exciting opportunity. I want to echo the thanks of both of my co-chairs to those of you in the public participating this afternoon. I think on behalf of the State Department's leadership, that the lines of effort of this working group are a priority for the department and will continue to be so in the years to come.

So I am appreciative of the opportunity to participate today and I look forward to the conversation. Oh, and I apologize for being only a voice on the phone. The technology has eluded the State Department today, but we'll get it right next time. Over. Thank you.

Dr. Paul Doremus: Deirdre, back to you.

Deidre Warner-Kramer: Thanks very much, Paul. And thanks to you and to the other two co-chairs for both those introductory remarks and also hitting some of the really important points, especially the idea behind what we will be talking about here, these priority regions and eventually the priority flag states.

This is a key piece of the legislation woven throughout all of the sections of the Maritime SAFE Act itself where it calls on different agencies in different parts of the government, working together, working with our stakeholder partners and working with our partners overseas to take certain efforts to build partnerships, share information, all of those things.

But the idea is that although we need to tackle IUU fishing wherever it occurs, we also need to prioritize and we need to focus. And so that's what we'll be talking about today, where some of that initial prioritization and focus will be.

So with that, I would like to turn things back over to Conny. And we have shared in advance with the invitation to this listening session a one page sheet that has essentially the summary of the work in determining the priority regions. But we'll have a little presentation now to offer a little bit more detail about what went into that and what it all means and what the next steps will be going forward.

After that, then we would like to open it up for the comments from everybody else who is participating. And thanks to those who have already put themselves in the queue.

And we will call on you in turn as well as thanks to the folks that have sent some written notes ahead of time. But there will also be an opportunity for any of the folks on the phone, even if you haven't signed up ahead of time, to be able to offer some thoughts and some reactions.

The input, and especially some of the information that the stakeholder groups that you represent, can share about what may already be happening in ways that we can try to get more information as well as build those partnerships is going to be so important. So we'll keep coming back to that over the course of this presentation and then again in the public comments.

So with that, let me see if I can get the presentation up and running. And once that happens, we'll tell Conny since she can't see it and she can start from there.

Conny Arvis:      Okay.

Deirdre Warner-Kramer:      Conny, I think we have the slides up and we're ready for you.

Conny Arvis:      Okay. Thank you so much, Deirdre. So hopefully you all are seeing a slide that says the Priority Regions and Flag State Task Group. I'm very grateful to Deirdre, who is able to access and push through the slides.

As has already been mentioned, the Department of State has been leading a task group made up of a number of the agencies under the broader working group.

The task group is focused on determining the priority regions and flag states as outlined in the Act. We started with establishing a framework based on specific text the Maritime SAFE Act uses to define priority flag state and priority regions.

We then worked to distill the key pieces of the Act's definition into elements and questions, including specific decision points and data sources that we can use to assess various regions to help facilitate our assessment.

The framework was shared in October of 2020 and using that framework, the task group has since successfully determined the priority regions we will go over today.

Next slide, Deirdre.

Deirdre Warner-Kramer:      You got it. It's there.

Conny Arvis:      Okay. Thank you. The key starting point was the Act's definition of priority region, which are those regions at high risk for IUU fishing activity or the entry of illegally caught seafood into their markets, and that lack the capacity to fully address the situation.

The group then used the questions in the framework to evaluate various regions around the world against the key elements of the definition based on the information that we had available.

In the end we determined that 12 regions met the key elements under the definition although the task group found that the specific challenges and the

availability of specific information varied quite a bit across the different regions.

The 12 regions were then organized into three tiers to help prioritize U.S. government activities. Next slide, Deirdre.

Deirdre Warner-Kramer: You got it.

Conny Arvis: Thank you. Okay. You all should be seeing a map. This map shows the general areas of the 12 priority regions with the Tier 1 regions in purple, the Tier 2 regions in yellow and the Tier 3 regions in blue.

