

INVESTIGATION NO. 10

MAURITIAN ACTION ON SRI LANKAN VESSELS



This case provides a textbook example of how information sharing and timely monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) operations can be effective in stopping illegal fishing. Based on their automatic identification system (AIS) signals, four vessels appeared to fish in Mauritian waters, and by cross-checking this information with relevant fishing licence lists and regional fisheries management organisation (RFMO) authorised fishing vessel lists, they were identified as fishing illegally. Prompt action by the coastal State confirmed the presence of the vessels through aerial surveillance, and two of the vessels were confirmed as fishing illegally.

VESSEL TYPE
Longliners

FLAG STATE
Sri Lanka

PENALTY/SANCTIONS
Case not concluded

KEY EVENTS

MID-MAY 2016 Four Sri Lankan vessels were spotted through AIS as operating on the Saya De Malha Bank, just outside the Mauritian exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

22 MAY 2016 As the vessels entered the Mauritian EEZ, AIS tracks indicated that they were continuing their fishing operations. Information transmitted over AIS suggested that all four were fishing vessels flagged to Sri Lanka with names that are variants of YAS AISURU (possibly also spelled YASAI SURU). No information was available to confirm the identity or

authorisation status of these vessels and these names did not appear on the current or historical lists of vessels authorised to operate in the relevant RFMO area, the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC).

At the time, most Sri Lankan vessels were authorised to IOTC using registration numbers rather than names, making it difficult to establish whether they were indeed IOTC authorised or not.

26 MAY 2016 The Mauritian authorities dispatched an aircraft to check on the location and activity of the vessels.

They could document two of the vessels fishing illegally within the Mauritian EEZ. Radio contact was attempted but none of the four vessels responded to requests for contact, and all then left the region.

ON-GOING With sufficient evidence of illegal fishing activity to initiate a case against two of the vessels, Mauritian authorities have been in contact with the flag State Sri Lanka to take action against the vessels.

WHAT WORKED?

- Satellite tracks indicating illegal fishing activity initiated the enforcement operation.
- Inter-agency cooperation between the fisheries inspectors and the Mauritian coastguard led to a successful operation.
- Systematic cross checking of information highlighted these high risk vessels.
- Regional cooperation and information exchange between FISH-i members facilitated the ability to cross-check and verify information.

WHAT DID FISH-i AFRICA DO?

- Tracked the vessels via AIS and identified vessels as possibly operating illegally.
- FISH-i members cooperated to undertake the investigation.



WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

- Flag State responsibility is required to ensure that fishing vessels operate according to the rules when fishing in foreign waters.
- Flag States must inspect their fishing vessels, monitor their activities and take action when non-compliance is detected.
- A system of mandatory IMO numbers, rather than names as vessel identifier, as well as a global database of commercial fishing vessels would make identification easier.

HOW?

The evidence uncovered during FISH-i investigations demonstrates different methods or approaches that illegal operators use to either commit or cover-up their illegality and to avoid prosecution.

VESSEL IDENTITY (suspected) These vessels all had very similar names. As most Sri Lankan vessels appear to be authorised to IOTC using registration numbers rather

than names, finding the true identity of the vessels in this case, and any information about them, was difficult.

AVOIDANCE OF PENALTIES (suspected) None of the four vessels responded to attempts by Mauritian authorities to contact them, suggesting they deliberately attempted to avoid contact and any penalty for fishing illegally.



In working together on over thirty investigations, FISH-i Africa has shed light on the scale and complexity of illegal activities in the fisheries sector and highlighted the challenges that coastal State enforcement officers face to act against the perpetrators.

FISH-i investigations demonstrate a range of complexity in illegalities – ranging from illegal fishing, to fisheries related illegality, to fisheries associated crime to lawlessness.

In this case evidence of illegal fishing was found.

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