



Charting a Blue Future for Cooperation between West Africa and China on Sustainable Fisheries

By Carolyn Gruber, Blake Ratcliff, Lily Schlieman, and Sally Yozell

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About the Ocean Security and Sustainable Fisheries Project

Protecting ocean assets and promoting transparency across the global fishing industry to safeguard the economic, health and food security of the billions of people who depend on our ocean.

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Cover photo: Artisanal fishers bring fish to shore at the Tanji Fish Landing Site, Tanji, The Gambia. Photo by Edward Mendy, University of The Gambia.

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Charting a Blue Future for Cooperation between West Africa and China on Sustainable Fisheries

This report offers the governments of West African states and the People's Republic of China a set of clear, concise, and actionable recommendations to foster sustainable fisheries management and counter IUU fishing in the Gulf of Guinea and beyond.

By Lily Schlieman, Blake Ratcliff, Carolyn Gruber, and Sally Yozell

Over the past decade, Chinese-owned and -flagged distant water fishing vessels have expanded their presence in West Africa, including building up fishing enterprises and deepening partnerships to access West African waters. This rapid expansion is occurring in a region of small states that often suffer from a lack of financial, technical, operational, and institutional capacity to manage their fisheries. This is compounded by a lack of political will to improve fisheries monitoring and management. To dive deeper into these challenges, the Stimson Center engaged trusted marine and fisheries experts from the People's Republic of China (PRC) and West Africa to better understand how West Africa and the PRC's fisheries interests and experiences converge and differ. Representatives from academia, governments, businesses and nongovernmental organizations mutually identified specific areas where more work and cooperation is needed to achieve long-term sustainable fisheries management in West Africa.

The outcomes of this effort include a set of clear, concise, and actionable recommendations aimed at West African and Chinese decision makers and stakeholders. The report offers a comprehensive understanding of the scale of IUU fishing in West Africa, including the role of the PRC in the development of West Africa's sustainable blue economy. Armed with this report, decision makers can pinpoint exactly how to improve policies, implementation, and enforcement actions to achieve the mutually beneficial goal of a sustainable blue economy in West Africa.

Table of Contents

Glossary	3
A. Country Profiles	4
Côte d’Ivoire.....	4
Gabon	10
The Gambia	15
Ghana.....	23
Guinea-Bissau.....	31
Liberia.....	38
Mauritania.....	43
Republic of Congo.....	50
Senegal.....	57
Sierra Leone	62
B. Interviewees	67
C. Track II Dialogue Participants	68
D. Track 1.5 Workshop Participants	69
Endnotes	70

Glossary

AIS	Automatic Identification System
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CECAF	Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic
CFAF	Central African Franc
CIFAA	Committee for Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture of Africa
CNFC	China National Fisheries Corporation
COMHAFAT/ATLAFCO	Ministerial Conference on Fisheries Cooperation among African States bordering the Atlantic Ocean
COREP	Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic
CRESMAC	Regional Maritime Security Center for Central Africa
CRESMAO	Maritime Security Regional Coordination Center for Western Africa
DWF	Distant Water Fishing
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EMS	Electronic Monitoring System
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCWC	The Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FMFO	Fish Meal and Fish Oil
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GGC	Gulf of Guinea Commission
ICCAT	International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas
IEZ	Inshore Exclusion Zone
IOTC	Indian Ocean Tuna Commission
IUU Fishing	Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing
IWC	International Whaling Commission
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MCS	Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPA	Marine Protected Area
NEAFC	North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission
NOAA	United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
PRC	The People's Republic of China
PSMA	Agreement on Port State Measures
SFPA	European Union Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement
SMA	Special Management Area
SPRFMO	South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization
SRFC	Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission
UNCLOS	The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
U.S.	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
VMS	Vessel Monitoring System
WCPFC	Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission

A. Country Profiles

Interviews, alongside extensive desk research, contributed to the development of country profiles for 10 West African states: Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, the Republic of Congo, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. The 10 countries were selected based on the following criteria: 1) Government support of civil society and the activity of civil society in fisheries; 2) The seafood sector's contribution to the state's economy; 3) The enactment and implementation of laws and regulations on fisheries governance; 4) The state is party to the Agreement on Port State Measures; 5) Documented incidents of IUU fishing; 6) Documented incidents of IUU fishing by Chinese-flagged, -owned, or -operated vessels; 7) Significant Chinese investment, broadly; 8) Chinese investment in the fisheries sector; and 9) The reliance on seafood for food security. Based on the selection criterion, seven initial states were chosen: Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Liberia, Republic of Congo, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. With the development of the Track II and Track I.5 workshop series, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Mauritania were added to provide additional regional context.

Each country profile provides an overview of a country's governance; national fisheries management efforts; engagement in subregional, regional, and international maritime fisheries management; and highlights specific IUU fishing challenges. It also shares information about each state's relationship with the PRC, focusing on Chinese investment in sustainable blue economy sectors.

Côte d'Ivoire

GOVERNANCE

Côte d'Ivoire is a constitutional republic with an independent executive, bicameral legislature comprised of the Senate and the National Assembly, and a judiciary. President Alassane Dramane Ouattara has ruled since 2010, and Prime Minister Patrick Achi has served as the head of government since 2021.¹

DOMESTIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Like its neighbors across the Gulf of Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire's fish stocks are in decline. Côte d'Ivoire's fish stock potential is lower than nearby Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone as its continental shelf is much narrower (11,000 square kilometers).² In addition to near-shore and offshore fisheries, Côte d'Ivoire has three inland lagoons that host important estuarine fisheries and sources of aquaculture.

The Ministry of Animal and Fisheries Resources is run by Minister Sidi Tiémoko Touré. Fisheries policy is coordinated by the Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture, Col. Bina Fofana. The sub-directorate for Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS) is headed by Maxime Diomande.

Côte d'Ivoire's primary fisheries legislation is *Loi n° 2016-554 du 26 Juillet 2016 relative à la pêche et à l'aquaculture* (2016). This framework law governs fishing in foreign, domestic, and inland waters; combatting IUU fishing; and aquaculture. Among other goals, the law establishes general principles for the conservation and sustainable management of fishery resources, including fisheries management plans and the preservation of protected species and ecosystems. *Loi n° 2016-554* also governs vessel access to Ivorian waters and the registration and licensing of industrial vessels. The law includes a ban on at-sea transshipment.³

Loi n° 2016-554 has been implemented by two subsequent decrees. *Décret n. 2021-792 du 08 décembre 2021 portant réglementation des plan de conservation et de gestion des pêcheries* defines procedures for the development and adoption of fisheries management plans and indigenous participation in conservation activities.⁴ *Décret n. 2021-788 du 08 décembre 2021 fixant les modalités d'enregistrement des captures par les navires de pêche industrielle* establishes catch documentation procedures for industrial fishing vessels.⁵ Côte d'Ivoire requires vessel monitoring systems (VMS) for its industrial fleet.

At the UN Ocean Conference in June 2022, an Ivorian representative announced a closed season for the Aby lagoon east of Abidjan.⁶

Côte d'Ivoire's territorial waters are patrolled by the Ivorian Navy, who is responsible for maritime security and counter-IUU fishing operations. An interviewee from Ghana noted that while Côte d'Ivoire is perceived to have less adequate or robust fisheries laws and regulations than Ghana, the laws are strictly enforced.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE'S FISHERIES SECTOR

Côte d'Ivoire's fishing sector contributes to 0.8% of its overall gross domestic product (GDP).⁷ Coastal fisheries provide direct employment for 70,000 people and indirect employment for 400,000.⁸ Abidjan is West Africa's largest port and is the largest tuna handling port in Africa. Three major tuna processing plants process canned tuna for export, primarily to Europe.⁹ Côte d'Ivoire's annual catch is lower than its neighbors at an estimated 105,000 metric tons. Domestic fisheries only meet about 20% of the local demand, thus Côte d'Ivoire is a major net seafood importer from other regional states, Europe, and Asia.¹⁰

Reliable, recent numbers on the size of the vessels operating in Côte d'Ivoire's waters are difficult to find. According to the Fishery Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC) vessel registry, there are 29 bottom trawlers and 21 sardine purse seiners licensed

to operate in Ivorian waters. Under the current European Union Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement (2019 – 2024), up to 16 Spanish-flagged and 12 French-flagged tuna purse seiners and six Spanish-flagged and two Portuguese-flagged long liners may operate in Ivorian waters.¹¹ In 2017, there were estimated to be 11,377 artisanal vessels.¹²

SMALL-SCALE AND ARTISANAL FLEETS

Artisanal fishing accounts for approximately 75% of Côte d’Ivoire’s total catch, estimated to be 73,000 metric tons in 2019. Small scale fishers primarily target small pelagic species such as sardinella, mackerel, and anchovy. The small-scale sector is primarily comprised of migrant fishers from neighboring countries.¹³ Women process tuna and dry small pelagic species for sale on the domestic market.¹⁴ Fish accounts for 39% of animal protein consumption, with annual per capita consumption estimated to be 24.9 kg.¹⁵ Côte d’Ivoire limits fishing activity within 3 nautical miles to artisanal fishers.¹⁶ Artisanal fishing also occurs in rivers and lagoons. One-third of artisanal seafood production is inland tilapia.¹⁷

SEMI-INDUSTRIAL AND INDUSTRIAL FLEETS

Semi-industrial and industrial trawlers target demersal species such as flatfish, as well as shrimp. In the offshore waters, tuna is targeted by purse seine and long-line vessels. The industrial tuna fleet is entirely comprised of European vessels operating under the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement (SFPA). The domestic industrial fleet ceased operations in 2014, replaced by Chinese-owned and -operated industrial vessels that primarily target skipper, pageot, razor, sole, and bigeye grunt.¹⁸

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

In October 2020, Côte d’Ivoire announced the creation of five new marine protected areas (MPA).¹⁹ The first MPA was established in December 2020, covering over 2,500 square kilometers off the coast of Grand-Bereby to protect sharks and turtles.²⁰

CÔTE D’IVOIRE’S ENGAGEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Côte d’Ivoire is a member of numerous maritime and fisheries-related organizations at the subregional, regional, and international levels, including: CECAF, CIFAA, COMHAFAT/ATLAFCO, ECOWAS, FCWC, ICCAT, and IWC. Côte d’Ivoire is a signatory to the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, as well as the UNCLOS and Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA). Côte d’Ivoire has adopted The International Declaration on Transnational Organized Crime in the Global Fishing Industry (“The Copenhagen Declaration”), which recognizes the presence of

transnational crime in the global fishing industry and emphasizes the need for global cooperation and capacity building to tackle the issue.²¹ In March 2023, Côte d'Ivoire joined the Blue Justice Initiative, which supports developing states implement measures to deter and prevent organized fisheries crime.²²

In March 2022, the Regional Maritime Security Centre for West Africa (CRESMAO), the implementing body for the ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy, was inaugurated in Abidjan.²³

In September 2022, Côte d'Ivoire issued the Joint Statement on Atlantic Cooperation alongside 17 other Atlantic countries to facilitate dialogue and cooperation on cross-boundary challenges including IUU fishing, transnational crime, and climate change.²⁴

IUU FISHING CHALLENGES

Foreign vessels have been caught IUU fishing in Côte d'Ivoire's waters for offenses such as fishing over quota, underreporting catch, and fishing without a license. Ivorian fishers have been caught fishing illegally in the waters of neighboring states.

Industrial fishing by foreign or domestic industrial vessels is prohibited within 7 nautical miles of the coast. Despite this, Ghanaian-flagged industrial trawlers have been observed operating at speeds consistent with fishing activities within the inshore exclusion zone.²⁵

While monitoring at-sea transshipment off West Africa, Global Fishing Watch has noted significant activity off Côte d'Ivoire, where at-sea transshipment is banned. Global Fishing Watch detected 4.5 "loitering events" each day between January 1, 2017–August 31, 2020, which suggests that illegal transshipment is taking place.²⁶

In 2014, the government of Côte d'Ivoire partnered with the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) to combat IUU fishing in Ivorian waters.²⁷ EJF has also worked in Côte d'Ivoire to protect vulnerable shark populations targeted for their fins, which are exported to East Asia.²⁸

IUU fishing in Ivorian waters by PRC-flagged, -owned, and -operated vessels reflects broader trends in West Africa. The PRC distant water fishing (DWF) fleet has been caught IUU fishing in Ivorian waters for small pelagics. Chinese companies engaged in joint and beneficial ownership schemes receive licensing and taxation benefits from the Ivorian Government.

In **December 2014**, the Ivorian Navy seized two Chinese trawlers fishing illegally offshore, taking the crew into custody, and levying a fine.²⁹ However, there are no reports of more recent enforcement efforts against PRC-flagged or -owned vessels.

In **April 2020**, EJF detected a significant presence of Chinese DWF vessels targeting the sardinella populations in the near-shore waters off Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo.³⁰

In **December 2021**, eight Ivorian fishing vessels were caught and arrested by Liberia’s Coast Guard for illegal fishing in Liberian waters. Each boat was made to register in Liberia and each fisherman was fined USD \$7,500 for violating Liberia’s fisheries laws. The boats were seized and impounded, to be held until the fines are paid.³¹

In **July 2022**, Ghanaian fishermen were reported to have fled to Ivorian waters to fish without licenses during Ghana’s closed season. An industrial closed season lasted through July and August 2022, although it was not reported if any Ghanaian-flagged industrial vessels similarly fished across the border.³²

FISHERIES-RELATED PROGRAMMING AND PARTNERSHIPS IN CÔTE D’IVOIRE

Côte d’Ivoire participates in Operation Obangame Express, an annual multinational maritime security exercise sponsored by the United States Africa Command.³³ Côte d’Ivoire also participates in Operation Flintlock exercises alongside the US Special Operations Command for Africa and their European and West African counterparts to counter violent extremism and strengthen regional maritime security.³⁴

Côte d’Ivoire also participates in the Grand African NEMO exercises, an annual multinational maritime security exercise led by the French Navy.³⁵ The exercises are conducted under the Yaoundé Code of Conduct to combat illegal fishing and facilitate information sharing between national maritime operational centers, maritime coordination centers, and regional maritime security centers.

Côte d’Ivoire has an active SFPAs with the European Union for tuna, which was renewed through July 31, 2024. The Agreement allows vessels flagged to Spain, Portugal, and France to fish in Ivorian waters and is part of the tuna network fisheries agreements in West Africa. The EU contributes €682,000 per year, including a dedicated €407,000 per year to support the fisheries sector. Ship owners pay €60 per ton the first two years and then €70 per ton the remaining four.³⁶

Côte d’Ivoire signed on to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2017 to promote cooperation with the PRC, enhance policy coordination, and deepen mutual understanding. The PRC has increased its foreign direct investment into Côte d’Ivoire in the last decade and has invested broadly in infrastructure like roadways and the expansion of the port of Abidjan.³⁷

In addition to broad investment in Côte d’Ivoire’s economy, the PRC has invested in the Ivorian fisheries sector. The Export-Import Bank of China loaned Côte d’Ivoire USD \$875 million to expand the main Port of Abidjan, a project with a total ceiling of USD \$934 million. As Côte d’Ivoire conducts 90% of its trade by sea and 80% of its sea trade flows through Abidjan, this is a vital economic link.³⁸ Côte d’Ivoire is a key market for Chinese tilapia imports as domestic producers have struggled to meet market demands.³⁹

Chinese fishing companies are engaged in joint-venture operations in Côte d'Ivoire. A 2021 report by the Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements found that of 80 industrial fishing vessels based out of the Port of Abidjan, 55 are joint ventures with Chinese owners. The joint venture vessels are of Chinese origin and are either re-flagged to Côte d'Ivoire or chartered by Côte d'Ivoire-based companies, maintaining their PRC flag. Ivorian-flagged vessels, including those in joint venture agreements, receive exemptions from fuel subsidies, reduced port taxes, and lower license costs. Fish caught by joint venture vessels is exported to the PRC or sold to regional fishmeal and fish oil (FMFO) factories.⁴⁰

The *Agreement between the Government of Ivory Coast and the Government of Senegal in the Field of Marine Fisheries* (1977) grants reciprocal fishing rights for Ivorian and Senegalese tuna vessels in their respective EEZs.⁴¹

Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire conduct joint sea patrols and joint inspections of fishing and fishing-related vessels in port.⁴² In March 2022, the governments committed to implement a simultaneous fishery closed season.⁴³

CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

The Ivorian government has broadly curtailed civil liberties, with elections marked by fraud and the harassment or imprisonment of opposition parties and journalists. Non-governmental organizations (NGO) are required to register with the Ministry of the Interior.⁴⁴ Despite this, domestic and international NGOs are relatively free to operate, particularly in the environmental and fisheries space.

TMT operates in Côte d'Ivoire as part of its efforts in cooperation with Stop Illegal Fishing on the 'Fisheries Intelligence and MCS Support in West Africa' project. The project is conducted under the auspices of the FCWC Secretariat and supports member countries Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria. The project facilitated the establishment and functions of the West Africa Task Force, which has operationalized key FCWC conventions on information sharing and MCS cooperation.⁴⁵

Conservation des Espèces Marines (CEM) is a local NGO that conducts research on marine species and habitats, provides monitoring and enforcement capabilities to local law enforcement agencies, supports community conservation and development, and provides environmental education to local students. CEM was instrumental to the creation of the Grand Béréby MPA, partnering with the Ivorian Government to conduct zoning and biodiversity surveys and provide a fully functional patrol boat to the Maritime Police of Grand Béréby.⁴⁶

Gabon

GOVERNANCE

Gabon is a presidential republic where power is consolidated in the executive. While Gabon holds multi-party elections, Freedom House has determined Gabon to be “not free” and scores low in political rights and civil liberties. President Ali Bongo Ondimba has ruled as an autocrat since 2009. Gabon’s bicameral legislature is comprised of the Senate and the National Assembly. In the 2018 parliamentary election, President Bongo’s Gabonese Democratic Party won 95 of the 143 seats in the National Assembly.⁴⁷ The Prime Minister, Rose Ossouka Rapondna, was appointed by President Bongo in 2020. The judiciary is effectively controlled by the executive branch.⁴⁸ Following protests after the disputed 2016 presidential election and a failed coup attempt in 2019, Gabon cracked down on NGOs, human rights groups, and journalists.⁴⁹

DOMESTIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Gabon has demonstrated the political will to protect its fisheries resources and combat IUU fishing in its territorial waters. The Ministry of Fisheries is led by Minister Biendi Maganga-Moussavou. It is a subset of the Ministry of Fisheries, Agriculture, and Food Security and coordinates fisheries policy.⁵⁰ The Gabonese Fisheries Enforcement Agency leads enforcement efforts against IUU fishing.⁵¹

Gabon has comprehensive fisheries laws, which have recently been updated and expanded. *Loi n° 015/2005 portant Code des pêches et de l’aquaculture en République Gabonaise* regulates all fishing and aquaculture activities in Gabonese waters. The law establishes sustainable fisheries management practices, MCS, and penalties for IUU fishing.⁵²

In 2014, Gabon established an MPA network under the *Gabon Bleu* initiative. The network was expanded in 2017 and now covers over 50,000 square kilometers, or 26% of Gabon’s EEZ.⁵³ By law, lakes, rivers, and lagoons are reserved for Gabonese artisanal fishermen, but foreign artisanal fishermen may legally fish up to 3 nautical miles off the coast.⁵⁴

Décret n° 1041 fixant les modalités de délivrance des licences de pêche establishes vessel licensing laws and current laws require licensing in the framework of joint venture agreements for industrial or artisanal fisheries. Vessels must be at least 50% owned by Gabonese nationals and owned by a company based in Gabon. In 2019, Gabon mandated the use of VMS by industrial fleets operating in its waters. In July 2021, Gabon partnered with CLS Group, a public-private partnership with the French National Center for Space Studies to install NEMO I-VMS on its small-scale fishing vessels to monitor.⁵⁵

Recent information on the legality of transshipment is difficult to find, but a 2013 EJF report indicated that it was allowed at sea.⁵⁶

GABON'S FISHERIES SECTOR

The fisheries sector comprises 9% of Gabon's GDP, primarily from marine fisheries. Fish protein accounts for 24% of Gabon's protein consumption. Gabon's annual fish production is 40,000 to 50,000 tons, but each year approximately 7,000 tons of seafood is imported to meet market demands.⁵⁷

Tuna is the primary species targeted by foreign fishing vessels in Gabonese waters. Industrial vessels also target prawns, shrimp, sardinella, and demersal species. Owendo and Port-Gentil are the largest fish landing sites.