For each the available information signaled that IUU fishing was affecting the country's markets and waters in these areas and that limited institutional or operational capacity among the countries within that region were hindering the ability to effectively combat that IUU fishing.

The tiers are intended to help steer and prioritize U.S. work with all of these regions, recognizing that we need to be strategic with our limited human and operational resources.

For the four regions in the top tier, the working group determined that there was both clear information about the challenges resulting from IUU fishing and existing opportunities for U.S. partnerships and activities that could address those challenges.

Those in the lower tiers reflect areas where either specific information or specific opportunities for cooperative work or both were less clear.

That doesn't mean that our future work will be limited to only those regions in the top tier. Under the Act, U.S. agencies and our partners are to look for opportunities to build law enforcement cooperation, share information and support training and capacity building with each of these regions.

Let's take a look at each tier. Next slide, Deirdre. Thank you.

So hopefully you have Tier 1 in front of you. And here are the four regions included in the top tier. As noted, the working group determined that for the regions in Tier 1 there was both clear information about the challenges resulting from IUU fishing and existing opportunities for U.S. partnerships and activities that could address those challenges.

We've included an illustrative list of the coastal countries, territories and entities within each region to help give a better sense of the geographic scope. But we did want to be clear that this isn't intended to imply that there are specific IUU fishing issues related to all of these countries, or that all would be targets for the U.S. government capacity building programs or partnerships.

Also the order of the regions within each tier is not a reflection of the prioritization. All regions within each tier are equally prioritized. Let's go to the next slide.

So Tier 2, here are the five regions that make up the second tier. These Tier 2 regions reflect areas where there is specific information about IUU fishing concerns and opportunities for cooperative work. But they were either less clear or less well developed than in the Tier 1 regions.

U.S. agencies and other partners are looking for opportunities to build law enforcement cooperation, share information and support training and capacity building within these regions. Next slide.

Tier 3, so here are the three regions in Tier 3. The regions in this tier where specific data information about IUU fishing challenges is more limited at this time, where the U.S. government has fewer established partnerships and programs related to combating IUU fishing.

We hope our conversation today, in fact, can help us better understand the current and future landscape of private sector programs and all the priority regions but particularly those in Tiers 2 and 3. But we welcome any insights that you may have on the scope of IUU fishing issues in the Tier 3 regions in particular. Next slide, which would bring us to next steps.

So determining the priority regions is the first step. Now the task group is focused on preparing guidance for Department of State overseas missions in priority regions to support capacity building, training and information sharing to combat IUU fishing activities.

In the priority regions in particular in order to further conversations around combating IUU fishing, our embassies will be asked to consider establishing working groups with the relevant host government ministries and authorities as well as local civil society.

In addition, the process of applying the framework to our flag states' analysis is ongoing. The definition in the Act notes that priority flag states are those who have the will but lack the capacity to address IUU fishing by their fleets.

Consistent with that definition, our focus is on determining where U.S. partnerships and activities will be most welcome and useful in helping key flag states who want to act but are struggling to uphold their responsibilities.

In other words countries that we determine to be priority flag states should be those that are most willing to engage and where there is the highest potential for true value creation.

Finally we are working to determine the appropriate intervals to revisit the priority list as we receive new information. We are also looking at how we

will track progress made as well as the success of U.S. cooperation and capacity building efforts.

Thank you for your attention and we look forward to hearing all of your comments. I'm going to - before turning this back to Deirdre, I just wanted to make a quick comment to give full credit to her and the team that she works with on all of the great work that has come to the presentation that you're seeing today. With that, over to you, Deirdre.

Deirdre Warner-Kramer: Thank you. Thank you very much, Conny. So we hope that this has helped to provide a little bit more information and context behind these lists of priority regions and especially the tiers that we sorted them into is intended to mean.

We would just like to emphasize a couple of the key points. And the first is that we have sorted those as a way of helping to strategize. But to underscore the point that Conny made, which is it doesn't mean we'll only work with those in the top tier. It doesn't mean that those who may be in either Tier 2 or Tier 3 are areas where there aren't opportunities for us to find new ways to work better.

