

27 October 2022

Special Report N° 20/2022:

**EU action to combat illegal fishing:**

**Control systems in place but weakened by uneven checks and sanctions by Member States**



EUROPEAN  
COURT  
OF AUDITORS





**Why did we do this audit?**



**What questions did we ask?**



**What did we find?**



**Overall conclusion?**



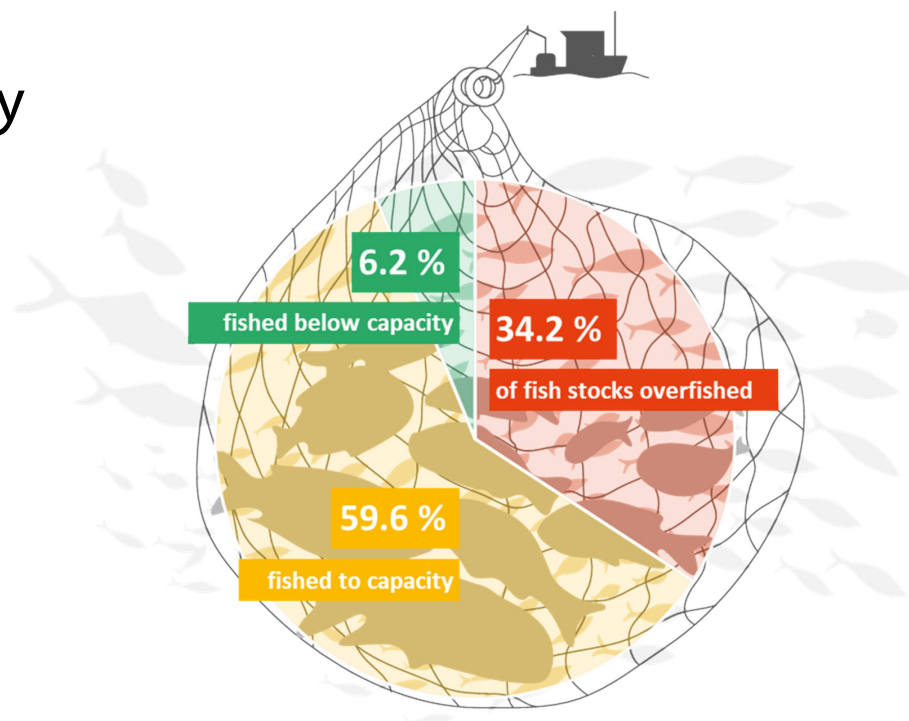
# Why did we do this audit?

## Our reason to focus on illegal fishing



### Illegal fishing remains one of the greatest threats to marine ecosystems...

- 60 % of fisheries are already “maximally” exploited and 34 % are exploited at unsustainable levels
- SDG 14.4 not achieved
- EU is a major player in the world of fisheries





# What questions did we ask?

## Our audit scope

**We examined the EU framework, action and spending to prevent illegal fishery products ending up on EU citizens' plates**

We focused on two fronts...



- are control systems for preventing **the import of illegal fishery products from outside the EU** effective?



- are Member States' control systems for checking **national fleets and waters** effective?



# What did we find?

## EU import control: the catch certification scheme

**EU requires that imported fisheries products are accompanied by a catch certificate to guarantee their legality**

We found that the scheme:



- **improved traceability** and **reinforced import control**

but...



- **differences in the scope and quality risk undermining the scheme's effectiveness**
- **lack of digitalisation** reduces efficiency and increases the risk of fraud

Canadian Catch Certificate (Standard) for the European Union Certificat de capture canadien (standard) pour la Communauté européenne		
Security Code / Code de sécurité :		
Information on the exportation / Information sur l'exportation		
Certificate Number Numéro de certificat	Date	
Description of the Exported Product Description du produit exporté	Weight (kg) Poids (kg)	
Species Espèces	Product Code Code du produit	
Name of the Exporter Nom de l'exportateur	Address Adresse	Signature
Authority / Autorité		
Name - Title Nom - Titre	Signature	
No Export Certificate / Pas de certificat d'exportation		
Place Lieu	Is Export Authorized (Y/N) Réexportation autorisée (Y/N)	Verification Requested (Y/N) Vérification demandée (Y/N)
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		