GABON'S ENGAGEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Gabon is a member of numerous regional fisheries management organizations as well as organizations related to fisheries management, including: CECAF, CIFAA, COMAFAT/ATLAFCO, COREP, ECCAS, GGC, ICCAT, and IWC. Gabon is a signatory to the PSMA, although the status of Gabon's implementation of the agreement is unclear. Gabon is also a signatory to the Yaoundé Code of Conduct. In 2021, the FAO signed an agreement with Gabon to provide a national strategy to address its fisheries shortfall as a net seafood importer, increase monitoring and assessment, and improve the sustainable catch of Gabon's fisheries resources.⁵⁸

At the 2021 annual ICCAT meeting, Gabon, alongside the United Kingdom, Canada, and Senegal, led an initiative to establish a ban on the landing of shortfin mako sharks in the North Atlantic, even if caught accidentally, from 2022–2023.⁵⁹

At the 2022 UN Ocean Conference, Minister Lee White called on the international community to protect 30% of the oceans before 2030 and emphasized the importance of eliminating IUU fishing.⁶⁰

IUU FISHING CHALLENGES

Gabon's economy is estimated to lose USD \$610 million to IUU fishing each year.⁶¹ Acknowledging this, the Gabonese government has increased its fisheries management, monitoring, control, and surveillance, and sought partnerships with foreign governments and NGOs to combat IUU fishing.

Industrial vessels loiter in the IEZ and the zone restricted to Gabonese vessels.⁶² Foreign vessels are known to fish in Gabon's EEZ without permission and land their catch in foreign ports, and therefore do not report to the Gabonese authorities. Domestic fish landings are primarily comprised of artisanal catch, which represents only a small portion of fish caught in Gabon's waters.⁶³ Gabon does not have a robust vessel tracking system for its small-scale fishers.⁶⁴

Illegal shark fishing is a major concern. Local artisanal fishers catch and eat sharks, including sharks caught as bycatch by tuna vessels. However, Congolese-flagged, PRC-owned industrial vessels cross illegally into Gabonese waters to target sharks to sell their fins in East Asia.⁶⁵

In 2018, a joint operation between Gabonese law enforcement and Sea Shepherd in São Tomé and Príncipe's waters interdicted a Senegalese-flagged Spanish-owned vessel licensed to catch tuna whose hold was filled with endangered sharks.⁶⁶

Chinese vessels have been caught and detained for illegal fishing in Gabon's waters. Chinese companies began operating in Gabon in 1985, starting in the 2000s Chinese vessels started flagging-in to other regional states, including Angola, Belize, Cape Verde, Gabon, Cameroon, Congo, and Guinea to fish in Gabonese waters.

When reconstructing the PRC's role in industrial catch and recategorizing fishing data, PRC-flagged and -owned vessels' catch far outstrips Gabon's domestic industrial catch. In 2010, PRC-flagged vessels accounted for over 20% of Gabon's industrial catch.⁶⁷

In 2017, Sea Shepherd interdicted two Chinese trawlers (*Haixin 23* and *Haixin 28*) that crossed into Gabonese waters from Congo. Neither vessel was licensed to fish in Gabon and one was not licensed to fish in Congolese waters. It's not clear if further penalties or sanctions were handed to the vessels.⁶⁸

In 2018, three Chinese fishing vessels (*Jin Li 961*, *Jin Li 962*, and *Hua Yi 5*) were arrested for fishing in Gabonese waters without a license after crossing over from Equatorial Guinean waters. The vessels had endangered sharks in their holds.⁶⁹

In 2019, Sea Shephard and Gabon interdicted the Chinese-flagged trawler *Haixin 27* fishing inside an MPA with no fishing log. Three other trawlers with the *Haixin 27* escaped across the border into Congolese waters.⁷⁰

In **August 2020**, Gabonese authorities, along with Sea Shepherd, arrested two PRC-flagged trawlers, *Guo Ji 826* and *Guo Ji 866*, for violating IUU fishing regulations.⁷¹ Over 6 tons of illegally caught fish was found, including 1 ton of endangered ray species.

In **December 2020**, pirates boarded four vessels owned by the Chinese-Gabonese joint venture company Société Sino-Gabonaise de Pêche (Sigapêche). The pirates killed one freighter master and took four Chinese nationals and one Gabonese national hostage from a trawler that had arrived and was waiting for a license to fish in Gabon's water.⁷² All hostages were found in Nigeria, rescued, and repatriated to their home countries.⁷³

In **September 2021**, a shrimp trawler, the *Renovation 2*, was discovered to have a ratio of catch to bycatch of 0.2% shrimp to 99.8% bycatch during joint patrol with Sea Shepherd and Gabonese fisheries inspectors. The *Renovation 2* and two other shrimp trawlers, *Amerger*

II and *Amerger 7*, were recalled to port and Minister Mangaga-Moussavou suspended the shrimp fishery.⁷⁴ Gabon's shrimp fishing practices have since improved, and the U.S. Department of State certified that Gabon's wild shrimp fishery has harvesting practices that protect sea turtle populations. The certification allows wild-caught Gabonese shrimp to be imported into the U.S.⁷⁵

Additionally in **September 2021**, a European-owned purse seiner entrapped two humpback whales in a net set for tuna. The vessel refused repeated calls from nearby vessels to release the whales. Sea Shepherd recorded this incident and reported it to Gabonese authorities. The vessel's licenses was suspended and it was expelled from Gabonese waters.⁷⁶

In **March 2023**, a patrol from the National Parks Agency intercepted and boarded a São Toméan vessel fishing illegally in Gabonese waters. The vessel had 142 kilograms of illegally caught grouper, which was seized by the Gabonese authorities. The 14-member crew were turned over to the justice system.⁷⁷

FISHERIES-RELATED PROGRAMMING AND PARTNERSHIPS IN GABON

Gabon participates in Operation Obangame Express, an annual multinational maritime security exercise sponsored by the U.S. Africa Command.⁷⁸

Gabon also participates in the Grand African NEMO exercises, an annual multinational maritime security exercise led by the French Navy.⁷⁹ The exercises are conducted under the Yaoundé Code of Conduct to combat illegal fishing and facilitate information sharing between national maritime operational centers, maritime coordination centers, and regional maritime security centers.

The PRC focuses investment in Gabon on rail and road infrastructure, mining, agriculture, petroleum, tourism, and timber exports. Gabon joined the BRI in 2018. The PRC has since become Gabon's largest trading partner and primary source of FDI.⁸⁰ President Bongo has called for more direct investment to help grow domestic natural resource processing industries.⁸¹ In 2019, the National Forestry and Grassland Ministry Administration of China and the Ministry of Water and Forestry of Gabon signed an MoU on forestry. The MoU establishes long-term and stable cooperative channels, promotes sustainable forest management, combats illegal logging, and seeks to develop Gabon's timber industry.⁸²

China has invested in Gabon's fisheries sector, although it is not a primary or significant focus. In 2013, Chinese Harbour Engineering Company won a bid to develop the Port-Mole area in the capital Libreville, but the deal was stalled indefinitely as of 2019.⁸³

CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN GABON

The Gabonese government has cracked down against civil society institutions and the press in the wake of recent disputed elections and the failed coup. NGOs must register with the Ministry of the Interior, and Freedom House has chronicled numerous instances of restriction, intimidation, and arrest against NGOs and journalists critical of the government's abuses.⁸⁴

However, there is more collaboration between the Gabonese government and international NGOs and foreign governments on issues related to fisheries and the ocean.

Sea Shepherd partners with the Gabonese Fisheries Enforcement Agency and with the National Agency of National Parks to identify and intercept vessels IUU fishing in Gabonese waters.⁸⁵ Since 2016, patrols conducted under Operation Albacore have taken place in the waters of Gabon and São Tomé and Príncipe.

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) marine program partnered with the Fisheries Department to restructure its fisheries management policies. WCS organized a permitting process for artisanal fishers around Libreville and is working to expand this to the entire country. WCS trains fisheries observers and marine mammal observers on seismic survey vessels in the oil and gas industry.⁸⁶

Organisation Ecologique des Lacs et de l'Ogooué (OELO) is a community-led NGO established by residents of the Lac Oguemoué to manage the lake's fishery resources. The Sustainable Fishing Initiative established no-take zones on the lake, leads net exchange programs to eliminate the use of illegal monofilament nets, and organizes sustainable fishing cooperatives. In 2018, OELO led the legalization of the first continental fisheries management plan for Gabon, a cooperative effort with local fisheries cooperatives, the Fisheries Department, the National Parks Service, and The Nature Conservancy.⁸⁷

Global Fishing Watch signed an agreement with Gabon, and West African states to strengthen collaboration on governance, capacity building, and analysis to combat IUU fishing.⁸⁸

The Gambia

GOVERNANCE

The Gambia is a multiparty democratic republic led by President Adama Barrow, who was re-elected in 2021 and rules alongside the unicameral National Assembly. Of the 58 members, 53 are elected by popular vote and the remaining five are appointed by the president. The judiciary is considered to be effective and independent by outside observers.⁸⁹ The Barrow administration has taken steps to increase government transparency and protect civil liberties, yet corruption remains a challenge. Freedom of expression is protected in the constitution and law, and the freedom of peaceful assembly and association is generally respected.

DOMESTIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

The Gambia has rich fisheries resources, due to a broad continental shelf and nutrient-rich outflows from the Gambia River system. Inland and marine fisheries are critical to Gambians' protein consumption and food security. On average, Gambians consume 29 kilograms of fish per capita. Over 500 species of marine fish have been recorded in Gambian waters, including commercially important small pelagic and demersal species.⁹⁰ There are three administrative areas for fisheries in The Gambia: the Atlantic/Marine Coast Stratum, the Lower River Stratum, and the Upper River Stratum. The Lower and Upper River Stratum are further subdivided into the North and South Banks.⁹¹

The Ministry of Fisheries and Water Resources (MoFWR) includes the Department of Fisheries, which is tasked with the management and development of fisheries; and the monitoring, surveillance, and enforcement of fishing operations.⁹² The Department of Fisheries has six units: Directorate and Administration; MCS; Aquaculture; Inspectorate; Research and Development; and Extension.

The Fisheries Act, 2007 (Act No. 20 of 2007) and its associated regulations from 2008 designate the nine nautical mile Special Management Area (SMA) for community-based co-management, in the interest of conserving inshore resources for artisanal fishers.⁹³ The National Sole Fishery Co-Management Committee, the Landing Site Co-Management Committees, and community-based organizations have exclusive rights to fish in the SMA through Community Fishery Centers.⁹⁴ *Regulation No. 2008-6 of 9th of June 2008* established the conditions, fees, and noncompliance penalties for the licensing and registration of foreign and domestic commercial fishing vessels.⁹⁵

The *2018 Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy of The Gambia* is the cornerstone fisheries management policy in The Gambia. This builds on the 2007 Fisheries Policy, which recognized that healthy stocks managed from a responsible fisheries approach are integral to the sector's sustained development and wellbeing. The 2018 Policy regulates small-scale,

industrial, and high seas fisheries, conservation and sustainable resource management, international engagement, and industry reform.⁹⁶ The 2018 Policy also identifies the primary threats to The Gambia's fisheries and aquaculture as overexploitation if fisheries expansion overrides management system development; changes in policy/management that could adversely affect employment and food security; uncertainty and risks in investment; underdeveloped infrastructure; threats to biodiversity conservation such as bycatch; limited investment capital and loan infrastructure; climate change vulnerabilities; and high fuel costs and high interest rates.

Industrial trawlers, tuna vessels, and processing vessels are licensed yearly according to their targeted catch. Foreign purse seiners, long liners, and pole and line vessels pay an additional access fee on top of the yearly fee.⁹⁷ While MoFWR does not publish a public list of industrial vessels licensed to fish in Gambian waters, licensing fees are made public on their website. Foreign fishing vessels pay higher licensing fees than local vessels. Entry into the industrial fishery is controlled through an application process. Under the *2007 Fisheries Act*, foreign vessels must have a Gambian national appointed and maintained to act on behalf of the vessel owner, master, or charterer, and must accept legal responsibility for any action taken against the vessel.⁹⁸

Mandated licensing for artisanal vessels was implemented in 2014. Motorized canoes pay 750 dalasi (USD \$20), non-motorized canoes pay 500 dalasi (USD \$12), and any other canoes pay 300 dalasi (USD \$8) per annum for registration.⁹⁹ Canoes are prohibited from being registered if the owner has been convicted of an offence under the 2008 fisheries regulations governing navigation, customs, immigration, narcotics, fiscal measures, firearms, or narcotics.¹⁰⁰

The Gambian Navy is responsible for enforcing anti-IUU fishing laws in The Gambia's territorial waters and in partnership with neighboring countries in the Gulf of Guinea. The Department of Fisheries' MCS Unit is responsible for inspecting vessels, gear, catch and shares a list of licensed vessels with the Navy. The MCS Unit also operates an onboard observer program. Observers collect catch data onboard licensed fishing vessels and report IUU fishing activity that occurs in Gambian territorial waters.¹⁰¹ The Department of Fisheries also maintains a collaborative agreement with the Gambia Maritime Authority to inspect fishing vessels and issue safety-at-sea certificates.¹⁰²

In May 2021, the Department of Fisheries inaugurated its Fisheries Monitoring Center (FMC) in Banjul. To develop the FMC, the Department of Fisheries initiated a procurement arrangement with CLS Group, a public-private partnership with the French National Center for Space Studies, to provide MCS technology and training for FMC and Gambian Navy staff.¹⁰³ The Center is supported by funds from the EU-Gambia Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement and is equipped with a VMS system to allow for 24-hour monitoring.¹⁰⁴ Previously, Senegal operated Gambia's VMS system.¹⁰⁵

THE GAMBIA'S FISHERIES SECTOR

Fisheries and aquaculture contribute 6.2% of The Gambia's GDP and employ over 30,000 people, primarily in the artisanal fisheries sector. In addition to providing direct and indirect employment opportunities for Gambians, the fisheries sector also employs people from Senegal, Mauritania, Ghana, Guinea, and Mali.¹⁰⁶ Approximately 80% of fish processors and 50% of small-scale fish traders are women.¹⁰⁷ The largest fish landing site is the Port of Banjul. Smaller vessels land their catch at the Banjul Fisheries Jetty, while larger vessels must land fish at the main Port of Banjul.¹⁰⁸

ARTISANAL FISHING

The artisanal sector accounts for 90% of all fisheries and aquaculture outputs, and over the past 10 years has accounted for over 80% of the domestic landings. The sector directly employs between 25,000 and 30,000 people.¹⁰⁹ It is unclear how many artisanal vessels there are as they are not required to register with the MoFWR.

The 2016, marine capture fish production in The Gambia was approximately 55,686 metric tons and the inland fisheries capture production was approximately 1,422 tonnes.¹¹⁰ There are approximately 155 artisanal landing sites; ten are located on the Atlantic coast while the remaining 145 are along the Gambia River.

In 2013, it was estimated that the artisanal fleet is comprised of more than 1,000 canoes.¹¹¹ Approximately 40% of the artisanal canoes are motorized.¹¹² Artisanal fishers use planked or dugout canoes to catch small pelagics with surround gillnets and bottom gillnets to catch demersal and sub-demersal species. Artisanal fisheries are diverse, encompassing marine, brackish, and freshwater fisheries, and aquaculture. The sector is concentrated in the traditional fishing communities of Kartong, Gunjur, Sanyang, Tanji, Brufut, Bakau, and Old Jeshwang.¹¹³ Marine artisanal fishers primarily target Bonga shad, sardinella, and mackerels, while artisanal aquaculture operations harvest, market, and process wild oysters and cockles. Inland artisanal fishers harvest catfish, tilapia, arowana, and aba. Small pelagic species are processed and consumed locally or exported to neighboring countries. High-value demersal and sub-demersal species such as shrimp, lobster, sea breams, and cephalopods are sold to foreign-owned fish processing facilities and exported to the EU, North America, and Asia.¹¹⁴

INDUSTRIAL FISHING

The Gambia's industrial fishing sector is much smaller than the artisanal sector, employing just 2,000 people.¹¹⁵ The industrial fleet is primarily comprised of foreign-owned trawlers that target shrimp, cephalopods, and high-value fish species such as barracuda, snappers, and tuna. In 2019, 55 industrial vessels were licensed to fish in Gambian waters. Approximately 90%

of these vessels are foreign-owned.¹¹⁶ Most foreign-owned industrial vessels land their catch either at neighboring countries' ports or offload directly at Chinese-owned fishmeal factories, hampering effective monitoring of The Gambia's fishery resources and fishing effort.¹¹⁷

Industrial fishing was banned in Gambian waters from 2015–2017 by the Jammeh administration, who believed The Gambia's fisheries access agreements were inequitable.¹¹⁸ President Barrow, seeking greater international investment into The Gambia, overturned the ban in 2017.¹¹⁹

FISHMEAL AND FISH OIL FACTORY OPERATIONS IN THE GAMBIA

There are three Chinese-owned fishmeal factories in The Gambia, located in the towns of Kartong, Gunjur, and Sanyang. According to local fishers, the presence of these fishmeal factories contributes to IUU fishing, especially of small pelagics.¹²⁰ Over half of the reported catch in The Gambia is used by industrial FMFO factories as raw material, primarily to the PRC.¹²¹ Bonga shad and sardinellas are sought after by FMFO factories which in turn reduces the availability of these fish for local fishers, marketers, and processors. FMFO factories do not adhere to proper water discharge practices. Industrial discharge from the fishmeal plants pollutes local waters and causes toxic algal blooms. Dead fish and decaying seaweed wash ashore on the coastlines and lagoons adjacent to the factories. This not only impacts the health and quality of life for residents, but also affects the tourism industry, which many Gambians rely upon for their livelihoods.¹²²

Conflict in host communities over FMFO factory operations has led to high-profile protests and incidents of violence. Notably, in 2018, residents of Gunjur protested the impact of the Nessim Fishing and Fish Processing factory on the town's environment and fish stocks, clashing with factory supporters.¹²³

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Only 68 square kilometers, less than 1%, of The Gambia's waters are fully or highly protected from fishing. The Gambia does not have any designated MPAs, but marine areas are included in the Niimi and Tambi National Parks, Jokadu Wetland Park, and the Tanji Bird Reserve.¹²⁴

THE GAMBIA'S ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

The Gambia is a member of numerous regional fisheries management organizations and relevant international organizations, including CECAF, CIFAA, COMHAFAT/ATLAFCO, ECOWAS, ICCAT, and IWC. The Gambia ratified the PSMA in 2016, and in June 2022 the

FAO held a workshop to commence a comprehensive review of The Gambia's laws, policies, and operational and institutional frameworks to counter IUU fishing. The workshop also aimed to formulate a national strategy and action plan for The Gambia to gradually implement the tenets of the PSMA.¹²⁵ The Gambia is a signatory to the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and is party to UNCLOS and the UN Fish Stocks Agreement.