But it really reflects a little bit again not only on strategy but also information. And that's where we're hoping that our partners can come in to really help us build the information that we need both to understand what is happening in those regions but also what opportunities we might have either working directly among all of our different agencies or helping to support efforts that our partners may already be undertaking in those regions.

So at this point, I would like to open up the session for public comment and hear what all of you have to say. I would like to remind everybody that in the invitation to this session, we have set out three questions to help spark some thinking. So let me share those with you again.

The first is we would really like to understand better what is the landscape of the private sector programs in all of these priority regions. Tell us, please, if your organization is currently engaging in counter IUU fishing projects in these regions or you're working on other related fisheries management activities.

And again we want to hear about it for all the regions, but especially for those that are in Tiers 2 and 3 where the information was a little harder to come by. We would like to hear about that.

Secondly, we also would like to better understand the future landscape of private sector programs in these regions. So if there are things that are not already underway but are in the pipeline or in the planning stages and especially places where there may be opportunities for partnerships or for value addition or for amplifying efforts, please, we'd like to hear about those.

And then finally, we would like to hear if any of the participants on this call have additional information not just about capacity building, training and partnership programs in these regions, but with a special focus on Tier 3 where we found the information about what specifically may be happening on the water and in the markets in those regions. If there's any additional information that could be shared or information sources, we'd be very grateful for that.

So with those three questions in mind, but also just in general, we will be interested to hear what you have to say. I will turn things back over to the operator to walk us through the process for public comment. And we will turn off our microphones and turn on our ears and hear what you have to say.

**Coordinator:** Thank you. We will now begin the public comment section of this conference. If you would like to enter the queue, please press star 1 on your phone and record your name clearly.

We would like your name to be able to introduce your question. Again, if you'd like to enter the queue for public comment, please press star 1. If you'd like to remove yourself from the queue, please press star 2.

We did have a few individuals sign up pre-conference. Benjamin from the World Wildlife Fund, your line is now open if you'd like to go ahead, sir.

**Benjamin Freitas:** World Wildlife Fund. Thank you for the opportunity to provide some comments. As we know, IUU fishing is most problematic in areas with weak governance, enforcement and monitoring control and surveillance. Forced labor, human trafficking, child labor and other major human rights violations often co-occur with IUU fishing.

This means that illegal fishery products are still being imported into most countries and sometimes re-exported without having to face any scrutiny or provide information on their origin to establish legality. The profits these products continue to generate perpetuate the over exploitation of marine resources and the unmitigated misery those forced to work on this must endure.

WWF recently conducted a baseline study on the status of electronic information systems for vessel tracking, vessel monitoring, recording of catches and supply chain traceability as a proxy for good governance measures for the 20 largest fishing and exporting countries in the world.

Those countries with the weakest systems in place included China, India, Indonesia, Vietnam and Mexico. Virtually no countries had any systems in place for supply chain traceability, which provides easy pathways and opportunities for the recall of products laundered into supply chains no matter where they were caught and then exported to lucrative markets like the U.S.

The U.S. International Trade Commission recently estimated that the U.S. imported \$2.4 billion worth of seafood derived from IUU fishing

annually. China was estimated to be the largest source of IUU imports. And many vessels from the Chinese distant water fishing fleets have been linked to IUU fishing around the world, including throughout the Pacific Ocean, in the Atlantic Ocean in proximity to Africa and South America.

Additionally working conditions on these vessels vary with the number of reports noting cases of hazardous conditions and forced labor.

Recent analysis of the AIS of these fleets, for example, have highlighted their targeting and likely illegal catch of squid off the coast of Argentina, for example, as a product. They used imports from China, which is not subject to any reporting requirements under the seafood import monitoring program.

Seafood supply chains are notoriously opaque and importers and vendors of fish are generally unaware of the role they play in buying and selling illegally caught products. We will never have enough cops on the water to stop IUU.