CERTIFICATE - DO NOT COPY  
CERTIFICAT - NE PAS COPIER

THIS CERTIFICATE MAY BE VERIFIED AT:  
CE CERTIFICAT PEUT ÊTRE VÉRIFIÉ À: [http://www.ec.europa.eu/cefin/cefin/cefin\\_en.jsp](http://www.ec.europa.eu/cefin/cefin/cefin_en.jsp)



# What did we find?

## EU import control: the carding system

**Commission and Council can take action if control systems in non-EU countries exporting fishery products to the EU are deficient**



We found that these actions triggered **positive reform in most of the countries concerned**

**14 countries which received a warning subsequently improved their systems**, for example Thailand and the Philippines.



# What did we find?

## Member States checks on their own fleet and waters

Member States are responsible for the correct application of the EU fisheries control system

We found that:

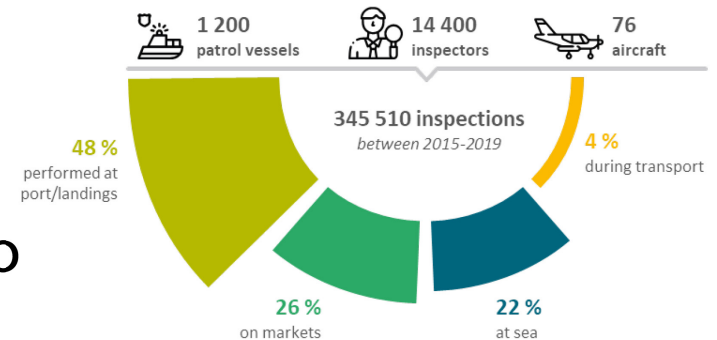


- national checks **often detected instances of illegal fishing**

but...



- significant shortcomings in some Member States leading to **overfishing**





# What did we find?

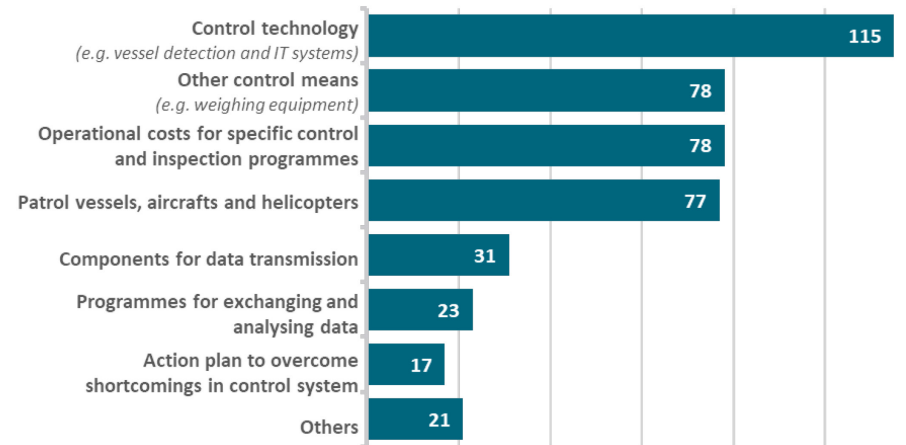
## The use of EU money

The EU provides financial support for monitoring, control and enforcement activities (€580 million)



All 23 project we audited were in line with priorities and **helped reinforce the control system**

How EU money is spent (m€)







# What did we find?

## Sanctions applied to serious infringements

### EU framework requires effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions for all serious infringements

We found that:



- A vast majority of serious infringements detected, led to **considerably varied** sanctions across Member States.
  - Fines ranged from €200 (Cyprus, Lithuania, and Estonia) to more than €7 000 (Spain).



- In some Member States, sanctions were **not proportionate to the economic benefit derived from the infringements.**



# Overall conclusion

## Control systems in place but their effectiveness is reduced by the uneven application of checks and sanctions

We recommend that the Commission:

- **monitor that Member States' reinforce their control systems** for preventing the import of illegal fishery products
- ensure that Member States apply **dissuasive sanctions against illegal fishing**

# Thank you for your attention!

Find out more  
about the other products and activities  
of the ECA:



[eca.europa.eu](http://eca.europa.eu)



[ECA-InstitutionalRelations@eca.europa.eu](mailto:ECA-InstitutionalRelations@eca.europa.eu)



@EUauditors

## EUROPEAN COURT OF AUDITORS

12, rue Alcide De Gasperi  
1615 Luxembourg  
LUXEMBOURG



EUROPEAN COURT  
OF AUDITORS