IUU FISHING CHALLENGES

The Gambia's fish stocks are threatened by overfishing, IUU fishing, and unsustainable fisheries management. The Gambia has low MCS and enforcement capacity which is compounded by a lack of political will to enforce laws and regulations against foreign fishing vessels and FMFO factories.

Artisanal fishers complain that industrial trawlers breach the SMA and fish close to shore, breaking their nets and depleting stocks. Gambian fishers have also reported harassment from foreign vessels fishing illegally in the SMA.¹²⁶ The Gambian government does not strictly enforce gear regulations against artisanal fishers, which allows some to use illegal techniques and gear such as monofilament nets and beach seining.

Industrial vessels flagged to the EU and the PRC have routinely violated access agreements and Gambian fishing regulations. Overfishing in neighboring waters throughout the Gulf of Guinea has driven fishers from regional states to fish in Gambian waters without licenses.

In **December 2016**, the European Commission launched an infringement procedure against Italy for failing to act against Italian-flagged trawlers fishing illegally in waters of The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. The trawlers have documented incidents of fishing with illegal gear, contravening the EU-The Gambia Sustainable Fisheries Agreement.¹²⁷ In 2019, a coalition of African and European NGOs filed a complaint with the EU, asking the European Commission to again launch an infringement procedure against Italy for failing to sanction the same trawlers who were caught fishing in Sierra Leone's inshore exclusion zone.

In **August 2019**, Gambian Navy and Fisheries officers in partnership with Sea Shepherd, boarded the *Lu Lao Yuan Yu 010*, an industrial trawler owned by the Chinese company Qingdao Tangfeng Ocean Fishery. The vessel was found to have a blank logbook; its captain and several crew members were arrested, and the vessel was impounded in the Port of Banjul.¹²⁸

In **September 2019**, Operation Gambian Coastal Defense, a joint operation with Gambian law enforcement agencies and Sea Shepherd, arrested four industrial trawlers for fishing in the SMA. One of these vessels, the *Niam Niokho*, was arrested for fishing in the SMA several times in one month. The *Niam Niokho* was detained in the Port of Banjul by Gambian authorities.¹²⁹

In **May 2020**, Gambian authorities boarded, arrested, and impounded three Chinese vessels (*Gorde 105*, *Gorde 105*, and *Gorde 107*) for fishing in the inshore Special Management Area and for using illegal fishing methods.¹³⁰

FISHERIES-RELATED PROGRAMMING AND PARTNERSHIPS IN THE GAMBIA

The Department of MCS and Fisheries of the Development for the Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission (SRFC) is headquartered in Banjul.¹³¹

USAID supports programming on civil society and the rule of law, though it does not cover fisheries specifically.¹³² From 2009 to 2013, USAID funded the Gambia-Senegal Sustainable Fisheries Project which built upon efforts by the Gambian government to improve community fisheries management and develop a draft fisheries management plan for sole and other commercially important species.¹³³

The Gambia participates in Operation Obangame Express, a multinational maritime security exercise sponsored by U.S. Africa Command.¹³⁴ The U.S. Coast Guard maintains a bilateral shiprider agreement with The Gambia which allows their defense and law enforcement personnel to join U.S. Navy and Coast Guard vessels to observe, board, and search vessels suspected of violating domestic laws and regulations within The Gambia's EEZ and on the high seas.¹³⁵

The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office of Legal Council and Office of Law Enforcement run the Improved Governance through Legal and Enforcement Capacity Building program in The Gambia. Gambian government participants attend workshops on legal and enforcement training to combat IUU fishing in Gambian waters.¹³⁶

In 2019, The Gambia signed a six-year sustainable fisheries partnership agreement with the EU. The agreement allows vessels from Spain, Greece, and France to fish in Gambian waters for tuna and limited demersal species. The EU makes an annual €550,000 contribution for the duration of the agreement, with €275,000 directly allocated to support The Gambia's fisheries policy. The EU also donated 14 vessels to the Department of Fisheries for training, MCS, and use by fishers.¹³⁷

The EU also supports the Improvement of Regional Fisheries Governance in West Africa project through ECOWAS. The project seeks to strengthen the MCS capabilities of the SRFC in The Gambia and in West Africa.¹³⁸

Since 1992, Japanese longliner and purse seine vessels that are members of the Federation of Japan Tuna Fisheries Cooperative and the Japan Far Seas Purse Seine Fishing Association are allowed to fish for tuna beyond 12 nautical miles off the coast of Gambia.¹³⁹

The Gambia also maintains a fisheries agreement with the Republic of Cameroon. Vessels flagged to Cameroon may fish for any species beyond seven nautical miles. Cameroon is a go-to destination for the “flag of convenience” system, where foreign-owned companies can register their vessels under a different flag even when there is no connection between the vessel and the flag it flies. Foreign trawlers “flag-in” to Cameroon to exploit this loophole to fish in Gambian waters when they would not ordinarily be able to.¹⁴⁰

In 2017, The Gambia signed a bilateral fisheries and aquaculture agreement with Senegal to strengthen the region’s fishing industry and trade.¹⁴¹ The agreement facilitates cooperation on industry privatization, the exchange of scientific information and research coordination, the development of joint aquaculture projects, and training for fishery officials. A previous agreement signed in the 1980s was revoked in 2014 under the previous administration.¹⁴²

In February 2018, Mauritania and The Gambia signed an MoU to boost maritime investment and cooperation in the fisheries sector.¹⁴³

In 2017, the Gambian government reestablished diplomatic ties with the PRC, and in 2018, The Gambia joined as a partner in the BRI.¹⁴⁴ The PRC is now The Gambia’s largest trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching USD \$570 million in 2020.¹⁴⁵ The PRC is an important source of FDI for The Gambia, primarily in support of the fishing industry and infrastructure. In 2020, Chinese FDI in The Gambia totaled USD \$67.42 million, a USD \$25 million increase from 2019.¹⁴⁶ In October 2021, China-Aid completed the Road and Bridges Project from Basse to Koina. The project includes 51 kilometers of asphalt road and two bridges: the Basse Bridge and the Fatoto Bridge.¹⁴⁷ The PRC also provides development assistance to The Gambia for agricultural development, healthcare, and the COVID-19 response; and general technical assistance.

CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN THE GAMBIA

The Gambian government actively partners with civil society groups engaged in fisheries issues. The 2018 Policy specifically seeks to enhance the capacity of fisher’s organizations to promote participatory governance, sustainable development, and responsible use.¹⁴⁸

Sea Shepherd has partnered with the Gambian government since 2019 to conduct anti-IUU fishing patrols. It also provides training to the Gambian Navy.¹⁴⁹

Yamasec Ltd., an Israeli-owned, Uganda-based security training and systems company has provided training to the Gambian Navy on vessel boarding and arresting non-compliant vessels.¹⁵⁰

The **GREAT Institute** is a Gambian environmental NGO that focuses on research, education, and outreach on The Gambia’s marine and freshwater environments, especially in relation to climate change.¹⁵¹

The **National Association of Artisanal Fisheries Operators (NAAFO)** is a Gambian co-operative organization that has established a sanitation taskforce and conducted trainings to keep important fishing areas hygienic. They help set waste disposal, hygiene standards, and other best practices.¹⁵²

The **Gambia Artisanal Fisheries Fishermen Development Authority (GAMFIDA)** is an NGO that focuses on the development of artisanal fisheries with a focus on food safety practices and poverty alleviation. GAMFIDA is comprised of over 4,000 fishers, processors, and traders. This organization tries to support the practices of sustainable fishing.¹⁵³

Regional Partnership for the Conservation of the Coastal and Marine Zone (PRCM) is a coalition of NGOs working on coastal and marine management and conservation issues in Cabo Verde, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Mauritania, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. Major focus areas include sustainable fisheries, ecosystem resilience, impacts from offshore hydrocarbon extraction, and endangered species protection. Members work closely with foreign and local governments, academics, philanthropic organizations, and intergovernmental organizations.

Ghana

GOVERNANCE

Ghana is a constitutional republic with one of the most stable governments in Africa. President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo has served as chief of state and head of government since 2017, serving alongside a unicameral parliament. Since 1992, Ghana has held competitive multiparty elections and undergone peaceful transfers of power between opposition parties, although corruption persists and post-election periods have experienced violence.¹⁵⁴

DOMESTIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

The Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development (MoFAD) is currently led by Minister Mavis Hawa Koomson.¹⁵⁵ Within MoFAD, Ghana's Fisheries Commission is the implementing agency for fisheries programming, led by Director Michael Arthur-Dadzie.¹⁵⁶ The Fisheries Commission is comprised of five divisions: Inland Fisheries Management; Marine Fisheries Management; Fisheries Scientific Survey; Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance; and Operations and Administration. The MCS Division enforces fisheries laws and regulations and surveils foreign vessels licensed to fish in Ghanaian waters.¹⁵⁷

Ghana's fisheries laws promote the sustainable management of domestic resources and combat IUU fishing in its waters.¹⁵⁸ Ghana publishes and makes public its fisheries laws and regulations, which are implemented by the Fisheries Commission.¹⁵⁹

The Ghanaian Navy patrols the country's territorial waters and is broadly responsible for Ghana's maritime security. The Fisheries Commission relies on the Navy to conduct anti-IUU fishing patrols, as the Commission lacks the capacity and resources. An interviewee reported that Ghana's Navy receives money from the oil and gas industry to patrol the waters, which can influence enforcement priorities away from IUU fishing.

Fisheries Act, 2002 (Act No. 625 of 2002) is Ghana's primary fisheries law. The Act regulates fishery plans; local industrial and semi-industrial fishing vessels; artisanal fishing, aquaculture and recreational fishing; foreign fishing vessels; industrial and semi-industrial vessel licenses; fishing zones and gear; fishing activities; conservation measures; and MCS and enforcement.¹⁶⁰

Fisheries (Amendment) Act, 2014 (Act No. 880) updated the 2002 Fisheries Act, introduced the concept of combatting IUU fishing into Ghana's legal code and defined offenses. It also empowers the Minister of Fisheries to make regulations to promote international cooperation and enhance the effectiveness of international conservation and fisheries management mechanisms to combat IUU fishing.¹⁶¹

Ghana has a current National Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter, and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing 2021-2025 (NPOA-IUU). It builds upon the 2018 revisions to the FCWC Regional Plan of Action on IUU Fishing

In line with section 84 of the *Fisheries Act of 2002*, MoFAD can issue a closed season to reduce pressure on fish stocks from over-exploitation. In 2022, the closed season lasted from July 1–31 for artisanal and semi-industrial fishers, and July 1–August 31 for industrial fishers.¹⁶² The *Fisheries Act of 2002* also bans foreign ownership of industrial and semi-industrial non-tuna vessels and joint-venture ownership of artisanal vessels.¹⁶³

In 2021, Ghana established the Fisheries Enforcement Unit (FEU), an interagency governmental body, specifically to combat IUU fishing. The FEU is headed by MoFAD and includes the Fisheries Commission, Ghana Navy, and Marine Police.¹⁶⁴

In July 2022, MoFAD issued a directive on gear specifications for industrial trawlers to reduce the catch of small and juvenile fish. Minister Koomson announced that only 25 of the 76 registered trawlers met the specification and received a license; the remaining 51 are banned from fishing in Ghana’s waters.¹⁶⁵

In March 2023 at the Eighth Our Ocean Conference in Panama, Minister Koomson announced Ghana’s commitment to achieving 100% transparency through in its industrial fisheries by 2025. Industrial vessels will be required to install an electronic monitoring system (EMS) with video cameras, remote sensors, GPS, and a hard drive. EMS will monitor fishing activities and gather data and information on catch and labor standards.¹⁶⁶

GHANA’S FISHERIES SECTOR

According to the FAO, the fisheries sector contributes 4.5% to Ghana’s GDP and employs roughly 10% of the country’s workforce. Marine capture fisheries directly and indirectly employ 2.6 million people as fishers, processors, and distributors.¹⁶⁷ Nearly 100% of workers in the small-scale processing sector are women.¹⁶⁸

Ghana has one of the highest rates of dependence on fish for nutrition in Africa. Fish consumption represents 60% of animal protein intake. Annual fish consumption per capita is estimated to be 25 kg.¹⁶⁹ Ghana’s fish stocks are overfished, especially in the nearshore areas. A 2021 EJF report concluded that Ghana’s inshore fishery faces immediate collapse, largely due to IUU fishing by industrial trawlers in the IEZ.¹⁷⁰ Seventy percent of local fishers, processors, and traders interviewed noted a decline in their living conditions and a rise in food insecurity due to falling incomes and an inability to subsist on the inshore fisheries.¹⁷¹

ARTISANAL FISHING

Artisanal vessels, non-motorized canoes and motorized small vessels comprise the largest share of the Ghanaian fleet and primarily target sardinella, anchovy, and mackerel. The artisanal sector is comprised of roughly 11,200 purse seine canoes (>8m) and more than 124,000 fishers who operate out of over 300 ports and landing sites. Historically, artisanal fisheries landed around 90% of the total small pelagic catch. The inshore commercial fleet is comprised of approximately 230 wooden canoes with onboard engines. Semi-industrial purse seiners and trawlers primarily target sardinella and mackerel.

INDUSTRIAL FISHING

Ghana's industrial fleet operates from the deepwater ports of Tema and Takoradi. As of April 2023, there were 76 registered trawlers,¹⁷² which are required to have VMS coverage and observers on board. Trawlers target grouper, cuttlefish, and snapper, and the tuna vessels for skipjack, yellowfin, bigeye. Industrial tuna vessels may operate on a joint-venture basis with Ghanaian owners having at least 50% of the ownership.¹⁷³ Other types of industrial and semi-industrial vessels are required to be wholly owned by Ghanaian citizens or companies established in Ghana, although according to Ghanaian experts, companies are known to find loopholes.¹⁷⁴ The list of semi-industrial and industrial vessels is publicly available on the MoFAD website.¹⁷⁵ The terms of licenses and access agreements are not made public.¹⁷⁶

Ghana maintains the largest registry of Chinese DWF vessels outside of China (137 ships). Rongcheng Rong Yuan Fishery Co. Ltd owns 68 of these vessels. The Meng Xin fleet of trawlers have been accused of numerous illegal violations and participation in *saiko* fishing.¹⁷⁷

One interviewee in the tuna industry estimated that about 10% of the tuna vessels operating in Ghana's offshore waters are Chinese and the remaining 90% are Korean. Yet, all of the captains are Korean, even onboard Chinese vessels, noting a higher level of skill is required for tuna skippers and Korean captains have more experience.

No law exists banning politicians from owning trawlers. An interviewee noted that some local politicians are partial owners in joint venture agreements with Chinese companies and receive profit-sharing benefits. Furthermore, some foreign-owned boats with political connections are protected from monitoring or seizure and can obtain permission to operate outside of their license.

GHANA'S ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Ghana participates in the CECAF, COMHAFAT/ATLAFCO, ICCAT, FCWC. The Regional MCS Center is located in Tema.¹⁷⁸ Ghana is a signatory to the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and the

multinational maritime coordination center for Zone F of the Yaounde architecture is located in Accra. Ghana has adopted the International Declaration on Transnational Organized Crime in the Global Fishing Industry (“The Copenhagen Declaration”), which recognizes the presence of transnational crime in the global fishing industry and emphasizes the need for global cooperation and capacity building to tackle the issue.¹⁷⁹ Ghana is also a member of the Blue Justice Initiative, which supports developing states implement measures to deter and prevent organized fisheries crime, and participated in its March 2023 conference.¹⁸⁰

Ghana is party to the PSMA, the UNCLOS and the UN Fish Stocks Agreement.

In September 2022, Ghana issued the Joint Statement on Atlantic Cooperation alongside 17 other Atlantic countries to facilitate dialogue and cooperation on cross-boundary challenges including IUU fishing, transnational crime, and climate change.¹⁸¹

IUU FISHING CHALLENGES

EJF estimated that 100,000 metric tons of IUU-harvested seafood was caught in Ghana in 2017, the landed value was estimated to be USD \$41–51 million when sold by trawlers at sea, and USD \$53–81 million when sold at the landing site.¹⁸² Common IUU fishing offenses in Ghana include: industrial trawlers breaching the IEZ and targeting juveniles and species reserved for artisanal vessels; artisanal fishers using illegal gear; and illegal transshipment.

Ghana’s tuna stocks appear to be healthier than other offshore fisheries due to its importance to international trade and Ghana’s responsibilities under ICCAT. Among interviewees, IUU fishing appeared to be less of a concern for tuna vessels. Tuna purse seiners are required to have vessel monitoring and 24-hour CCTV footage.¹⁸³ According to local experts, the primary IUU fishing concern in Ghana’s tuna fisheries is the procurement of anchovies to bait the long-line vessels.

According to experts, the primary drivers of IUU fishing in Ghana are weak law enforcement and a lack of political will. One interviewee expressed that even when arrests are made, the laws are ignored so there is no deterrence and no culture of compliance. Despite the Yellow Cards and the importance of the fishing industry, another interviewee stressed that most of the government, including the President, fail to understand what is happening to Ghana’s fish stocks. Each MoFAD Minister brings new staff who often lack experience. Institutional memory can be lost with the high turnover rate.