However one of the most effective solutions to combating illegal fishing and preventing illegal products from entering the U.S. is by establishing catch documentation, traceability and transparency requirements like AIS for imported products that can help industry and government better identify the legal origin of products and incentivize change for better management and stronger monitoring, control and surveillance measures.

Even if the current implementation is not yet effective at blocking these imports, NOAA's seafood import monitoring program provides the foundation and the tools for the U.S. to better detect and prevent illegal imports from entering.

(Unintelligible) currently accounts for only about...

Coordinator: Thirty seconds remaining, sir.

Benjamin Freitas: Okay. The U.S. should take a whole of government approach to work collectively to strengthen and expand SIMP so the information collected, including AIS, can also be used in partnership with other agencies like CBP, State Department and Coast Guard. We also screen the information collected and help identify the origin of products that may have been created with forced labor.

The U.S. should also strengthen the process for identifying nations engaged in IUU fishing, which should develop new requirements for due diligence plans and risk assessments of supply chains to ensure that products have not been made with forced labor.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. We have some additional comments that we will submit in writing.

Coordinator: Thank you, sir. Next up, we are going to have Amanda Ingram from CSIS. Ma'am, your line is now open. You have five minutes.

**Amanda Ingram:** Thank you. Thank you very much for having me. And thank you for all this great information. My presentation actually goes along the lines of Ben Freitas from WWF regarding human rights abuses at sea as well as all of the forced labor concerns that are associated with IUU fishing.

But really just addressing IUU fishing not only as a fisheries management and economic perspective but also as a security threat on a global scale, not just to the United States, but for the entire world, as many of these IUU fishing fleets are associated with distant water fleets and trans-shipments, which is highly associated with IUU fishing around the world, and also military militias around the world, particularly prevalent in the South China Sea and areas, you know, congregating in the South Pacific areas.

We're seeing large distant water fishing fleets congregating around South America and creating these infrastructure capital investments in the ports in these developing countries, which also projects soft power and hard power in the event of conflict in these developing countries around the world.

And that goes for both the west and east sides of South America and Africa and maybe even some of these areas in the Tier 3 regions of some of these distant water fishing countries, which have the capital investment capacity to establish port access to bypass regulations as well as create poor access to import their products throughout the world, focusing this on, you know, a national sovereignty issue around the world for these developing nations as well as any of the potential military conflict that could arise from having those ports around the world as well.

In addition the national security aspect of it in terms of every single country that these distant water fishing fleets are going into the exclusive economic zones of these countries, the national security threat that that poses for both our allies and our partnering nations.

And taking a look at in terms of the agencies that we could cooperate with, not just agencies that are involved with fisheries management and NGOs and enforcement capacity for fisheries management, but also national security defense agencies such as the Coast Guard and the naval defense agencies around the world where we have capacity building opportunities to partner with other nations where we potentially have influence in those regions, such as, you know, SOUTHCOM and near the Philippines and places where IUU fishing is particularly prevalent, but we also have an influence in our defense capacity down in that region.

And then just also looking at it in terms of a food security problem. As we all know, IUU fishing has a significant impact on the food security throughout the world. So just looking at this in terms of sovereignty, national security and food security and being able to partner with the appropriate agencies on the security front to create that capacity building and regulatory pluralism to tackle this problem as well as human rights agencies as well throughout the world.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. And I also submitted some comments that you guys can refer to as well. Thank you.

**Coordinator:** Thank you for your time, ma'am. If Sally Yozell is on the line, could you please press star 0 so I can see your line? Sally, could you please press star 0? I do see you, Sally. Stand by. Opening your line now. We have Sally Yozell from the Stimson Center. Your line is now open.

**Jack Stuart:** Good afternoon. My name is Jack Stuart, and I'm speaking on behalf of Sally Yozell today. I am a research analyst with the Environmental Security Program at the Stimson Center, a nonpartisan research institution in Washington, D.C.

