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Statement of the BOBP-IGO on 35th COFI Documents

Agenda Item 7: Combatting Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing (COFI/2022/5)

The Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO) join the global community to share our concern in combatting the IUU fishing. We appreciate the work carried out by the FAO in combatting the IUU fishing as documented in the agenda Item 7. The FAO has taken a lead from the beginning in this global battle against IUU fishing. The FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) listed illegal fishing under the flag state responsibilities in Article 8.2.7. Subsequently, FAO brought out the IPOA-IUU in 2001, where again the focus remained on the flag states. However, with the introduction of market-related measures, the consuming states entered into the picture. Finally, now after the coming into force of the PSMA Agreement in 2016, all possible parties have been brought into the fold.

There is also considerable progress made by the countries as seen from the improvement in SDG indicator score from 3 to 4 out of 5. Despite considerable progress in the national and international arrangements and institutions, the magnitude of IUU fishing seems to remain constant, if not increased. *By definition, IUU fishing is difficult to observe and report and hence its true extent is difficult to estimate.* However, studies carried out at different time frames and geography indicate that the extent of IUU fishing has not declined.

Given the above context, the BOBP-IGO urges the FAO and its members to include the following actions in their work programmes:

Ensure adequate finances: While there is a concerted global effort to take the bad subsidies out of fisheries to curb IUU fishing, there is also a parallel requirement to see if countries are increasing their budgetary allocation for fisheries MCS activities.

HRD Needs: This brings up the issue of capacity need of the flag and port states in dealing with IUU fishing and improving reporting mechanisms. Money is not the only constraint. There could be a lack of trained and dedicated staff to monitor and engage in activities curbing IUU fishing including ensuring compliance of the legal procedure.

Closer engagement with RFBs: As FAO is the nodal agency to build capacity on WTO regulations and implementation of PSMA, there is a need to enhance its engagement with regional fisheries bodies. This is essential to ensure capacity building activities are broad-based, well-coordinated and sustainable.

Capacity building in data collection and sharing: Countries often use their own method which is not compatible with international systems and this hampers data reporting procedure. Therefore, the global exchange facilities should start with demonstration and training programmes in reporting.

Use of technology to curb IUU: There is also a need to look at the possible technical solution, such as eMCS to curb IUU fishing. A technological solution could be cost effective for under-developed and developing countries in the long run as recurring costs would be low.

Coordinated action for implementation: A concerted effort is required for improving implementation, which is clearly lagging. The FAO and its members may consider developing regional plans alongside the regional fisheries bodies to build the initiative.

Incentivize compliance to catch documentation: The countries could be encouraged to use the data collected from vessel monitoring and MCS system such as the Voluntary Guidelines on Catch Documentation Schemes (VGCDs) to generate business intelligence for the fisheries sector, which can incentivize their participation. One possible way of incentivizing use of VMS and CDS is linking them with fisheries insurance. Suitable schemes can be designed with the data generated to reward good fishing practices. This will also help in improving fisheries livelihoods.

Enabling institutional and regulatory mechanisms: There is a need to undertake a legal and policy review at national level, to understand the current level of alignment to international norms; identify gaps in existing systems and standard operating procedures and suggest a roadmap for improvement.

In conclusion, the battle against IUU is being fought in many fronts and on each front a suitable strategy is needed depending on the governing landscape. There is no one-size fit-all solution here but what is required is a concerted effort involving FAO and other tertiary organisations, RFBs and similar secondary organisations and the national government.



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