Ghana received a Yellow Card from the EU in 2013 for inadequate legal framework to combat IUU fishing and uphold its responsibilities as coastal, flag, port, and export state.¹⁸⁴ The Yellow Card was lifted in 2015 in response to the development of new regulations and the NPOA-IUU. Structurally, those steps were enough to have the Yellow Card lifted. However, a lack of political will across local and national governments led to inadequate

enforcement. The EU issued Ghana a second Yellow Card in June 2021, noting that it had failed to adequately address the challenges of IUU fishing and its effects on fish stocks and the economic and food security of coastal communities. The EU singled out Ghana's lack of enforcement of its fisheries laws, the general lack of transparency in the fishing industry and seafood supply chain, and the prevalence of the damaging practice of *saiko* as the primary reasons for issuing a second Yellow Card.¹⁸⁵

Beneficial ownership and the use of shell companies is pervasive, despite the clear ban under the 2002 Fisheries Act of this practice for trawlers and other non-tuna vessels.¹⁸⁶ Chinese companies circumvent Ghanaian law, which requires foreign DWF vessels licensed and flagged to Ghana to trawl in Ghanaian waters. However, according to local experts, Chinese companies exploit lax enforcement to fish with vessels built in China, owned by Chinese interests, with a Chinese name, and with a captain and crew from China.¹⁸⁷ This is corroborated by a 2021 EJF report that found 90% of Ghana's industrial fleet is owned by Chinese DWF companies that set up local "front" companies and use local Ghanaian middlemen to get around the ownership laws.¹⁸⁸ One interviewee stressed the millions of dollars earned by the Chinese DWF operations are sent back to China, not spent or invested in Ghana. Chinese companies have also been reported to bribe naval and law enforcement officials to bypass regulation and legal backlash.¹⁸⁹ Ghanaian fishermen have also accused Chinese vessel captains of maltreatment and abuse onboard vessels.¹⁹⁰

IUU fishing is also widespread in Ghanaian small-scale fisheries, as fishers believe they are disadvantaged if they do not use illegal harvesting techniques like mesh nets. According to one interviewee, there is "decreasing catch, decreasing food, and decreasing profitability." MoFAD has started to take steps to address IUU fishing by small-scale fishers. In July 2022, MoFAD announced that it will subsidize and distribute multithread filament nets to artisanal fishers to stop the use of illegal monofilament nets.¹⁹¹

SAIKO FISHING

Saiko fishing is a form of illegal transshipment where industrial trawlers freeze fresh fish into slabs and transfer slabs to canoe operators, who then take the catch to be sold at local markets. The slabs often contain species reserved for artisanal fishers, bycatch, and juvenile fish. Slabs are sold to local middlemen at a profit rather than being caught, landed, and sold by local fisherfolk where it is recorded and taxed by local authorities. One stakeholder estimated that small pelagics account for over 50% of the *saiko* and at-sea transshipped fish.

MoFAD is working to eradicate *saiko*. Under the implementing rules to the **2002 Fisheries Act**, at-sea transshipment from industrial vessels to canoes is banned, but industrial trawlers were allowed to sell a 15% bycatch allowance. In September 2022, Minister Koomson overturned the 15% bycatch allowance and noted that the law will be enforced with fines.¹⁹² Fines for *saiko* range from USD \$100,000 to USD \$2,000,000 but these are rarely levied or paid. One

interviewee noted that bribes are often paid to avoid payment of the full fine levied and vessels with political connections can get permission to conduct banned at-sea transshipment.

FISHERIES-RELATED PROGRAMMING AND PARTNERSHIPS IN GHANA

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) runs fisheries conservation projects in Ghana, including the Feed the Future Ghana Fisheries Recovery Activity (GFRA), a five-year (2021–2026) USD \$17.8 million activity designed to mitigate the collapse of Ghana’s small pelagic fisheries and establish a foundation for their recovery. GFRA operates in fishing villages and landing sites in the Greater Accra Region, the Central Coast, and the Volta Region.¹⁹³ In January 2023, USAID and MoFAD announced the Safe Fish Certification and Licensing Scheme, an activity under GFRA. It is designed to raise awareness and promote the consumption of hygienic fish on the domestic and regional market. Fish processors will adopt health and hygiene standards that reduce the allowable levels of contaminants, opening access to higher value markets in Ghana and overseas.¹⁹⁴

Under the Security Governance Initiative, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries’ Office of International Affairs and Seafood Inspection supports capacity building to address maritime security challenges, including IUU fishing. The NOAA Office of General Council and Office of Law Enforcement also run the Improved Governance through Legal and Enforcement Capacity Building program in Ghana. Participants attend workshops on legal and enforcement training to combat IUU fishing in domestic waters.¹⁹⁵

Ghana participates in Operation Obangame Express, an annual multinational maritime security exercise sponsored by the U.S. Africa Command.¹⁹⁶ Ghana also participates in Operation Flintlock exercises alongside the U.S. Special Operations Command for Africa and their European and West African counterparts to strengthen regional maritime security and counter IUU fishing.¹⁹⁷ The United States Coast Guard maintains a bilateral shiprider agreement with Ghana, allowing Ghanaian defense and law enforcement personnel to join U.S. Navy and Coast Guard vessels to observe, board, and search vessels suspected of violating domestic laws and regulations within Ghana’s EEZ and on the high seas.¹⁹⁸

The Ghanaian Navy also participates in the Grand African NEMO exercises, an annual multinational maritime security exercise led by the French Navy.¹⁹⁹ The exercises are conducted under the Yaoundé Code of Conduct to combat illegal fishing and facilitate information sharing between national maritime operational centers, maritime coordination centers, and regional maritime security centers.

In December 2021, Ghana signed an agreement with the government of Togo to carry out joint monitoring of the countries’ territorial waters and fisheries as part of their effort to ensure safe, secure, and legal fisheries are maintained across the Gulf of Guinea.²⁰⁰ The

agreement includes data and intelligence provided by the FCWC's MCS Center which was launched in May 2021.²⁰¹ Other partners involved in the joint fishery observer mission include the Abidjan-based CRESMAO, European Fisheries Control Agency, Multinational Maritime Coordination Centers for Zones E and F, and TMT. The project is funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.²⁰²

Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire also conduct joint sea patrols and joint inspections of fishing and fishing-related vessels in port.²⁰³ In March 2022, the governments committed to implement a simultaneous fishery closed season.²⁰⁴

In January 2023, Ghana signed an MoU with the government of Malta to boost cooperation and investment in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors.²⁰⁵

The PRC has made several significant high-profile economic investments in Ghana's infrastructure, technology, manufacturing, and mining. The PRC agreed to finance a \$USD 2 billion investment deal to extract Bauxite in the Upper Guinean Forest in 2018.²⁰⁶ The Sinohydro Corporation financed the Bui Dam's construction, which was completed in 2013. The 400-megawatt dam cost USD \$790 million and had previously been rejected for financing by the World Bank and European Union over concerns of its environmental sustainability.²⁰⁷

The PRC has made multiple large investments in Ghanaian ports, including Tema (USD \$667 million) and Atuabo (USD \$600 million). The PRC also funded the development of Takoradi oil and gas port into a shipbuilding facility with a dry dock.

CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN GHANA

Ghana partners with international NGOs to combat IUU fishing. In 2015, the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation partnered with Ghana on a project that tests electronic monitoring technology with part of the Ghanaian fleet. In 2018, the FEU announced it would undertake electronic monitoring for all industrial vessels.

Ghana maintains and supports a robust civil society. Thousands of registered civil society organizations are generally free to operate without intervention by the government. However, civil society faces challenges in terms of resources, technology, and personnel. Freedom of assembly is respected and unions are restricted within a few sectors but otherwise free to operate. Numerous NGOs are work in Ghana to improve sustainable fisheries management or to combat IUU fishing.

EJF has a major program operating in Ghana that supports the effort to reduce IUU fishing and build capacity in fishing communities to sustainably manage fisheries resources. EJF also launched a phone app to help small-scale fishers gather evidence against IUU fishing perpetrators.

In collaboration with the FCWC, **Stop Illegal Fishing** coordinates the West Africa Task Force to gather information and mount enforcement against illegal fishing operators.

Hen Mpoano is a local NGO that works with communities to provide technical and policy support to the government, private sector, and civil society on fisheries and coastal governance.²⁰⁸ Hen Mpoano has projects that support sustainable fisheries management, coastal landscapes, sustainable livelihoods, and women’s empowerment. Hen Mpoano is also an implementing partner alongside TMT, EJF, Friends of the Nation, and the FCWC on Improving Fisheries Governance in Ghana and the Wider Sub-Region. The three year-project aims to strengthen government and industry commitment to improve fisheries governance in the key policy areas of enhanced transparency, law enforcement, collaborative management and capacity of key stakeholders in Ghana and the West African region.

Friends of the Nation (FON) is an NGO registered and based in Ghana focused on natural resource management, community development, and knowledge transfer. They specialize in oceans and fisheries, mining and oil and gas, agriculture, and human rights. FON promotes greater transparency and accountability in Ghana’s fisheries governance.

Centre for Maritime Law and Security (CEMLAWS) is an independent NGO based in Ghana with a regional and continent-wide reach to help improve ocean governance and maritime security in Africa. CEMLAWS combines research expertise, policy understanding and practical insight in delivering responses to maritime issues to provides policy advice, capacity building, and partnerships with stakeholders at all levels in enhance maritime governance in the continent. The organization’s mission is to promote effective national and regional policy responses to ocean governance issues and maritime security in Africa through policy analysis, expert-driven deliberations, capacity building and research. CEMLAWS focuses on IUU fishing and sustainable fisheries, piracy/robbery at sea, transnational organized crime, and offshore infrastructure.

Guinea-Bissau

GOVERNANCE

Since independence in 1973, Guinea-Bissau has experienced political instability and disputed elections, echoing a legacy of civil war, coups, and military rule. Guinea-Bissau is a semi-presidential republic. President Umaro Sissoco Embaló was elected in 2019 and appointed Nuno Gomes Nabiam as Prime Minister.²⁰⁹ Outside observers deemed the 2019 parliamentary elections to be free and fair, but flawed.²¹⁰ Bissau-Guinean politics are marred by conflict between the executive and legislative branches and public sector corruption. In February 2022, armed men attacked the presidential palace in a failed coup attempt.²¹¹ The political and military elite have facilitated the growth of transnational organized crime, which has contributed to conflict and instability. State institutions, notably the National Guard and Environment and Nature Protection Brigade have been implicated in illicit logging.²¹² Guinea-Bissau is also a major transit point for the global drug trade; cocaine shipped from South America is smuggled through Guinea-Bissau to Europe.²¹³

DOMESTIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Guinea-Bissau's 45,000 square kilometers continental shelf is one of the largest in West Africa. The shallow waters of the continental shelf are extremely biodiverse and support important marine habitats and commercially important species, including shrimp, cuttlefish, octopus, croakers, and snappers.²¹⁴ Coastal estuaries are important spawning grounds for small pelagics, while tunas migrate through offshore waters.²¹⁵ The fisheries sector in Guinea-Bissau contributes approximately 4% to the country's GDP. Guinea-Bissau's fisheries are in decline; of the 18 commercially important demersal and coastal pelagic species, 15 are fully or over-exploited.²¹⁶

The Ministry of Fisheries and Fishery Resources is led by Malam Sambú.²¹⁷ The Secretary of State for Fisheries and the Maritime Economy (SEPEM) is responsible for the management of fisheries and is a member of the Council of Ministers. Under SEPEM, there are four directorates: the Director General of Industrial Fisheries oversees foreign industrial vessel licensing and fishing; the Director General of Artisanal Fisheries who manages the development of artisanal fisheries; the General Director for Training, Support, Development of Fisheries, and Marine Economy is tasked with coordinating level training and career development for fishers; the General Director for the Administration of Fishing Ports manages Guinea-Bissau's fishing ports and related infrastructure and is also tasked with their modernization.²¹⁸

SEPEM also operates fisheries at the Center for Applied Fisheries Research (CIPA), which is mandated to carry out policy development for the government of Guinea-Bissau. CIPA is an autonomous public institution tasked with the management of

fisheries in four areas: Human Resources, Fishing Resources & Oceanographic Surveys, Statistics, and the National Fisheries.

The Fisheries Surveillance Service (FISCAP) oversees regulatory compliance and enforcement. FISCAP and the Navy share joint bases and patrol boats along the coast. On-the-water enforcement is conducted by the Navy and Coast Guard. VMS and Bissau-Guinean observers are required on industrial vessels, but this is rarely enforced. Guinea-Bissau's MCS capacity is the lowest among the West African states.²¹⁹ The Ministry of Fisheries is working to procure drones to enhance MCS capacity.²²⁰

Guinea-Bissau's primary fisheries law is *Decreto-Lei n. 10/2011 - Aprova a Revisão da Lei Geral das Pescas*, which establishes the management of fisheries and aquaculture, licensing requirements, fishing activities, mariculture and product procession, hygiene, and inspection.²²¹ Additional laws and decrees manage the marine and inland artisanal fisheries, as well as the conditions for national and foreign vessels, including specifying vessel, gear, and licensing requirements, fishing zones, conservation measures, and fines.²²² Foreign artisanal vessels are required to obtain a fishing license from the Bissau-Guinean government. They are required to submit the registration from their flag state, crew member identity cards, and immigration permits. Non-motorized vessels are required to have at least one Bissau-Guinean crew member on board; motorized vessels are required to have at least two.²²³

Government fisheries policy is dictated by the five-year *Strategic Plan for Fisheries Development (2015–2020)*.²²⁴ The Strategic Plan prioritized combatting IUU fishing, integrating the industrial fleet into the national economy, good governance, research, and promoting artisanal fisheries and aquaculture development for the domestic market. It is unknown if the government has released an updated version of the Strategic Plan for 2020 through 2025, though in January 2022, the government introduced a one-month closed season for industrial fishing to allow stocks to regenerate.²²⁵

GUINEA-BISSAU'S FISHERIES SECTOR

Fisheries directly employ 6,000 Bissau-Guineans, and indirectly employ another 26,000.²²⁶ Annual fish consumption per capita is low, estimated at 16 - 18 kg, but fish provide 64% of animal protein consumption.²²⁷

Guinea-Bissau's fisheries are divided into the artisanal and industrial sectors. Waters from 0–12 nautical miles are reserved for artisanal vessels as an IEZ. The IEZ is separated into three zones: Zone A with depths less than 10 m; Zone B with depths 10–20 m; and Zone C, with depths 20–200 m.²²⁸

ARTISANAL FLEETS

The artisanal sector includes Bissau-Guineans, and migrant fishers from Senegal, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. Artisanal fisheries generate approximately USD \$33.8 million per year between the formal and informal economy. The Bissau-Guinean artisanal fleet is comprised of 883 pirogues, operated by nearly 5,600 fishers.²²⁹ Artisanal fisheries directly and indirectly employ over than 25,000 Bissau-Guineans.²³⁰ The sector is important for Guinea-Bissau's food security, as artisanal catch provides Guinea-Bissau's population with 35% of its animal protein.²³¹ Foreign artisanal vessels account for one-third of artisanal fishing effort.²³² Under Bissau-Guinean law, artisanal vessels must be less than 60 horsepower, although roughly 85% of the artisanal fleet is unmotorized. There are approximately 200 artisanal landing sites.²³³ Guinea-Bissau's artisanal marine fisheries produce approximately 30,000 metric tons of marine fish each year; inland artisanal fisheries produce approximately 5,000 metric tons.²³⁴ These fishers primarily target small pelagics. Women engage in subsistence fishing and gleaning from the beach and in the shallows.

INDUSTRIAL FLEETS

Guinea Bissau has no domestic industrial fleet; all industrial vessels are either foreign-flagged and operating under bilateral fisheries access agreements, chartered, or foreign-owned and reflagged to Guinea-Bissau. The most recent data, from 2017, indicates that there are 203 foreign vessels from 17 flag states authorized to fish in Guinea-Bissau. The largest fleets are the PRC (82 vessels); Spain (41); Senegal (19); and France (10). 34 of the 203 vessels had previously documented IUU fishing or fisheries crimes violations.²³⁵ Industrial vessels primarily target shrimp, cephalopods, and small pelagic species including sardinella, mackerel, mullet, and bonga shad.²³⁶ Small pelagics are approximately 80% of the industrial catch. Industrial fishing is concentrated in the Bijagós, Cacheu and Cacine areas.²³⁷ The estimated catch value of the industrial fleet is USD \$416.2 million per year. Only 15% of the landed value (USD \$49.5 million) is paid to Guinea-Bissau through fees and access agreements.²³⁸

The government publishes the number of foreign artisanal and industrial vessel licenses but does not publicize vessel names or the terms of access agreements. Licensing requirements for foreign industrial vessels are also not public.

Only Bissau-Guinean citizens and legal entities are allowed to charter foreign fishing vessels. Chartered vessels are required to have at least one Bissau-Guinean citizen on board.²³⁹

The Port of Bissau is the largest fishing port in the country. Alto do Bandim port, also located in Bissau, is the primary port for artisanal fishers to offload and sell their catch. The PRC has committed USD \$23.5 million to expand and improve the port. Development was halted by Covid-19 but has since resumed.²⁴⁰ Most fish caught in Guinea-Bissau's waters are landed

in neighboring countries, notably Senegal and Spain (Canary Islands) or transshipped at sea. Of the approximately 160,000 metric tons harvested by industrial vessels per year in Bissau-Guinean waters, approximately 6,700 metric tons are landed in the country.²⁴¹ Transshipment is banned but the regulations are not enforced.²⁴²

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Guinea-Bissau has two MPAs which protect 12.27% of the country's territorial waters. João Viera e Poilão Marine National Park protects 495 square kilometers of waters in the southern Bijagós archipelago. The park includes the most important nesting grounds for green sea turtles in the Eastern Atlantic.²⁴³ The area is also an important spawning ground for commercially targeted fish species. The Urok Islands Community Marine Protected Area protects 545 square kilometers of crucial habitat in the Northern Bijagós Archipelag for endangered marine mammals such as the manatee and humpback dolphin.²⁴⁴

GUINEA-BISSAU'S ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Guinea-Bissau participates in several regional and subregional fisheries organizations, including CECAF, COMHAFAT/ATLAFCO, ECOWAS, ICCAT, and SRFC. Guinea-Bissau is party to UNCLOS and the UN Fish Stocks Agreement, but not the PSMA. Guinea-Bissau is also party to the Yaoundé Code of Conduct.