As we all know, estimates suggest that 20% to 50% of the global fish catch is either illegally caught, mislabeled, never reported, or from a fishery without any management. IUU fishing undermines the competitiveness of domestic fishermen, weakens the economic and food security of coastal communities.

To combat IUU fishing, a whole of government approach is needed to shine a light across the seafood sector and enhance traceability efforts to safeguard fish stocks and track seafood throughout the supply chain.

Transparency is one of the key tasks of the interagency working group and a robust and effective traceability program must start at home.

In 2016 NOAA launched the Seafood Import Monitoring Program, a risk-based traceability program designed to keep IUU fish out of the U.S. market. Last year, Stimson published a report on SIMP implementation which highlighted several shortcomings and offered recommendations on how to strengthen SIMP implementation.

We are now working with stakeholders and members of the Interagency Task Force on recommendations to strengthen SIMP through enhanced technology, growing targeted inspection (and boating capacity), adopting electronic catch documentation, expanding CC's coverage and improving interagency cooperation.

Stimson is also aiding the government of Japan to establish their tracing program and are working with the EU as they fine tune their program.

As more countries develop seafood traceability systems to combat IUU fishing, particularly across Asia, the U.S. has an opportunity to lead in this fight and provide global collaboration. The more major markets who acquire the first catch documentation scheme, the more IUU fish will be kept from entering the global market and to reiterate that work starts at home in getting our systems being robust, effective and efficient.

In 2019 the Stimson Center also released a report which shone a light on distant water fleets, an expansive but opaque industry. To combat IUU fishing, we need to highlight greater transparency throughout the seafood supply chain, including an issue such as vessel ownership and access agreements, mandating tracking systems and implementing and expanding the ports that measure agreements are key.

Throughout this research, we found that IUU fishing driven by distant water fleets is decimating fish stocks in Western Africa waters, costing billions of dollars across the region each year.

The Stimson Center is now working to bring together different stakeholders to better understand distant water fleet operations in Tier 1 regions as highlighted by the working group.

For example, Chinese vessels comprise over 40% of the world's distant water fleet operations. And their vessels fish throughout Western African waters. This has been accompanied by significant Chinese investment in fisheries infrastructure, port facilities and other projects across the region.

Against this backdrop, the Stimson Center will convene a Track 2 dialogue in 2022 with civil society participants from West Africa and China to facilitate a discussion on how best to improve transparency across the seafood industry.

The dialogue will bring together experts across the SIL society, regional fisheries organizations and industry to work together to identify solutions.

This dialogue will focus specifically on China's distant water fishing operations in seven Western African countries, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Gabon and Congo.

These countries were determined through a rigorous assessment process. We selected countries which are most vulnerable to the threat posed by IUU fishing and have also shown a willingness to promote solutions.

The goal of the dialogue is to develop a set of mutually agreed upon recommendations to promote transparency in the seafood industry and reduce the threat of IUU fishing in West Africa. Dialogue participants will present the recommendations to national governments in West Africa and China.

Coordinator: You have 30 seconds remaining.

Jack Stuart: Thank you. And if adopted, would show serious commitment and leadership to improve fishery management and support communities who depend on fishery resources for their food and livelihood.

Finally with regard to Tier 3 countries, Stimson's Environmental Security and associated North Korea Program are both assessing the impact of IUU fishing around the Korean Peninsula.

Using remote sensing and satellite technology, our North Korea program monitors activity occurring in North Korea and the adjacent marine areas, including the Yellow Sea, to uncover illicit activities such as smuggling and activities in violation of international law, including IUU fishing.

Thank you all for your time. And the Stimson Center looks forward to working with you all on these critical issues. Thank you.

**Deirdre Warner-Kramer:** Thank you very much to the three speakers. I understand that those were the three that had requested in advance to make public comment, but at this time we would also like to open up the line to receive any other comments or feedback from participants here.

So I believe - well I'll ask the operator to tell you how to do it because I know there's a way of signaling it. I think some folks have already done that. But let's hear from those who have now also raised their hands. And I'll hand it back to the operator to walk us through that list. Thank you very much.