In September 2022, Guinea-Bissau issued the Joint Statement on Atlantic Cooperation alongside 17 other Atlantic countries to facilitate dialogue and cooperation on cross-boundary challenges including IUU fishing, transnational crime, and climate change.²⁴⁵

In February 2022, Guinea-Bissau adopted the Namibe Declaration alongside Angola, Brazil, Cabo Verde, Mozambique, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Timor-Leste. The Declaration established a roadmap to combat IUU fishing through the development of a cooperative network.²⁴⁶

IUU FISHING CHALLENGES

Guinea-Bissau is a hub for IUU fishing as bad actors exploit weak governance, corruption, and poor MCS enforcement capacity. Guinea-Bissau loses an estimated USD \$260.7 million each year to IUU fishing: USD \$239.8 million from industrial vessels, and USD \$20.9 million from the artisanal fleet. Industrial vessels report only approximately 40% of their catch to the Bissau-Guinean government.²⁴⁷

From 2010 to 2022, there were 23 detected cases of industrial vessels with previous IUU fishing violations fishing in Guinea-Bissau's waters, the sixth-most of any country in the world.²⁴⁸ This number is likely much higher, as poor MCS capacity allows many vessels to evade enforcement. 20% of foreign vessels licensed to fish in Guinea-Bissau have committed previous IUU fishing violations or related fisheries crimes.²⁴⁹

Industrial trawlers regularly fish in the IEZ. Local fishers report that the trawlers destroy their gear and damage the seabed and fragile coastal habitats in the IEZ.²⁵⁰

Some artisanal fishermen in Guinea-Bissau use illegal nets and other prohibited gears. Guinea-Bissau has lax gear regulations and poor surveillance of artisanal fishers. As a result, artisanal fishers from neighboring countries often choose to fish in Guinea-Bissau's waters regardless of whether they are permitted or licensed to fish there. Foreign artisanal fishers process their catch and export it to neighboring countries without reporting or paying export fees to the government. Bissau-Guinean fishers cite Ghanaian and Senegalese fishers as the worst offenders in the artisanal fisheries. In July 2017, the Guinea-Bissau authorities arrested 11 Senegalese pirogues for illegal fishing. Four pirogues escaped after taking a Bissau-Guinean law enforcement officer hostage.²⁵¹

PRC-flagged vessels are the largest fleet operating in Guinea-Bissau, and there are an unknown number of Chinese vessels that have re-flagged as Bissau-Guinean. Chinese-built and operated vessels flagged to neighboring countries also fish illegally in Guinea-Bissau's waters.²⁵²

In **March 2017**, a joint patrol with FISCAP and Greenpeace detained 7 vessels for IUU fishing. The Moldova-flagged *Saly Reefer* was caught in the middle of at-sea transshipment with three Comoros-flagged vessels (*Flipper 3*, *Flipper 4*, *Flipper 5*). They were escorted to port and fined.²⁵³ The *Saly Reefer* has since reflagged to other flags of convenience, including Comoros and Cameroon. All four vessels are owned by a company incorporated in Panama, widely believed to be a shell company to obscure its true beneficial owner.

Two days later, the joint patrol observed three vessels (*Yi Feng 8*, *Yi Feng 9*, *Yi Feng 10*) with vessel names only written in Chinese, violating the law that requires vessels to have easily identifiable names. The *Yi Feng 8* was arrested and impounded, but the other two vessels escaped. All three vessels are owned by the Chinese company Yi Feng Aquatic Products Company but registered in Guinea-Bissau under a local company, Guiespa Pesca Lda.

Three days after the *Yi Feng 8* incident, the joint patrol observed a Chinese trawler, the *Chang Yuan Yu 05* fishing in an MPA in the Bijagós Archipelago. In 2016, the same vessel was caught using illegal nets and was fined, which the company failed to pay. After the March 2017 incident, the vessel was boarded, arrested, and impounded at the Port of Bissau.²⁵⁴

In **November 2019**, enforcement officials intercepted a Chinese fishmeal factory ship, the *Tian Yi He 6*. The vessel failed to report its arrival to the Guinea-Bissau authorities and was

accused of hiding its fisheries purpose. The vessel was fined for violating national fisheries law and obstructing the work of fisheries inspectors.²⁵⁵

In **February 2020**, the *Tian Yi He 6* was again caught in the middle of an at-sea transshipment operation with a Senegal-based transfer vessel.²⁵⁶

In **September 2021**, the Guinea-Bissau Coast Guard detained a Chinese-flagged, Guinea-based vessel, the *Sabu-3*, for IUU fishing. The Guinean crew were arrested, and the vessel owner was fined 500 million CFA (USD \$844,000).²⁵⁷

FISHERIES-RELATED PROGRAMMING AND PARTNERSHIPS IN GUINEA-BISSAU

The United States NOAA Office of General Council and Office of Law Enforcement run the Improved Governance through Legal and Enforcement Capacity Building program in Guinea-Bissau. Participants attend workshops on legal and enforcement training to combat IUU fishing in Bissau-Guinean waters.²⁵⁸ Guinea-Bissau also participates in Operation Obangame Express, an annual multinational maritime security exercise sponsored by the U.S. Africa Command.²⁵⁹

Guinea-Bissau maintains an SFPAs with the EU (2019-2024) that allows 50 EU vessels flagged to Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, France, Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland to harvest shrimp, cephalopods, small pelagic species, and tuna. Under the SFPAs, the EU will pay €15.6 million to access Bissau-Guinean waters, including €4 million to directly support fisheries management capacity.²⁶⁰

Guinea-Bissau is a member of the BRI, and the PRC provides funding and development to improve Guinea-Bissau's infrastructure. The PRC has funded projects to renovate the national stadium, presidential palace, National School of Health, and the Sino-Guinean Friendship Hospital.²⁶¹ In April 2022, Guinea-Bissau broke ground on a new 14-kilometer roadway connect the international airport with Bissau city; this USD \$14.7 million project is fully financed by the PRC.²⁶²

The PRC has invested heavily in Guinea-Bissau's fisheries since 1984, when the two governments signed a bilateral fisheries cooperation agreement. Under the agreement, Guinea-Bissau authorized Chinese vessels to fish in its EEZ and the two countries stated their intention to develop a joint-venture fishing company.²⁶³ The joint-venture company operates a cold-storage facility.²⁶⁴ In 2010, the Bissau-Guinean government and the China National Fisheries Corporation (CNFC) signed an updated version, the *Protocol of Agreement between Guinea-Bissau and the CNFC*, that establishes the terms for Chinese fishing activities within Guinea-Bissau's EEZ in exchange for Chinese investment in Guinea-Bissau's fisheries sector.²⁶⁵ In March 2023, a CNFC subsidiary company Zhongyu Global Seafood inaugurated

a 4000 m² fish processing facility. CNFC is the PRC's largest fisheries company and has an office in Guinea-Bissau. 16 of its vessels have been indentified as having been involved in alleged or confirmed IUU fishing activities.²⁶⁶

Prior to his position in the Ministry of Fisheries, Minister Sambú, was the Ambassador to the PRC from 2010-2020. In a June 2020 bilateral meeting with the Ambassador of China to Guinea-Bissau, Minister Sambú expressed a desire to establish a bilateral fisheries agreement with China similar to EU SFPA.²⁶⁷

CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN GUINEA-BISSAU

Civil society is generally free to operate, but activists and journalists who criticize the government face harassment, arbitrary detention, and assassination attempts.²⁶⁸ Civil society groups have faced retaliation from government representatives for reporting on their involvement in the illegal logging trade.²⁶⁹ Despite this, the government does cooperate with international and domestic NGOs on MPAs and combatting IUU fishing.

Greenpeace conducts joint fisheries enforcement operations with FISCAP and the Coast Guard and provides trainings to fisheries enforcement officers.²⁷⁰

Tinguena is a local NGO focused on improving artisanal fisheries governance through participatory resource oversight. Tinguena has programming on environmental education for citizens, management of protected areas, and gender equality and equity. The organization developed a natural resource monitoring project that uses local information gathering to develop better understandings on environmental exploitation by the government and corporations.²⁷¹

The **Management Councils of João Vieira Poilão and Orango National Parks** represent local communities in the vicinity of the parks. The councils have also cooperated with local authorities to intercept vessels fishing illegally the MPAs.

Liberia

GOVERNANCE

Since the end of the Second Liberian Civil War in 2003, the country has reestablished the rule of law, rebuilt the capacity of government, and worked to ensure basic civil rights and stability.²⁷² Liberia is a constitutional democracy with a directly elected president, bicameral legislature, and an independent judiciary. President George Weah was elected in 2018.

DOMESTIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Liberia's fish stocks and aquaculture production were impacted heavily by the First and Second Liberian Civil Wars. In the 1970s, Liberia was a regional leader in fisheries production, but the civil wars decimated both fish stocks and artisanal fishing communities. Since the end of the Second Liberian Civil War, the government has sought to rebuild the marine capture fisheries and aquaculture industries.²⁷³ However, Liberia's stocks today are still not as robust as those of its neighbors, and fish plays a smaller role in the country's food security.

Liberia's fisheries agency is the National Fisheries & Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA), which was constituted in 2017 from the former Bureau of National Fisheries. NaFAA's mission is to ensure the sustainable management and economic viability of Liberia's fish stocks, which has three main components: marine, aquaculture, and inland fisheries. The current Director General of NaFAA is Emma Metieh-Glassco.²⁷⁴

The *Fisheries and Aquaculture Management and Development Law of 2019* is Liberia's primary fisheries legislation. The law builds upon the existing objective to "ensure the long-term management, conservation, development and sustainable use of the fisheries and aquaculture resources and ecosystems" through additional provisions on conservation, fisheries agreements, registers, compliance, licensing, MCS, offences, and fines.²⁷⁵

NaFAA came under scrutiny in October 2021 for its controversial policy development related to the 2019 law. NaFAA announced experimental deep-water shrimp fishing with the aim of returning shrimp catch and export levels to those of the 1970s, when shrimp exports contributed USD \$40 million per year. A Belgian NGO, the Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangement, challenged the law, noting that the law did not allow for "experimental" shrimp fishing but rather "research fishing" for scientific purposes.²⁷⁶

Liberia's Coast Guard is in charge of enforcing fisheries laws, combatting IUU fishing, and other maritime security concerns. Since 2017, the Liberian Coast Guard has partnered with Sea Shepherd to combat IUU fishing. Under Operation Sola Stella (February–April 2017), joint-sea patrols arrested 16 vessels for IUU fishing and other fisheries crimes.²⁷⁷

LIBERIA'S FISHERIES SECTOR

Fisheries contribute to approximately 10% of Liberia's GDP and directly and indirectly employ approximately 33,000 people. Fish provides 15% of Liberia's primary protein, which is among the lowest in West Africa. Liberia imports approximately 33,000 tons of fish on average each year.²⁷⁸

Coastal artisanal and semi-industrial fisheries account for 86% of Liberia's total fisheries production. In 2020, the sector produced 18,806 tons of fish, although this is likely an undercount.²⁷⁹ There are estimated to be approximately 3,000 artisanal and 500 semi-industrial Fanti canoes up to 15m. Some Fanti fishers are Liberian, but others have migrated from Senegal and Ghana. Artisanal fishers harvest barracuda and croakers with hooks, long lines and gillnets while Fanti canoes target small pelagics.²⁸⁰ In 2019, NaFAA raised the licensing fees for artisanal vessels by 1000%, prompting many to stay in port.

Liberia's industrial fleet is smaller than those in neighboring countries. The sector is comprised of trawlers and tuna vessels. Exact numbers on industrial fleet size is difficult to find; recent numbers suggest there are at least nine trawlers and 36 tuna vessels licensed to fish in Liberian waters.²⁸¹ The primary fish landing sites are the Freeport of Monrovia and the Ports of Buchanan, Greenville, and Harper.

Liberia's industrial fleet is entirely comprised of foreign-owned vessels. Six vessels in the trawler fleet are owned by the Chinese company Dalian Int. Coop Pelagic Fishing Co. Ltd. At least three trawlers are owned by the Spanish-Senegalese joint venture company SOPERKA S.A.²⁸² The ownership of the industrial tuna fleet is unclear.

In 2010, Liberia established an IEZ from 0–6 nautical miles to preserve fish stocks and protect the livelihood of its artisanal fishers. In 2017, a law was introduced to reduce the IEZ to 0–3 nm and open it to semi-industrial vessels, although industrial trawling would remain banned. The law ultimately failed.²⁸³ There is no transshipment ban or requirement for industrial vessel tracking. Liberia maintains steep fines for IUU fishing but they are rarely enforced. For example, fishing without a license is punishable by a fine up to USD \$100,000.

LIBERIA'S ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Liberia is a member of numerous maritime security and fisheries management organizations at the subregional, regional, and international levels, including CECAF, COMHAFAT/ATLAFCO, ECOWAS, FCWC, IATTC, IWC, NEAFC, SPRFMO, and WCPFC. Liberia is also a Cooperating Non-Contracting Party to the IOTC.

Liberia is signatory to the Yaoundé Code of Conduct. Liberia is party to the PSMA and the UN Fish Stocks Agreement. The FAO held PSMA implementation workshops in

Liberia 2019. In 2021, the Liberian government signaled its intention to accede to both the International Labor Organization's Work in Fishing Convention, and the International Maritime Organization's Cape Town Agreement.²⁸⁴

IUU FISHING CHALLENGES

Like its neighbors around the Gulf of Guinea, foreign vessels commit IUU fishing offenses in Liberia's waters. Common offenses include overfishing, underreporting, industrial fishing in the IEZ, and fishing without a license.²⁸⁵ Enforcement is a persistent challenge as MCS and enforcement capacity are limited. The government only has seven patrol vessels: one operated by NaFAA and six operated by the Coast Guard.²⁸⁶

In 2017, the EU issued a yellow card to Liberia, citing a lack of cooperation in the fight against IUU fishing. To lift the Yellow Card, NaFAA is working to establish a Transshipment Unit to monitor distant water fleet activity and issue annual transshipment licenses.²⁸⁷

PRC-flagged and -owned industrial vessels have been interdicted and fined for engaging in IUU fishing in Liberian waters. Local artisanal fishermen's associations strongly oppose the government issuing fishing licenses to Chinese trawlers in Liberian waters. Artisanal fishers believe the trawlers are unfair competition and have the potential to destroy local livelihoods and the environment.²⁸⁸

In **November 2018**, a joint patrol by Sea Shepherd and the Liberian Coast Guard arrested the Chinese-owned, Ivorian-flagged industrial trawler *Bonheur* for fishing illegally in Liberian waters, obscuring the vessel name with nets, and fishing in the IEZ.²⁸⁹

In **September 2022**, joint patrol by the Liberian Coast Guard and Sea Shepherd encountered an unidentified trawler operating without the Automatic Identification System (AIS).²⁹⁰ The trawler, later identified as the Chinese-owned *Guo Ji 831*, was boarded and seized. The crew was arrested. Earlier that month, a second Chinese-owned trawler, the *Guo Ji 829*, was arrested after it was discovered to have been transmitting a false identity.

FISHERIES-RELATED PROGRAMMING AND PARTNERSHIPS IN LIBERIA

In 2015, Liberia and the EU entered into an SFPA, which allowed EU-flagged vessels to fish in Liberian waters and cooperate on surveillance measures. This agreement lapsed in 2020 and was not renewed.²⁹¹

In October 2021, the FAO signed a funding agreement with the Japanese government to combat IUU fishing. It provides USD \$3.5 million to NaFAA to improve fish quality for

fishers, fishmongers, and fish processors. The project supports fish product health and quality training at sea, in markets, and during processing to minimize post-catch losses.

The World Bank's West Africa Regional Fisheries Program is active in Liberia. The program focuses on building good governance and the sustainable management of fisheries.²⁹²

In December 2021, the World Bank's International Development Association announced a USD \$40 million financing deal with Liberia, which included a USD \$20 million grant and USD \$20 million in credit to establish an industrial and artisanal fish landing site in Monrovia and other artisanal sites in Margibi, Maryland, Grand Bassa, and Grand Kru counties. The deal will also strengthen fisheries management and governance, increase capacity, and improve the regulatory framework.²⁹³

Liberia participates in Operation Obangame Express, a multinational maritime security exercise sponsored by the U.S. Africa Command. Liberia also participates in the Grand African NEMO exercises, an annual multinational maritime security exercise led by the French Navy.²⁹⁴ The exercises are conducted under the Yaoundé Code of Conduct to combat illegal fishing and facilitate information sharing between national maritime operational centers, maritime coordination centers, and regional maritime security centers.

The United States NOAA Office of General Council and Office of Law Enforcement run the Improved Governance through Legal and Enforcement Capacity Building program in Liberia. Participants attend workshops on legal and enforcement training to combat IUU fishing in domestic waters.

In November 2022, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia signed an MoU to work together to prevent, deter, and eliminate IUU fishing through the implementation of the PSMA and knowledge exchanges on MCS.²⁹⁵

In February 2023, Liberia signed an MoU with Senegal to improve regional maritime security and combat IUU fishing.²⁹⁶ The two countries will work to harmonize their inspection regimes, run joint exercises, exchange information, and implement the PSMA.

Also in February 2023, Liberia signed an MoU with Morocco to conduct stock assessments of Liberia's fishery resources.²⁹⁷

In 2019, Liberia signed on to the BRI to promote cooperation with the PRC, enhance policy coordination, and deepen mutual understanding. Current Chinese investment is concentrated in the mining and forestry sectors.²⁹⁸ Beyond the BRI, the PRC has also invested in major infrastructure in Liberia, including government buildings in Monrovia and airport terminals.²⁹⁹ In 2019, the PRC reaffirmed its pledge to continue to improve and modernize Liberia's transportation and infrastructure.³⁰⁰

Foreign direct investment by the PRC in Liberia’s fisheries sector is difficult to pinpoint, but the PRC has provided technical training and funded advanced degrees for NaFAA staff. In a May 2022 meeting with the PRC’s ambassador to Liberia, NaFAA Director-General Metieh-Glassco called on the PRC to take advantage of investment opportunities and help NaFAA to develop Liberia’s aquaculture industry.³⁰¹

CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN LIBERIA

Liberia’s civil society is well developed and relatively free from governmental interference. Environmental groups collaborate with foreign partners and the national government on fisheries and ocean issues.³⁰²

In October 2021, **the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF)**, in partnership with NaFAA, launched the Communities for Fisheries project (2021–2024) for USD \$3 million over four years. Under the umbrella of the EU-Liberia Agriculture Programme, the project seeks to empower communities to co-manage fisheries, reduce IUU fishing, and build lasting sustainability and social equity into Liberia’s fishing sector. This will help to safeguard food security and coastal livelihoods across Liberia.³⁰³

In 2017, **Sea Shepherd** launched a campaign to patrol against IUU fishing.³⁰⁴ The campaign resulted in the arrests of 14 vessels from 2017–2018 and acted as a deterrent. Initially slated to last three months, the campaign continues today.³⁰⁵

TMT, in cooperation with **Stop Illegal Fishing**, the FCWC Secretariat and FCWC member countries, developed the ‘Fisheries Intelligence and MCS Support in West Africa.’ The project was supported by the Norwegian Agency for Development and Cooperation to tackle IUU fishing in the Gulf of Guinea. An initial four-year project was implemented between 2014 and 2018, and a second phase was implemented through 2022. The project has facilitated the establishment and functions of the West Africa Task Force, operationalizing key FCWC conventions on information sharing and MCS cooperation.³⁰⁶

In March 2022, the **University of Liberia** and NaFAA signed an MoU to establish a Fishery Sciences program, which offers four- and two-year degrees and a certificate.³⁰⁷ The World Bank provided USD \$1.2 million in funding for the program’s establishment.

Mauritania

GOVERNANCE

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania is a presidential republic led by President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani. Ghazouani was elected to office with 52% of the vote in June 2019. This election was the first democratic transfer of power between presidents since Mauritania's independence in 1960. The legislative branch is comprised of unicameral Parliament. The military has outside influence in national policymaking. Mauritania has been under military rule or led by a military officer since 1978. Corruption is rampant, despite improved anti-money-laundering and anti-terror-financing measures, and anticorruption laws.³⁰⁸

DOMESTIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Mauritania has a 32,366 square kilometer continental shelf and sits at the confluence of the Guinea and Canary currents.³⁰⁹ The rich waters support over 600 fish species. The fisheries sector contributes between 4–10% of Mauritania's GDP and accounts for approximately 35–50% of Mauritania's exports.³¹⁰

The Ministry of Fisheries and Maritime Economy (MPEM) manages fishery governance in Mauritania.³¹¹ MPEM provides technical supervision of the Mauritanian Institute for Oceanographic Research and Fisheries (IMROP), the National Office for Sanitary Inspection of Fishery and Aquaculture Products, the Mauritanian Fish Marketing Company, the Nouakchott Fish Market, the National Fish Distribution Company, and the Shipyards of Mauritania. MPEM also oversees marine resource exploitation and industrial processing, MCS, vessel licensing, research and training, and international cooperation. IMROP is the government agency responsible for fisheries sector issues.³¹² The Mauritanian Coast Guard oversees at-sea MCS and enforcement to counter IUU fishing.³¹³

Loi no. 2015-017 du 21 juillet 2015 portant code des pêches maritimes is Mauritania's primary fisheries management law and establishes the rules and regulations applicable to maritime fishing in waters in Mauritania.³¹⁴ This, along with other related laws and regulations, establish fishery access rights and requirements and licensing fees for Mauritania's deep-sea, coastal, and artisanal fisheries, as well as parameters for mariculture production, health and sanitary regulations for fish processing, MCS and prosecution, and environmental protections.³¹⁵ The law also establishes two regimes; one for national fishing and the other covers international fishing. The national regime includes vessels owned by Mauritians and foreign-owned vessels operating under the Mauritanian flag, and the international fishing regime allows foreign governments or companies to enter into fisheries access agreements with the Mauritanian government.

The Government of Mauritania has released fisheries development policies since 1976. The 2015-2019 policy prioritized fisheries research; optimized management and exploitation of

fishery resources, integration of the fisheries sector into the national economy; development of maritime affairs, promotion of the development of inland fisheries and aquaculture, and good fisheries governance.³¹⁶ Under the 2021-2025 policy, Mauritania is implementing measures to develop a fish processing industry for human consumption.³¹⁷

MAURITANIA’S FISHERIES SECTOR

The fisheries sector in Mauritania is divided into three sectors – deep-sea, coastal, and inshore – and employs approximately 55,000 Mauritians, primarily in the inshore sector. Approximately 200 species are commercially harvested, including cephalopods, inshore and deep-sea demersal fish, crustaceans, bivalves, small pelagics, and tunas.³¹⁸ Most foreign vessels do not land their catch in-country, thus the post-harvest processing and marketing sector do not employ many Mauritians. This is in contradiction to existing fisheries management policies, but there is limited enforcement of these regulations.³¹⁹

DEEP-SEA FLEET

The deep-sea fleet is comprised of 392 industrial vessels, including trawlers; purse seiners; trap, net, longline, and net vessels; and pole and line vessels. The deep sea fleet can be split into two groups: the Mauritanian-flagged national industrial fleet, and the foreign-flagged DWF fleet. As of 2021, the Mauritanian-flagged national industrial fleet is comprised of 245 vessels. 36 of these vessels are operated by the Chinese company Fuzhou HongDong Pelagic Fishery Co., Ltd. These vessels fly the Mauritanian flag and operate under the national regime.³²⁰ Mauritanian-flagged and owned vessels only account for 2-3% of the total marine catch. National vessels primarily target octopus, crustaceans, and other demersal species. Tunas and other high-value pelagic species are targeted by foreign industrial vessels, although in November 2022, Mauritania submitted a request to the ICCAT to develop a domestic bluefin tuna fleet with an annual quota of 200 metric tons. Mauritania intends to introduce its first purse seiner in 2023 and a second in 2024.³²¹

DWF vessels operate in Mauritanian waters under fisheries access agreements and target high-value pelagic species, including tunas, mackerel, sardines, and herring. As of 2021, the largest foreign-flagged DWF fleets are flagged by the EU (48 vessels); Japan (16); Cameroon (8), Belize (8), and The Russian Federation (7).³²² DWF vessels are required to land their catch in Mauritania, a regulation that is routinely ignored.³²³ 201 DWF vessels from 16 countries are authorized to fish in Mauritanian waters, a 24% decrease from 2020.³²⁴ The terms of most fisheries access agreements are publicly available.³²⁵

24 additional foreign vessels fish for small pelagic species under Mauritania’s *Convention de Pêche Pelagique*. These vessels are flagged to Belize (8); Cameroon (8); The Russian Federation (7); and Angola (1).³²⁶

Foreign vessels can re-flag into the Mauritanian national fleet through specific fisheries access agreements. National vessels pay lower access fees and are allowed to harvest certain species, including octopus.³²⁷ As of 2021, 53 foreign-owned, chartered industrial vessels were listed as part of the Mauritanian national fleet.³²⁸ Anecdotal evidence suggests that most of the Mauritanian “national” fleet are reflagged foreign vessels, primarily from the EU and PRC. Between 2018 and 2021, 19 EU vessels reflagged to Mauritania.³²⁹ The exact number of re-flagged PRC vessels is unknown, but fisheries access agreements have allowed large groups of PRC vessels to re-flag, including one instance of 43 PRC vessels.³³⁰

COASTAL AND INSHORE FLEETS

The coastal fleet and the inshore fleet are a mix of semi-industrial and artisanal vessels. Both subsectors target cephalopods, crustaceans, demersal fish, and mollusks. In 2021, the coastal fleet was comprised of 346 registered semi-industrial purse seiners and decked artisanal vessels over 14 m. 245 vessels were flagged to Mauritania, while the remainder were flagged to Senegal (63); Turkey (28); the PRC (6); Cameroon (2); Morocco (1); and Nigeria (1). In 2021, the inshore fleet was comprised of 7,617 artisanal pirogues, 7,492 flagged to Mauritania and 125 flagged to Senegal. Common artisanal gear types include traps, handlines, and nets.³³¹ Waters from 0 to 12 nautical miles are reserved for the inshore fleet as an IEZ.³³² Foreign industrial trawlers are further excluded from waters up to 20 nautical miles.³³³ The Mauritanian government grants concessions to individual industrial vessels to fish the IEZ.³³⁴

FISHERIES ACCESS FEES AND REQUIREMENTS

All vessels are required to pay direct access flat fees and the list of industrial vessels licenses and payments are publicly available.³³⁵ The fees depend on the targeted species. Deep-sea vessel access fees range from 150,000 Ouguiya (USD \$4,379) to 1,000,000 Ouguiya (USD \$29,197). Deep-sea vessels pay an additional licensing fee per gross ton (GT)/month. Trawler freezer vessels pay an additional 1900 Ouguiya (USD \$55) per GT/month; freezer vessels fishing with gear other than trawls pay 1400 (USD \$41) Ouguiya per GT/month; and fishing vessels other than trawlers pay 900 Ouguiya (USD \$26) per GT/month. Coastal industrial vessels pay 900 Ouguiya (USD \$26) per GT/month and access fees from 80,000–300,000 Ouguiya (USD \$2336–\$8759). Artisanal vessels pay a flat access fee from 8000–30,000 Ouguiya (USD \$23–\$88).³³⁶

TRANSSHIPMENT

Transshipment is allowed in domestic waters in Mauritania, though there are transshipment control systems in place aimed at limiting IUU fishing. Transshipment activities, including

catch information, must be reported to the Port Authorities of Nouadhibou and the Mauritanian Coast Guard.³³⁷

FISHMEAL AND FISH OIL PRODUCTION IN MAURITANIA

Mauritania is one of the largest FMFO producers in the world. There are approximately 40 fishmeal factories, with many concentrated around the northern port city of Nouadhibou.³³⁸ Prior to 2010, there was only one FMFO factory, which processed trash fish, bycatch, and offcuts. Today, the majority of Mauritanian FMFO factories use whole round and flat sardinella as raw material.³³⁹ The processed products are sold to markets in East Asia and Europe to support aquaculture production.

In 2017, the Mauritanian government announced measures to decrease FMFO production with the objective of ending fishmeal production by 2020, noting the decrease in small pelagic stocks.³⁴⁰ This, however, has not yet happened, and demand for small pelagic species surged to 650,000 metric tons per year by 2020.

Mauritanian and foreign companies own FMFO factories. Several factories employ their own fleet to catch small pelagics and offload directly at the factory docks. This catch is not reported. Foreign vessels owned by FMFO companies have reflagged to Mauritania. For example, Poly HongDong re-flagged its factory fleet of 43 vessels to Mauritania.³⁴¹

MAURITANIA'S ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Mauritania is a member of numerous maritime security and fisheries-related organizations at the subregional, regional, and international levels, including: CECAF, COMHAFAT/ATLAFCO, ICCAT, and SRFC. Mauritania is also party to the PSMA. In September 2022, Mauritania endorsed the Joint Statement on Atlantic Cooperation alongside 17 other Atlantic countries to facilitate dialogue and cooperation on cross-boundary challenges including IUU fishing, transnational crime, and climate change.³⁴²

IUU FISHING CHALLENGES

Despite Mauritania's commitment to improving fisheries management and transparency, it still faces challenges with IUU fishing and overfishing. Mauritania's permissive legal framework results in a number of specific challenges, particularly with respect to underreporting catch, encroachment on specialized or protected areas, and disputes between sectors.³⁴³

Industrial vessels frequently underreport their catch.³⁴⁴ FMFO factory fleets offload their catch directly to fishmeal factory piers, where fish are immediately processed and exported without accountability or oversight.

Protected waters in Banc d'Arguin National Park are encroached on by small-scale and industrial vessels. Artisanal and semi-industrial Senegalese vessels target sharks and rays for their fins in the area to sell in East Asia.³⁴⁵ AIS data indicates that Turkish-chartered seiners encroach on the park's waters and surrounding IEZ. Fishing in protected areas is can be government sanctioned; in November 2021, the Mauritanian government authorized one of these vessels, the *Habibin Yazuz*, to fish in the IEZ on the park's border.³⁴⁶

Tensions over fishery resources has also sparked conflict with Mauritania's neighbors. In **January 2017**, the Mauritanian Coast Guard opened fire on a Senegalese pirogue that attempted to ram the patrol craft, killing one fisherman. Fishers rioted in the Senegalese border city of Port Louis.³⁴⁷

In **September 2017**, 28 crew members on a Senegalese vessel were expelled from Mauritania after they were found to have no operating license.³⁴⁸ Similar incidents between 2017 and 2020 led to a fishing stalemate, where 12,000 Senegalese fishers were banned from accessing Mauritanian.³⁴⁹

In **September 2020**, three Mauritanian artisanal fishermen were killed when their boat was struck by a Chinese trawler from the Poly HongDong Company illegally operating in the IEZ. The captain of the vessel was detained, accused of striking the artisanal vessel deliberately because it had turned off its AIS and lights.³⁵⁰

FISHERIES-RELATED PROGRAMMING AND PARTNERSHIPS IN MAURITANIA

The FAO is implementing a three-year, USD \$356,000 Technical Cooperation Programme to support small fishers and processors with Covid-19 recovery and develop the necessary infrastructure for inland aquaculture.³⁵¹ As of September 2022, the FAO is also conducting a needs assessment in Mauritania to encourage and support PSMA compliance.³⁵²

The World Bank and the Global Environment Facility financed the West Africa Regional Fisheries Program in Mauritania and neighboring Guinea from 2015 to 2020. The projects supported the revision of national fisheries policies and legal frameworks and their harmonization at the regional level, scientific research, strengthening the vessel registration system, implementation of fisheries management plans, and rehabilitated the Nouakchott fish market.³⁵³

The EU and Mauritania maintain an ongoing SFPAs, dating back to 1987. The current SFPAs (2021–2026) is a multi-species agreement, and allows EU-flagged vessels to harvest lobster, crab, squid, tuna, and small pelagic species. The EU pays €57.5 million/year for

access rights to Mauritania's waters and an additional €16.5 million to support the fisheries sector.³⁵⁴ Mauritania has also negotiated support from the EU through the SFPA to finance marine protected areas.³⁵⁵ By 2015, commitments to the Banc d'Arguin and Coastal and Marine Biodiversity Trust Fund reached €22.3 million from the EU and other international donors to support park surveillance, management, monitoring, restoration, and sustainable development and environmental education in the park's neighboring communities.³⁵⁶

In March 2022, MPEM and the Japanese International Cooperation Authority (JICA) signed a 32-month agreement to reconstruct the Qualification and Training Center for the Fishing Professions facilities and provide human resource development in the fisheries sector. Under the grant, JICA also provided fishing gear, processing and cold storage equipment, and vessel motors.³⁵⁷

The United States NOAA Office of General Council and Office of Law Enforcement run the Improved Governance through Legal and Enforcement Capacity Building program in Mauritania.³⁵⁸ Participants attend workshops on legal and enforcement training to combat IUU fishing in domestic waters.

The Government of Mauritania is open about its desire to attract more investment from the PRC and provides a favorable tax and regulatory environment to facilitate this bilateral cooperation. In response, the PRC has provided large investments, largely in the energy, fisheries, and mining sectors, into Mauritania to promote bilateral cooperation as a part of the BRI.³⁵⁹ In February 2019, Mauritanian Minister of Economy and Industry Sheikh El Kebir Ould Moulay Taher and the Chinese Ambassador, Zhang Jiango, signed an annual agreement to provide USD \$40 million in economic and technical cooperation.³⁶⁰

Fisheries are a focus area for Chinese investment in Mauritania. At least two major Chinese fishing companies maintain fisheries access agreements with the Mauritanian government.³⁶¹ In 2010, representatives of Poly Hong Dong Fishing Co. claimed the firm invested at least USD \$100 million into Mauritania since 2011.³⁶²

The PRC actively invests in Mauritania's port infrastructure. The USD \$300 million modernization of the Friendship Port in Nouakchott was financed by low-interest loans from the Export-Import Bank of China.³⁶³ In 2020, Exim Bank loaned the Mauritanian government USD \$87 million for the construction of a fishing port.³⁶⁴

Mauritania and Senegal have maintained a bilateral agreement since 2001 that allows Senegalese pirogues to harvest small pelagic species in Mauritanian waters.³⁶⁵

In February 2023, Mauritania and Morocco signed a new reciprocity protocol to strengthen cooperation on fisheries research.³⁶⁶ In February 2018, Mauritania and the The Gambia signed an MoU to boost maritime investment and cooperation in the fisheries sector.³⁶⁷

CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN MAURITANIA

Politically motivated arrests, restrictions on freedom of assembly, and widespread corruption hamper civil society action to improve human rights and the socioeconomic situation of marginalized communities. Despite this, the Mauritanian government partners with international and domestic civil society organizations to combat IUU fishing, improve fisheries sustainability, and environmental management.

Mauritania participates in the **Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI)**, a voluntary, global initiative to make fisheries management more transparent and sustainable.³⁶⁸ Through FiTI, the Mauritanian government partners with local civil society groups to assess and improve fisheries governance.

In May 2022, **Global Fishing Watch** and the Mauritanian government signed a letter of intent to strengthen governance tools, capacity transfer, and analysis.³⁶⁹

Association Nafore works on environmental protection and management, climate change adaptation, and sustainable development in rural areas. The portfolio includes biodiversity, wildlife management, and invasive aquatic plants. The organization works with the national government and international donors to implement projects in these areas. Association Nafore is a member of the Regional Partnership for the Conservation of the Coastal and Marine Zone.³⁷⁰

Nature Mauritania is a non-governmental organization association that works specifically in promoting the integrated management of wetlands, their resources, and sustainable development. They focus on improving the living conditions of communities living in or near these wetlands through income-generating activities.³⁷¹

African Confederation of Professional Organisations of Artisanal Fisheries (CAOPA) is a confederation of professional organizations in the artisanal maritime and continental fisheries of Africa. The confederation's focus has been the promotion of sustainable artisanal fishing, the support of women in artisanal fishing, the promotion of FiTI, and environmental protection. The group draws members from countries such as Senegal, Madagascar, and Mauritania.³⁷²

Regional Partnership for the Conservation of the Coastal and Marine Zone (PRCM) is a coalition of NGOs working on coastal and marine management and conservation issues in Cabo Verde, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Mauritania, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. Major focus areas include sustainable fisheries, ecosystem resilience, impacts from offshore hydrocarbon extraction, and endangered species protection. Members work closely with foreign and local governments, academics, philanthropic organizations, and intergovernmental organizations.³⁷³

Republic of Congo

GOVERNANCE

The Republic of the Congo is a semi-presidential republic. President Denis Sassou Nguesso has ruled from 1977–1992 and from 1997–present. Prime Minister Anatole Collinet Makosso was appointed in 2021. The president is directly elected, but there is little opposition in national elections. The 2021 presidential election was boycotted by an opposition group and marred by voter intimidation and internet shutdowns.³⁷⁴ Several former opposition candidates are jailed. The president appoints a Council of Ministers while the bicameral Parliament appoints the Prime Minister. The last legislative and local elections were held in 2017 with considerable election irregularities. While officially a multi-party system, the president's Congolese Labor Party and its allies occupy 68% of the legislative seats and party members occupy nearly all senior government positions.³⁷⁵

DOMESTIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Despite Congo's relatively narrow coastline, its marine fisheries have increased production over the last decade. Total capture fisheries and inland aquaculture production has doubled since 2010. In 2017, the annual capture fisheries production was almost 95,000 metric tons, although approximately half comes from inland fisheries. The increased production contribute to greater economic and food security to the country's population, which is mainly clustered in cities on the coastline or in Brazzaville on the Congo River.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries is led by Minister Paul Valentin Ngobo. Congo's national fisheries law is *Loi n° 2-2000 portant organisation de la pêche maritime en République du Congo (2000)*. The law established rules for managing fisheries resources, delineated the artisanal and industrial fishing zones, and instituted licensing requirements.³⁷⁶

Loi n° 2-2000 has been strengthened by subsequent decrees. *Décret n° 2009-33 portant définition des dispositions relatives aux maillages des filets et aux engins de la pêche maritime* established provisions on the mesh size for nets and maritime fishing gear. *Décret n° 2011-317 du 26 avril 2011 déterminant les conditions d'exercice de la pêche maritime artisanale professionnelle* professionalized the small-scale marine fishing industry. *Décret n° 2012-174 du 12 mars 2012 portant statut de l'observateur à bord d'un navire de pêche* clarified the status of observers on board fishing vessels.³⁷⁷

In 2018, Congo identified developing the fisheries sector as a priority area in its five-year National Development Plan. In 2019, The Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries acknowledged the threat of IUU fishing and partnered with CLS Group, a public-private partnership with the French National Center for Space Studies, to improve MCS in Congolese territorial waters.³⁷⁸ The Ministry also mandated the use of VMS for all industrial vessels.