**Coordinator:** Thank you, ma'am. Again as a reminder if you'd like to enter in a comment, please press star 1 to enter the queue . Again if you'd like to enter a comment, please press star 1. We do have several requests. Marla Valentine, your line is up first. You may begin, please.

**Marla Valentine:** Hello. This is Marla Valentine. I'm representing Oceana, the largest international nonprofit dedicated to ocean conservation. Thank you for giving me this time to speak.

Fishing by distant water fleets along the coast of South America are increasing every year. Oceana analyzes the data of fishing vessels found near the Galapagos Islands from July 13 to August 13, 2020, using automatic identification system or AIS data from Global Fishing Watch.

We found nearly 300 Chinese fishing vessels primarily targeting squid that were fishing along the southern edge of the Ecuadorian exclusive economic zone surrounding the Galapagos. In this brief period the fleet appeared to amass over 73,000 hours of fishing within a very brief one month time period.

Additionally, Oceana has analyzed the activity of fishing vessels along the border of Argentina's national waters from January 1, 2018, to April 25, 2021. Of the visible fishing on Global Fishing Watch, we documented over 800 foreign vessels, logging more than 900,000 hours of fishing.

In comparison to the foreign fleets, only 145 of Argentina's vessels were conducting fishing activity in this area, less than 1% of the total amount. As a part of this analysis, Oceana documented more than 6,000 gap events, instances where AIS transmissions were not broadcast for more than 24 hours, which can indicate where vessels potentially disabled their public tracking devices.

These vessels were invisible for more than 600,000 total hours, hiding their activity in locations and potentially masking illegal behavior, such as crossing into Argentina's national waters to fish. Without catch documentation, transparency and traceability requirements applying to all seafood fish illegally caught around the world will continue to enter the U.S. market.

Of the 32% of the wild caught seafood imported into the United States is a product of illegal or unreported fishing. And if IUU imports are prevented, honest U.S. fishermen could increase their income by an estimated 20%.

While the Seafood Import Monitoring Program was a good step forward, these rules currently only apply to 40% of the value and volume of U.S. imports and products that are no longer traced once they have entered the country.

We need more to ensure that all seafood sold in the United States is safe, legally caught, responsibly sourced and honestly labeled. To expand transparency of fishing, public vessel tracking systems like AIS, which broadcasts the vessel's location, direction and speed should be required on more fishing boats to shine a light on what is happening beyond the horizon.

Adopting stronger requirements for imported seafood would also ensure that it is held to the same standards as seafood caught within the United States.

A recent Ipsos poll commissioned by Oceana found that 89% of registered voters agree that imported seafood should be held to the same standards as U.S. caught seafood. And nearly 90% of voters also agree that governments need to do more to ensure consumers are purchasing properly labeled seafood.

After a little more than a decade, policies in the EU have led to a meaningful reduction in IUU fishing, particularly among the world's worst offenders. Multiple countries that have been carded by the EU due to illegal fishing practices, have improved their practices to comply with those regulations.

If major seafood importing nations adopted stronger import controls to ensure that only legally caught fish enter their countries, the market access for illicitly sourced seafood would decline, cutting off the profit from pirate fishermen.

Oceana recommends that the United States follow the EU's blueprint by expanding SIMP to require catch documentation for all seafood, adopting a carding system like the one used by the EU for nations engaged in IUU fishing, increasing penalties for those engaged in IUU fishing and expanding transparency of fishing.

Human trafficking is the fastest growing criminal enterprise in the world, enslaving nearly 22 million people, and fisheries are no exception. Some vessel captains exploit vulnerable migrant workers, use violence, threats and debt bondage to keep them trapped at sea thousands of miles from their families in inhumane conditions.

No matter where in the world these abuses happen, the seafood caught and processed as a result of human trafficking and forced labor can still make its way to our shores, our grocery stores and our place.