In 2020, Congo and CLS announced a new Fisheries Monitoring Center to scale up Congo's sustainable fisheries management. Later that year, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries announced the creation of a new interministerial commission to ensure enforcement and compliance with new regulations.³⁷⁹

The Departmental Directorate for Fisheries and Aquaculture (DDPA) Fisheries Brigade is responsible for fisheries monitoring and enforcement in Congolese waters. Enforcement is a challenge; for example the Kouilou divisional fisheries inspection directorate only has two patrol vessels.³⁸⁰ DDPA has worked with the NGO Wildlife Conservation Society to improve the planning and execution of patrols and the safety of surveillance at sea.³⁸¹

Congo has taken steps in recent years to strengthen its fisheries management laws. Previously, most artisanal and industrial vessels were not in compliance with the national laws, and enforcement was lacking. Fishing at sea requires an annual license granted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries. Licensing fees are determined by the vessel's size and ownership. Annual canoe registration costs 2,000 Central African Francs (CFAF). Small-scale professional fishing cards are 10,000 CFAF each year, paid to the Ministry of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises. Annual shark fin permits for large vessels are 300,000 CFAF. Processors pay an annual 75,000 CFAF hygiene tax.³⁸²

Waters up to 6 nautical miles are set aside as an inshore exclusion zone (IEZ). The IEZ is reserved for artisanal fishers and aquaculture.³⁸³ Congolese artisanal fishers primarily work in the inland fisheries, while migrant fishers from Benin, Togo, and Ghana account for most of the effort in artisanal marine fisheries. Congolese marine artisanal fishermen target demersal and pelagic species while migrant artisanal fishermen target sardinella, shark, and flying fish. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimated that the marine artisanal catch in 2016 was 13,018 metric tons.

CONGO'S FISHERIES SECTOR

According to the FAO, Congolese capture fisheries directly employ approximately 41,000 people. Over 19,000 processors are indirectly employed by inland and marine fisheries, 80% of whom are women. Employment figures are dominated by inland fisheries as marine capture fisheries only employ an estimated 6,570 people. There are approximately 700 artisanal vessels and 110 industrial trawlers. Of the artisanal vessels, approximately 240 are motorized.³⁸⁴ Despite the rise in domestic fisheries production, Congo is a net importer of fisheries products.³⁸⁵ Fish is the primary source of animal protein for approximately 30% of the population.

ARTISANAL FISHING

Shark fishing is common in Congo's territorial waters and is predominantly undertaken by artisanal fishers. Local coastal communities have traditionally eaten small quantities of shark caught as bycatch. However, since the 1980s, migrant artisanal fishers have increasingly fished for shark to support the demand for fins from markets in East and Southeast Asia. Between 2010 and 2017, 23,073 metric tons of sharks and rays were landed in Congo.³⁸⁶

Sardinella stocks are fully exploited, subject to fishing pressure from industrial and artisanal sectors.³⁸⁷ Local fishermen believe that a decline in sardinella and other stocks has led many to turn to shark fishing.

Offshore oil platforms have reduced artisanal fishing grounds by two-thirds. Foreign and domestic industrial fleets fish in the IEZ with impunity, leading to violence between artisanal and industrial fishers.³⁸⁸

INDUSTRIAL FISHING

Industrial marine capture fisheries primarily target shrimp, tuna, shark, and sardinella. The FAO estimates that the total industrial marine catch in 2016 was 31,915 metric tons; 9,554 metric tons caught by trawlers and 22,361 harvested by shrimpers. In 2018, the composition of the fleet was 90 trawlers, 13 sardine boats, one longliner, and six carrier vessels. Congo's fisheries capacity should sustain no more than 30 industrial trawlers, far fewer than the existing fleet.³⁸⁹ The industrial fleet is concentrated around Pointe Noire, Matombi, and Tchissanga. 90% of the industrial catch is sold at local markets.³⁹⁰ Each year, approximately 1,000 metric tons of shrimp are exported to Spain.

Foreign industrial vessels are allowed to fish in Congolese waters if their flag state maintains an agreement with the Republic of Congo. Foreign vessels may fish in Congolese waters if they have concluded a contract with the relevant fishing authorities authorizing them to operate. In practice, however, this regulation is ignored as demonstrated by the overcapacity in the industrial trawler fleet. Vessels are required to have at least one Congolese observer on board while fishing in Congolese waters. Vessels must bear clear identification marks and carry documents attesting to the name, nationality, and address of captain or owners. Captains must also maintain daily fishing logs and supply them to the relevant authorities at the end of a 60-day period or the end of each trip.³⁹¹

Foreign DWF vessels were first authorized access to Congolese waters in 2000. Today, 80% of the industrial fishing fleet operating in Congo is licensed to foreign companies. On average, 95% of yearly fishing effort in Congo's marine fisheries is undertaken by distant-water fleet vessels.³⁹² The issuance and renewal of fishing licenses for foreign industrial vessels is allowed only within the limits of the surplus of exploitable stocks.³⁹³

Joint-venture agreements are allowed under Congolese law. For a fishing vessel to be considered Congolese, it must be at least half-owned by a Congolese national or a national of a state with a reciprocal agreement concluded. If a vessel is owned by a company, the head office must be in Congo, the Chairman of the Board, the General Manager, the majority of the members of the Board must be Congolese, and at least 50% of the share capital must be held by Congolese nationals or nationals of a state with which there is a reciprocal agreement.³⁹⁴

Beneficial ownership practices that take place in Congo's industrial fisheries are unclear, with approximately 65% of the industrial vessels (70) are Chinese-flagged or -owned trawlers.³⁹⁵ PRC DWF vessels target sharks for their fins desired by Asian markets. Shark fishing is legal and the government levies taxes with rates that vary with the fishing method. There is a flat 2,000 Central African Franc (CFAF) tax on individual fins landed.³⁹⁶ There are also regulations on shark fishing gear designed to prevent the catch of juveniles.³⁹⁷

FISHMEAL AND FISH OIL PRODUCTION

There is one FMFO factory operating in Congo. In 2017, the Chinese company Rong Chang Long Distance Fishing Co. opened a factory near Pointe-Noire. The factory's fishing fleet expanded from 10 boats in 2017 to 37 boats in 2019. Compared to records that show there are 70 Chinese-flagged or -owned trawlers licensed to operate in Congolese waters, 53% are factory vessels fishing for small pelagics. Catch from the factory's fishing fleet is directly offloaded to cold storage or production lines. Sardinellas constitute the bulk of the catch.

According to data provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries, in 2019 23,730 metric tons of fresh fish were offloaded, yielding 4,476 metric tons of processed fish meal and 500 metric tons of fish oil. Production was likely underreported; based on the average conversion ratio (4.5) production was likely at least 8,000 metric tons of fishmeal and 2,000 metric tons of fish oil.³⁹⁸

When the factory opened, 30% of the 330 employees were from local communities. By 2019, the number of employees dropped to 55, and 82% of these positions were temporary. Local community members have accused the factory of dumping untreated waste directly into the ocean and causing respiratory diseases from noxious air pollution.³⁹⁹

Factory products are exported directly to the PRC. Local communities believe that the factory has reduced jobs in artisanal fisheries and the post-harvest sector. The factory's consumption of sardinella has exacerbated scarcity in local markets, driving up prices and reducing food security.⁴⁰⁰

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

In August 2022, Congo officially announced the creation of the country's first three MPAs with the support of the Wildlife Conservation Society and other civil society organizations. The three MPAs announced include a marine extension to the Conkouati-Douli National Park on the border with Gabon, Loango Bay Community Marine Reserve, and Mvassa MPA.⁴⁰¹

Together the MPAs cover 12.01% of Congo's territorial waters and protect more than 4,000 square kilometers of marine and coastal habitats. Congo's first marine spatial plan was approved by the Ministry of Forest Economy in 2019 and identified 11 future MPA sites.

CONGO'S ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Congo is a member of numerous maritime-related organizations, including: CECAF, CIFAA, COMHAFAT/ATLAFCO, COREP, ECCAS, GGC, and IWC. Congo is party to the UNCLOS although not the UN Fish Stocks Agreement or the PSMA. Congo is a signatory to the Yaoundé Code of Conduct. The Regional Center of Maritime Security in Central Africa (GRESMAC), the ECCAS coordinating center, is located in Pointe-Noire.

IUU FISHING CHALLENGES

Congo's primary IUU fishing challenges include industrial vessels encroaching into the inshore exclusion zone set aside for artisanal fishing; unlicensed foreign vessels in Congolese waters landing their catch at foreign ports; industrial overcapacity; and the overfishing of shark, sardinella, and other stocks. Industrial vessels from distant-water fleets regularly breach the IEZ. The distant-water fleet accounted for 71% of annual effort in the artisanal fisheries zone.⁴⁰²

In **July 2017**, two Chinese trawlers, *Haixin 23* and *Haixin 28*, caught IUU fishing in Gabon fled to Congolese waters to escape the authorities. In **July 2019**, the sister ship *Haixin 27* was interdicted and arrested in Gabon's waters by the Gabonese Navy and Sea Shepherd after attempting to flee into Congo's waters.⁴⁰³ These incidents demonstrated that Congo's MCS and enforcement capacity is insufficient to stop IUU fishing in its waters, but also as MCS increased in neighboring countries, vessels would turn to Congo's waters where there was little threat of detection and arrest.

The Chinese DWF was granted access to fish in Congolese waters in 2000. Since then, there have been consistent reports of Chinese vessels engaged in IUU fishing. In the 2020 TRAFFIC survey of Congolese artisanal shark fishermen, 52% of respondents cited problems caused by the Chinese fleet as a primary concern. 15% of respondents cited illegal fishing by Chinese trawlers in artisanal zones as a major problem affecting their livelihood.⁴⁰⁴

In 2012, 69 Chinese-owned vessels were banned from fishing in Congolese waters by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries for trawling in the IEZ. The boats were owned by three Chinese companies: Lulu, Rong Chang Long Distance Fishing Co., and Huayi Jinri.⁴⁰⁵

FISHERIES-RELATED PROGRAMMING AND PARTNERSHIPS IN CONGO

Congo participates in Operation Obangame Express, an annual multinational maritime security exercise sponsored by the U.S. Africa Command.⁴⁰⁶

Congo also participates in the Grand African NEMO exercises, an annual multinational maritime security exercise led by the French Navy.⁴⁰⁷ The exercises are conducted under the Yaoundé Code of Conduct to combat illegal fishing and facilitate information sharing between national maritime operational centers, maritime coordination centers and regional maritime security centers.

In 2019, Agence Française de Développement and the EU signed a €29.3 million agreement to upgrade industrial fish landing site and protect the artisanal landing site at the Port of Pointe-Noire.⁴⁰⁸

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) opened the Support Center for Artisanal Fishing in Pointe-Noire (CAPAP) in 2018. CAPAP has fish landing and handling facilities open to artisanal fishermen, fishmongers, and processors in Pointe-Noire. The site also serves as a monitoring and data collection site to inform better fisheries management.⁴⁰⁹

Congo is a member of the BRI and has received considerable PRC investment both broadly across the economy and in fisheries. The PRC has invested heavily in mining, hydrocarbons, agriculture, and infrastructure. Notably, the Chinese firm Jiangsu Provincial Construction built Congo's new Parliament building.⁴¹⁰ The PRC holds one-third of Congo's foreign debt which has been restructured twice, most recently in June 2021.⁴¹¹ In 2016, the China Road and Bridge Corporation was given the contract to expand the port of Pointe-Noire.⁴¹² In 2017, the Congolese Parliament approved the development of the Pointe-Noire Special Economic Zone, financed by the China Development Bank and built by PRC firms. The Export Import Bank of China pledged USD \$1.65 billion in funding, but there is no available information if development has begun.⁴¹³

CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN CONGO

Congo's civil society has experienced repression and harassment related to disputed elections and civil rights. Groups must receive government authorization to assemble, and NGOs must register with the Ministry of the Interior.⁴¹⁴ However, NGOs in the environmental space work closely with the Congolese government on projects to improve sustainable fisheries management and marine biodiversity protection.

Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has coordinated the Congo Marine Program since 2017, which works with the Congolese government to improve fisheries management by collecting fish stock data, building capacity, and expanding MPAs.⁴¹⁵ In 2018, WCS worked with the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries to conduct a marine surveillance assessment to identify the training needs of the DDPA Fisheries Brigade.

Renatura is an NGO focused on protecting sea turtles in Congo's waters.⁴¹⁶ They have partnered with other civil society organizations in Congo, and their work also touches on curbing IUU fishing to protect sea turtles.

Senegal

GOVERNANCE

Senegal is a democratic republic and is one of the more stable democracies in Africa. Peaceful transfers of power between rival parties have taken place since 2000. Senegal's government is led by President Macky Sall, who rules alongside the unicameral National Assembly and an independent judiciary. The position of Prime Minister was eliminated in 2019, which vests greater power and policy influence in the president.⁴¹⁷

DOMESTIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Senegal's waters are highly biodiverse and are home to important pelagic species such as sardinella, tunas, mackerel, marlin, and coastal demersal fish. Fisheries contribute 3.2% of the national GDP, and is the second largest export sector. Fish accounts for 70% of the country's consumed animal protein.⁴¹⁸

The Ministry of Fisheries and Maritime Economy is charged with managing fisheries in Senegal. Minister Alioune Ndoye has led the ministry since November 2020. The ministry includes the Department of Maritime Fisheries, the Department of Fisheries Processing Industries, the Department of Fisheries Protection and Surveillance, the Department of Continental Fisheries, the Department of Merchant Shipping, and the Department of Marine Resources Management and Exploitation. The National Agency for Maritime Affairs, under the supervision of the Department of Merchant Shipping, oversees the administrative management of vessels and seafarers and is involved in monitoring and enforcing Senegal's maritime boundaries.⁴¹⁹

Senegal's primary fisheries law is *Loi n° 2015-18 du 13 juillet 2015 portant Code de la Pêche maritime*. The law regulates marine fisheries, transshipment, and licensing and reaffirms Senegal's commitment to ending IUU fishing. The law has been implemented by the subsequent decree: *Décret n° 2016-1804 du 22 novembre 2016 portant application de la loi n° 2015-18 du 13 juillet 2015 portant code de la pêche maritime*.⁴²⁰

SENEGAL'S FISHERIES SECTOR

Senegal's fisheries industry provide over 600,000 jobs across the commercial and artisanal fishing and processing sectors,⁴²¹ employing approximately 15% of the country's workforce.⁴²²

ARTISANAL FLEET

Senegal's artisanal fleet is the largest in West Africa. A 2015 survey identified 19,009 artisanal vessels, of which 90% were motorized canoes (pirogues). Exact numbers are not published, but there are estimated to be approximately 150 licensed industrial vessels, including trawlers and tuna vessels.⁴²³ The terms licensing and access agreements are not made public. Major fish landing sites include the ports of Dakar, Kaolack, Lyndiane, Ziguinchor, and Saint-Louis.

FOREIGN VESSELS

Senegal uses joint ventures to license foreign industrial vessels. The Senegalese Merchant Marine Code stipulates that foreign vessels must be at least 51% owned by an entity of Senegal or another ECOWAS country, but shell front joint-ventures have been set up to skirt these requirements.⁴²⁴ Foreign vessels must fly the Senegalese flag, unless there is a specific partnership agreement in place with its home country.⁴²⁵ Senegal bans transshipment in its EEZ.

AQUACULTURE AND MARICULTURE

In July 2022, Senegal announced a plan to increase oyster farming by 500% by 2032. This was a reaction and alternative to depleted fish stocks caused by IUU fishing and overfishing. Oysters are farmed in Senegal's southern provinces of Casamance and Siné-Saloum, mostly by women. The industry expansion aims to catalyze economic and social development and women's empowerment in a model that's more financially and environmentally sustainable than capture fisheries.⁴²⁶

FISHMEAL AND FISH OIL PRODUCTION IN SENEGAL

There are eight registered FMFO factories in Senegal, all owned and financed by foreign companies from the PRC, Republic of Korea, Spain, and Turkey.⁴²⁷

Industrial vessels overexploit high-value stocks and illegally encroach into the IEZ to target sardinella and other species relied upon by local communities.⁴²⁸ Chinese market demand has raised the price of FMFO and subsequently raised the demand for small pelagics and other raw material.⁴²⁹

Sardinella and other small pelagic species are targeted by foreign industrial trawlers and local artisanal and semi-industrial canoes and sold to FMFO factories as raw material. Factories dump untreated waste into nearby waters, polluting community drinking water

sources and nearby coastal waters. Female fishmongers have been pushed out of the market as they are unable to compete with factory prices.⁴³⁰

In 2022, the coastal Kayar community sued a Spanish company in Senegalese court, seeking a temporary closure of the Barna fishmeal factory over environmental and economic damages. The case was dismissed, but is indicative of a broader surge in community activism against FMFO factories and IUU fishing by foreign actors.⁴³¹

SENEGAL'S ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Senegal is a member of numerous maritime security and fisheries management organizations at the subregional, regional, and international levels, including: CECAF, CIFAA, COMHAFAT/ATLAFCO, ECOWAS, ICCAT, IOTC, and IWC. Senegal is party to the UNCLOS, PSMA, and the UN Fish Stocks Agreement. Senegal is also signatory to the Yaoundé Code of Conduct. In September 2022, Senegal issued the Joint Statement on Atlantic Cooperation alongside 17 other Atlantic countries to facilitate dialogue and cooperation on cross-boundary challenges including IUU fishing, transnational crime, and climate change.⁴³²

IUU FISHING CHALLENGES

IUU fishing costs an estimated USD \$272 million per year.⁴³³ Foreign trawlers fish illegally in the IEZ. These vessels take advantage of weak MCS and enforcement capacity to overexploit the sardinella stocks vital to artisanal fishers and regional food security.⁴³⁴ Interviews with Senegalese fisheries experts noted that Senegalese vessels sail to Sierra Leone's territorial waters to fish illegally without punishment due to lax enforcement. Senegalese vessels are also known to fish without permission in the waters of Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau, and The Gambia.

In **June 2017**, a Senegalese patrol boat caught and detained seven Chinese trawlers for fishing illegally in Senegalese waters.⁴³⁵

In **March 2018**, Senegal revoked the licenses of vessels operated by the Chinese company Lian Run Pelagic Fishery Ltd, who were caught fishing illegally in Senegalese waters.⁴³⁶ The company later had their distant water fishing certificate canceled by the PRC's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs for IUU fishing violations.⁴³⁷

In **May 2020**, the Senegalese Ministry of Fisheries received a request to grant use of the Senegalese flag and fishing licenses to 52 foreign trawlers—two from Turkey and 50 from the PRC. Local fishers associations protested, and the Ministry of Agriculture revoked the requests. However, it was later uncovered that one of the 52 vessels, the *Fu Yuan Yu 9889*, was granted a license in secret. Local media revealed that the owner of

the *Fu Yuan Yu 9889* also requested licenses for nine additional vessels in the fleet. At least three additional licenses were granted for the *Fu Yuan Yu 9885*, *Fu Yuan Yu 9886*, and *Fu Yuan Yu 9888* behind closed doors.⁴³⁸

FISHERIES-RELATED PROGRAMMING AND PARTNERSHIPS IN SENEGAL

The U.S. NOAA Office of General Council and Office of Law Enforcement run the Improved Governance through Legal and Enforcement Capacity Building program in Senegal. Participants attend workshops on legal and enforcement training to combat IUU fishing in domestic waters. USAID operates Feed the Future in Senegal, which, in addition to broader support for agricultural development and food security, focuses on improving coastal fisheries management and protecting biodiversity.⁴³⁹

The U.S. Coast Guard maintains a shiprider agreement with Senegal. The agreement allows Senegalese defense and law enforcement personnel to join U.S. Navy and Coast Guard vessels to observe, board, and search vessels suspected of violating domestic laws and regulations within Senegal's EEZ and on the high seas.⁴⁴⁰

Senegal participates in Operation Obangame Express, a multinational maritime security exercise sponsored by the U.S. Africa Command. Senegal also participates in the Grand African NEMO exercises, an annual multinational maritime security exercise led by the French Navy.⁴⁴¹ The exercises are conducted under the Yaoundé Code of Conduct to combat illegal fishing and facilitate information sharing between national maritime operational centers, maritime coordination centers, and regional maritime security centers.

FDI from the PRC has increased in recent years, primarily in energy, public transportation, museums, and sports facilities and an industrial park in Dakar.⁴⁴² Chinese industrial fishing vessels are licensed to fish in Senegal, and Chinese companies have built and operate fish processing plants, including fishmeal factories.

Senegal maintains an active SFPAs (2019–2024) with the EU. In exchange for allowing EU vessels to fish in Senegalese waters for tuna and hake, the EU will provide an annual €1.7 million financial contribution plus an additional €900,000 per year towards sustainable fisheries management, capacity building, monitoring, control, and surveillance, and fighting IUU fishing. The EU fishing industry will provide its own annual contribution of around €1.5 million per year depending on catch levels.⁴⁴³

In March 2022, EU's border agency, Frontex, offered to deploy in Senegalese waters to combat IUU fishing and intercept vessels engaged in human trafficking and migrant smuggling to the Canary Islands.⁴⁴⁴ As of August 2023, this arrangement has not yet been finalized.⁴⁴⁵

The World Bank's West Africa Regional Fisheries Program is active in Senegal and focuses on building good governance and the sustainable management of fisheries.⁴⁴⁶

In February 2023, Senegal and Liberia signed an MoU to improve regional maritime security and combat IUU fishing by harmonizing their inspection regimes, conducting joint exercises, sharing data and information, and working to implement the PSMA.⁴⁴⁷

Mauritania and Senegal have maintained a bilateral agreement since 2001 that allows Senegalese pirogues to harvest small pelagic species in Mauritanian waters.⁴⁴⁸

CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN SENEGAL

Senegal's civil society is flourishing and largely protected by the government. Numerous organizations associated with the fishing industry work to promote sustainable fisheries, and to combat IUU fishing. The Senegalese government collaborates with local and international NGOs and artisanal fishing groups on fisheries and ocean issues.⁴⁴⁹

The **Association for the Promotion and Accountability of Actors in Maritime Artisanal Fishing (APRAPAM)** supports small-scale and artisanal fishing communities in Senegal, mobilizing resources and raising awareness of current and future issues with the national government.⁴⁵⁰

The **Senegalese Association of Fishing Companies and Ship Owners (GAIPES)** collaborates with artisanal fishermen and the administration to pass regulatory framework adapted to the socioeconomic needs of fisherfolk. GAIPES also works at the subregional level to establish fishing protocols with neighboring countries.⁴⁵¹

Greenpeace represented the Kayar community in the court case community members filed against the Spanish company operating a fishmeal factory in their town.⁴⁵²

The **Regional Partnership for the Conservation of the Coastal and Marine Zone (PRCM)** is a coalition of NGOs working on coastal and marine management and conservation issues in Cabo Verde, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Mauritania, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. Major focus areas include sustainable fisheries, ecosystem resilience, impacts from offshore hydrocarbon extraction, and endangered species protection. Members work closely with foreign and local governments, academics, philanthropic organizations, and intergovernmental organizations.⁴⁵³

Sierra Leone

GOVERNANCE

Sierra Leone is a constitutional republic with a unicameral parliament, independent judiciary, and a democratically elected president. President Julius Maada Bio was elected in 2018. The Chief Minister, Jacob Jusu Saffa, oversees the operation of the government. Opposition parties have faced police violence and public assembly restrictions, while government corruption remains pervasive.⁴⁵⁴

DOMESTIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Sierra Leone has one of the richest fisheries in West Africa, and the fishing sector provides local communities with considerable economic security. Sierra Leone's waters have a high level of biological diversity. Important stocks include sardines, horse mackerel, anchovies, herring, shad, and tuna.⁴⁵⁵

The Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR) oversees the management, development, and conservation of Sierra Leone's fishery resources. MFMR is led by Minister Emma Kowa-Jalloh. The Director of Fisheries is Kadijatu Jalloh, who oversees five units: Policy, Planning, Research, and Statistics; MCS; Quality and Marketing; Marine Artisanal Fisheries; and Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture. The agency is tasked with managing all fisheries in Sierra Leone's territorial waters.⁴⁵⁶

The Joint Maritime Committee (JMC) coordinates Sierra Leone's national response to IUU fishing and other crimes at sea. The JMC is comprised of relevant maritime agencies which coordinate joint MCS and enforcement against piracy, drug-, human-, and arms- smuggling, and IUU fishing. Prior to July 2021, the JMC only had one patrol boat, provided with funding by the World Bank. Counter-IUU fishing efforts are constrained by poor MCS and enforcement capacity; Sierra Leone only has four patrol boats, three provided by the World Bank and one donated by the PRC.

Sierra Leone's primary fisheries law is the *Fisheries and Aquaculture Act, 2018 (No.10 of 2018)*. The Act regulates artisanal and industrial fishing in Sierra Leone's waters as well as fishing by nationals and Sierra Leone-flagged vessels in foreign waters and on the high seas. The Act is implemented by the *Fisheries and Aquaculture Regulations, 2019*. The Regulations establish vessel licensing, registration, and transshipment requirements, define the IEZ and rights of traditional resource users, and institute a penalty scheme for IUU fishing offenses.⁴⁵⁷ Foreign vessels are required to appoint a Sierra Leonean citizen to assume legal responsibility for the vessel and its owner, operator, master, and crew. The list of foreign industrial vessels licenses is made public on the MFMR website. The annual registration

fee for foreign vessels is USD \$1000. AIS is required on all industrial and semi-industrial vessels. Licensing fees are based on vessel size, not quota limits.

SIERRA LEONE'S FISHERIES SECTOR

According to the FAO, the fisheries sector comprises 9.4% of Sierra Leone's GDP.⁴⁵⁸ Fisheries play a vital role in Sierra Leone's food security; approximately 80% of Sierra Leone's 7.8 million people rely on fish as their primary source of protein.⁴⁵⁹ Sierra Leone is estimated to have 7,395 artisanal canoes and 92 industrial vessels, including six trawlers, eight shrimpers, and 38 purse seiners.⁴⁶⁰ Total annual marine capture fisheries production is estimated to be approximately 200,000 metric tons.

Artisanal fishers harvest shad, sardinellas, and other pelagic and demersal species, which account for approximately 70% of fish sold on the domestic market. Industrial vessels target small pelagics and high-value species for export such as shrimp, cuttlefish, spiny lobster, and finfish.⁴⁶¹ Foreign-flagged and -owned vessels dominate the industrial fleet. 78 of the 92 vessels in the industrial fleet are foreign-flagged. The largest DWF fleets are the PRC (2 vessels), Spain (11), Panama (7), and Senegal (6). Vessels flagged to Belize, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Curacao, El Salvador, Guatemala, Ghana, France, Iceland, are Liberia, and Turkey are also authorized to fish in Sierra Leone. The 14 vessels flagged to Sierra Leone are owned by Chinese (10 vessels) and Turkish (4) joint ventures.⁴⁶²

SIERRA LEONE'S ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Sierra Leone is a member of numerous maritime and fisheries-related organizations at the subregional, regional, and international levels including: CEEFAC, CIFA, COMHAFAT/ATLAFCO, ICCAT, and IOTC.

Sierra Leone is a signatory to the Yaoundé Code of Conduct. Sierra Leone is party to the UNCLOS and the PSMA, but not to the UN Fish Stocks Agreement.

IUU FISHING CHALLENGES

Sierra Leone's fish stocks and economy have been decimated by IUU fishing. Sierra Leone loses an estimated USD \$29 million each year due to IUU fishing,⁴⁶³ and the government has acknowledged that IUU fishing robs the country of much-needed revenue.⁴⁶⁴ In 2016, the EU issued Sierra Leone a yellow card warning for its failure to stop IUU fishing in its waters. In its ruling, the EU highlighted Sierra Leone's outdated fisheries laws and regulations, weak sanctions, and inability to control its fleet.⁴⁶⁵

Common IUU fishing offenses include DWF vessels fishing in the IEZ, operating without licenses, and underreporting their catch.⁴⁶⁶ Local fishers have reported harassment and violence from foreign vessels fishing in the IEZ. Domestic fishers smuggle locally caught fish to Guinea, where they can get a higher price. An expert in Sierra Leone’s fisheries noted that IUU fishing and overfishing by foreign trawlers has led artisanal fishers to adopt tight net mesh and other illegal practices to capture dwindling fish stocks. Local fishers have complained that Chinese trawlers use illegal and destructive fishing methods that have contributed to the decimation of fish stocks, impacting food and economic security.⁴⁶⁷

MCS and enforcement capacity are low, and while fines are high for serious IUU fishing offenses, they are infrequently levied. Corruption in the form of political interference is pervasive. An expert highlighted an example where the MFMR caught a vessel IUU fishing, but someone onboard called a different ministry which then “took jurisdiction” over the boat and let it go without a fine or seizure of illegal catch.

According to experts, small-scale fishers are inadequately accounted for in the country’s fisheries management policies. Due to the loss of fish stocks, fishers migrate to cities in Sierra Leone or leave the country to find work. Some leave the industry and turn to logging. There are no government funds or programs to retrain former fishers in new skills or industries.

In **August 2018**, a Chinese industrial fishing vessel was caught fishing illegally in Sierra Leone’s waters. The vessel was caught and boarded by local fishers who refused a bribe, destroyed the nets, and turned the crew and boat over to authorities.⁴⁶⁸

In **April 2019**, the government closed domestic waters to industrial fishing vessels and implemented a moratorium to allow depleted fish stocks to rebound.⁴⁶⁹ Artisanal vessels were permitted to continue to fish. Shortly after the moratorium was announced, vessels flagged to Italy were caught fishing in spite of the ban and operating inside the IEZ.⁴⁷⁰

In **April 2020**, three Chinese industrial trawlers (*Jian Mei 1*, *Jian Mei 4*, *Hong Chang 1*) were arrested for IUU fishing but escaped Sierra Leone waters before their companies paid the fines.⁴⁷¹

In **April 2021**, the Sierra Leone Navy and Sea Shepherd conducted a joint operation to arrest four Chinese vessels fishing illegally in Sierra Leone’s IEZ. Two of the vessels, the *Liao Dan Yu 6616* and *Liao Dan Yu 6618*, were unlicensed and transmitting false electronic identifying information. The other two vessels, the *Friendship 806* and *Friendship 888*, had licenses but were not permitted to fish in the IEZ.⁴⁷²

In **February 2023**, a joint operation between the Sierra Leone Navy and Sea Shepherd arrested five trawlers for illegally deploying Fish Aggregating Devices.⁴⁷³

FISHERIES-RELATED PROGRAMMING AND PARTNERSHIPS IN SIERRA LEONE

Sierra Leone participates in Operation Obangame Express, an annual multinational maritime security exercise sponsored by the U.S. Africa Command.⁴⁷⁴ The U.S. maintains a bilateral shiprider agreement with Sierra Leone. The agreement allows Sierra Leonean defense and law enforcement personnel to join U.S. Navy and Coast Guard vessels to observe, board, and search vessels suspected of violating domestic laws and regulations within Sierra Leone's IEZ and on the high seas.⁴⁷⁵

Sierra Leone also participates in the Grand African NEMO exercises, an annual multinational maritime security exercise led by the French Navy.⁴⁷⁶ The exercises are conducted under the Yaoundé Code of Conduct to combat illegal fishing and facilitate information sharing between national maritime operational centers, maritime coordination centers, and regional maritime security centers.

The U.S. NOAA Office of General Counsel and Office of Law Enforcement runs the Improved Governance through Legal and Enforcement Capacity Building program in Sierra Leone. Participants attend workshops on legal and enforcement training to combat IUU fishing in domestic waters.⁴⁷⁷

The PRC is a major investor in Sierra Leone across several sectors, including mining, energy, infrastructure, and fisheries. In June 2018, the governments of Sierra Leone and the PRC signed an MoU to increase Chinese fleet access to Sierra Leone's waters. Under the agreement, the PRC would also conduct research on Sierra Leone's fish stocks and improve MCS capacity. In 2018, the PRC donated a research vessel, the *Zhong Yu Ke 212* to conduct a joint stock assessment led by the China Academy of Fishery Sciences.⁴⁷⁸

In February 2018, the PRC and Sierra Leone signed an agreement for the PRC to construct a new fish harbor, worth an estimated USD \$29.8 million.⁴⁷⁹ Details of this agreement are difficult to find.

In May 2021, the PRC and Sierra Leone signed an agreement for a USD \$55 million to build a 25-acre industrial fishing harbor and fishmeal processing factory on Black Johnson Beach, next to Western Area Peninsular National Park, an area recognized for its rainforests and biodiversity. Local NGOs are fighting for more transparency into the terms and negotiations of the deal, as they claim the harbor will harm the area's unique environment and fish stocks.⁴⁸⁰

In April 2023, the PRC donated a navy patrol vessel to Sierra Leone to help combat IUU fishing and piracy.⁴⁸¹

The World Bank's West Africa Regional Fisheries Program is active in Sierra Leone, focusing on building good governance and the sustainable management of fisheries.⁴⁸² The World Bank also provided the funds for Sierra Leone's governmental fisheries patrol boats, as noted above.

In March 2022, Sierra Leone and Vietnam held a business forum in Hanoi to promote greater bilateral trade and investment between the two countries. The focus was mainly on information sharing and other industries, but it was noted that Vietnamese companies could invest in Sierra Leone's fisheries sector.⁴⁸³

CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN SIERRA LEONE

Civil society played a critical role in Sierra Leone's post-conflict reconstruction. However, in 2017, the government instituted stricter regulations on NGOs that mandate annual registration renewal and ministries to approve proposed projects. The approval process has been criticized for a lack of transparency.⁴⁸⁴

While the government collaborates with NGOs on fisheries issues, local stakeholders believe that the government is not receptive to challenges made to its anti-IUU fishing policies. A local expert expressed that although NGOs and fisheries associations are trying to build capacity, those efforts are not yet successful in convincing the government to change policies or stamp out corruption.

The **Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF)** works to empower local fishers on Sherbro Island to identify and expose IUU fishing by industrial vessels.⁴⁸⁵

In academia, the **University of Sierra Leone Institute for Marine Biology and Oceanography** has programs on fisheries management and economics. **Njala University** established the Department of Aquaculture and Fisheries Management in 2007, which now awards undergraduate and graduate degrees.⁴⁸⁶

B. Interviewees

Country	Sector
Benin	Philanthropy
Canada ¹	Academia
Canada ²	Academia
Côte d'Ivoire	Technical Expert
Gabon	Government
Ghana	Local NGO
Ghana	Local NGO
Ghana	Local NGO
Ghana	Local NGO
Ghana	Local NGO
Ghana	Technical Expert
Ghana	Technical Expert
Ghana	Fishing Industry
Mauritania	International NGO
Norway ³	Government
PRC	Academia
PRC	International NGO
PRC	International NGO
PRC	Local NGO
PRC	Local NGO
PRC	Journalism
PRC	International NGO
PRC	International NGO
PRC	International NGO
PRC	International NGO
Senegal	Technical Expert
Senegal	Technical Expert
Senegal	International NGO
Senegal	International NGO
Senegal	Fisherfolk
Sierra Leone	Local NGO
The Gambia	Academia
The Gambia	Journalism
The Gambia	Journalism
The Gambia	Local NGO
The Gambia	Academia
The Gambia	Ecotourism Industry
The Gambia	Fishing Industry
The Gambia	Journalism
The Gambia	Journalism
United States ⁴	Academia
United States ⁵	Government
United States ⁶	Philanthropy

¹ Expertise on W. Africa.

² Expertise on W. Africa.

³ Expertise on W. Africa and the Seychelles.

⁴ Expertise on the PRC.

⁵ Expertise on W. Africa.

⁶ Expertise on W. Africa.

C. Track II Dialogue Participants

Country	Sector
Ghana	Local NGO
Ghana	Local NGO
Mauritania	International NGO
PRC	International NGO
PRC	International NGO
PRC	International NGO
PRC	International NGO
PRC	International NGO
PRC	International NGO
PRC	Local NGO
PRC	Local NGO
PRC	Local NGO
Senegal	Fisherfolk
Senegal	International NGO
Senegal	International NGO
Senegal	International NGO
The Gambia	Academia
The Gambia	Fishing Industry
The Gambia	Ecotourism Industry
The Gambia	Community Activist
The Gambia	Journalism
The Gambia	Journalism

D. Track 1.5 Workshop Participants

Country	Sector
Ghana	Local NGO
Mauritania	International NGO
Senegal	International NGO
Senegal	International NGO
Senegal	International NGO
Senegal	International NGO
Senegal	Fisherfolk
The Gambia	Academia
The Gambia	Academia
The Gambia	Community Activist
The Gambia	Ecotourism Industry
The Gambia	Fishing Industry
The Gambia	Fish Marketer
The Gambia	Fish Marketer
The Gambia	Government
The Gambia	Government
The Gambia	Government
The Gambia	Government
The Gambia	International Organization
The Gambia	Journalism
The Gambia	Journalism

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