As a major seafood importer, the United States must ensure that U.S. dollars are not supporting these crimes at sea, which impacts the economy, environment and human rights. The United States has the tools and authorities necessary to address these issues.

Success will require strong leadership and coordination across government agencies. The failure of the United States to fully use its authorities, coupled with its treatment of IUU fishing, seafood fraud and human rights as separate issues to be tackled piecemeal have allowed bad actors to continue profiting from forced labor.

I'd like to say thank you for your time and we look forward to continuing to work in the space and collaborate with other agencies. Thank you.

Coordinator: Our next comment is going to come from Megan Westmeyer. Megan, your line is now open. You have five minutes. Thank you.

**Megan Westmeyer:** Thank you very much. I am with the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership, a nonprofit conservation organization that works with seafood supply chains to help improve sustainability, fisheries and aquaculture around the world.

I'm going to try and keep this very short today, and I can make myself available for further questions. You can contact us through our Web site, which is [sustainablefish.org](http://sustainablefish.org). And I believe I have some other colleagues, at least one, who may also be in the queue, who will speak about fisheries other than that which I will speak about.

My focus has been on the Mexican Pacific shrimp fisheries. In the last two years we have collected a lot of information on laundering of illegally harvested gillnet shrimp from the upper Gulf of California and the subsequent export of that product to the U.S. in violation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act import provisions.

Over the past few years, we've attempted to work with the supply chains that bring that Mexican shrimp to the U.S. to perform legal verification processes to close the U.S. market to illegal shrimp and subsequently help to disincentivize continued illegal fishing.

The supply chain legal verification work to date has been inadequate, but we will continue to press for further improvements in those processes.

And we are now seeing a lot more willingness from U.S. importers and U.S. buyers to follow through on legal verification due to the current full embargo of Mexican wild shrimp due to the poor compliance with turtle excluder device requirements.

In the future we plan to expand this sort of work into the Gulf of Mexico with focus on snapper, grouper and octopus and trying to implement some of these same market-based tools to enhance compliance.

As to your prioritization of flag states for the work you're planning, with respect to Mexico I definitely believe they lack the capacity to properly enforce their own regulations. I'm not quite sure about whether they have the will. Maybe, maybe not.

We've been working on these issues for a long time and Mexico has a lot of very good regulations on the books. But when it comes to implementing them, they often fall short. This may be a lack of capacity and only that and maybe the U.S. could have a big influence but that is not really clear at this time. I'll stop my comment there. Thank you.

Coordinator: Thank you. Again as a reminder, if you'd like to enter a comment into the queue, please press star 1. Again if you'd like to enter the queue to leave a comment, please press star 1.

Our next speaker is going to be Braddock Spear. Braddock, your line is open.

**Braddock Spear:** Great. Thank you. I am the colleague Megan was referring to also from the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership. As she mentioned, we work with the seafood supply chain globally to work on issues together, on issues such as IUU fishing, a couple of the other sectors and fisheries that we work on, one of which is squid.

We maintain a squid supply chain roundtable, which is an organization of companies that buy and sell pretty significant volumes of squid globally. Most of the companies are based in the U.S. or in Europe.

And a group of them has recently self-organized into an IUU working group. And this has come out of a shared concern about the distant water squid fisheries, some of those that the Oceana commenter noted are off of Argentina and the eastern Pacific Ocean but also off of Korea and Japan.

It's a relatively new group and they're looking for partnerships. They're looking for solutions, and they're looking to use their sort of pre-competitive position in the marketplace as part of the solution. So, as Megan said, they certainly would welcome any thoughts or ideas from the interagency group.

The other fishery is Indonesia blue swimming crab. I recognize that Indonesia is on Tier 1, but I do think it is a country and a government that is interested in solving these issues and is woefully under-resourced to do so, particularly in a fishery with so many fishers and spread out across such a great distance.

We work with the National Fisheries Institute Crab Council, who have a shared concern of illegal fishing that's happening there and looking for

creative solutions like co-management and other tools to work on those issues together. Thank you.

Coordinator: Thank you, sir. Again, if you would like to enter the queue, please press star 1. If you would like to enter the queue for public comment, please press star 1.

Deirdre Warner-Kramer: Thanks very much to those who have commented so far. We can wait just a little bit longer to see if anybody else wants to raise their hand. So please do if you have any last thoughts to share before we wrap-up the session here today.

Coordinator: And one more time, if you would like to enter a public comment, please press star 1. Again to enter a public comment, please star 1.

Deirdre Warner-Kramer: I think it sounds like we have now hit the end of our list. So I wanted to say thank you very much to those individuals who have already shared some comments with us. The information that you brought about some of the areas of concern as well as the specifics that we heard you share about areas where you are either focusing around the world or may already have activities underway is really helpful.

And we really hope that this is not the last time that we talk about this. It's only the first time that we talk about this and that there will be opportunities to continue to learn more from you and figure out where we can go from here.

To that end, I'd like to plug two things. The first is a reminder that even if you have not spoken today or if you have, you are very welcome to send any additional thoughts and comments in writing.

We would like to receive those by July 30th and again, a particular interest in learning a little bit more about what some of your organizations are already doing in some of these parts of the world.

So if that's the kind of thing that's easier to submit in writing then please do that. So we look forward to receiving those additional comments from folks, both those who have spoken as well as those who haven't spoken with us today.

And secondly, another key piece of work that is getting off the ground underneath the working group in general is a subworking group that's focused on public-private partnerships. And so we will certainly be back in touch with all of the list of stakeholders that we have already as that work becomes a little bit more fleshed out and we look to figure out where we're going to take that into the future.

But please share this information with all of your colleagues who may be working in this area or in related areas to make sure that we have a good list of folks that we can include on our notices and invitations to future sessions like this.

So we would appreciate getting the word out so that we can get as many hands on deck as possible. So with that, I would like to say thank you once again to everybody that we've heard from. Thank you in advance to those who will send us some additional written comments.

And before we close up the session today, I'll turn the floor back over to Paul to see if he has some final thoughts for us. Paul, please, take it away.

Dr. Paul Doremus: Thank you, Deirdre, and thanks to everybody who contributed today and I do appreciate all the thought that went into the comments and look forward to reviewing the written submissions as well.

And I, once again, Deirdre, want to thank you and your team for the work that we reviewed today and the additional folks that's going to provide to our collective efforts under this interagency working group to work not just whole-of-government, but broadly in partnership with the private sector to help address this area of need in the areas where it is most prevalent, where we have the greatest ability to combine forces and make a measurable impact against the problem.

So I really do appreciate everyone contributing to our efforts. And thank you, Deirdre, to you and your team again for your work. Thanks.

Deirdre Warner-Kramer: Thank you. I can see if Admiral Clendenin or Conny have any final thoughts to share as well.

Admiral Clendenin: This is Scott Clendenin again. I'll just echo the comments of my colleagues. I really appreciate all the insights and the comments. I know that's going to be a valuable contribution as we continue this effort and I appreciate your time and thoughts and everybody's comments.

Conny Arvis: And this is Conny Arvis and I will do exactly the same, echo my thanks, echo the appreciation for the comments that have been made and the insights that have been shared. I look forward to working with the broader group in the future.

And also thank you, Deirdre, for your great moderating skill.

Deirdre Warner-Kramer: Thanks very much to all three of you. And in the flurry of thanks, I will add my own back to the three chairs for the excellent leadership that you've offered to this whole effort.

Thank you again for the final time to the participants who have joined us today, those who have spoken and those who are listening in and thinking and we look forward to hearing from you the next time around.

This is a conversation that will be a very, very important conversation. But it's great that we've gotten it started here today. This is a key step forward. And I

look forward to hearing from all of you again as we take our next steps in the future. So thank you all very much.

Coordinator: This concludes today's conference. Thank you for your participation. You may disconnect at this time.

END